THE CLOUGH CENTER
FOR THE STUDY OF
CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

ATTACHMENT TO PLACE IN A WORLD OF NATIONS

CLOUGH CENTER 2024 STUDY VISIT TO MEXICO SUMMARY REPORT

A delegation of twelve Boston College graduate students and four faculty members -- from political science, history, literature, philosophy, psychology, law and theology -- had the opportunity to spend part of the semester break on a field visit to Mexico, through a Clough Center for the Study of Constitutional Democracy initiative that examines political geography and its impact on contemporary democracies.

Over the course of one week in Cuernavaca and Mexico City, they explored this year's Clough Center theme of "Attachment to Place in a World of Nations" through historic site visits and expert interviews with a range of interlocutors from Mexican civil society, academia and politics.

This initiative was made possible through the support of the Office of the Provost and Dean of Faculties.

I. FIRST ENCOUNTERS

AN INTRODUCTION TO MEXICO

An opening briefing with Prof. Antonio Ortega Ayala provided a comprehensive review -- a *coyuntura* lecture -- of Mexican history beginning with the political and cultural life of Indigenous people before the Spanish conquest of the 1500s and continuing until the present day. The overview underscored two key themes that we would see reflected again and again throughout the rest of our trip. The first was mestizaje, the mixing of pre-Hispanic Indigenous peoples and cultures with Spanish people and culture, which has shaped Mexican identity over centuries. The second was the incredibly complicated history of colonization, revolution, and transfers of power that paved the way for strong cultural pride in Mexico, yet also revealed deep cynicism about government and rampant economic inequality.

Trys Lousteau
Graduate Student, Psychology

WALKING THROUGH HISTORY IN CUERNAVACA

A walking tour of Cuernavaca gave us the opportunity to explore how the themes of Mexican history we had learned about in the morning briefing were visible in the city's built environment. The first site we visited, the **Cuernavaca Cathedral**, gave us the opportunity to reflect on the history of Mexico's colonization, as well as the evolution of Catholicism within Mexican culture and politics. We noted the church's colonial-era defenses and location away from the main square, signifying the long history of hostility between Catholic and indigenous worldviews. Yet today the remodeled cathedral reflects its more recent history as one of the most important sites of liberation theology, where Bishop Sergio Méndez Arceo fought for social justice and human rights.

Later, at the palace of Cortés, we explored how the meaning of place has been physically rewritten and layered through Mexican history. Built from the stones of an Aztec tribute center destroyed by colonizers, **Hernan Cortés's castle** literally embodies the history of invasion and Indigenous destruction. At the same time, it also presented us with questions about how Mexico ought to represent the undeniable Spanish influence upon its past-and present-identity. Inside the Palace, Diego Riviera's massive, and controversial, mural offered one answer to that question. It provided us with an evocative visual representation of how Mexico's colonial and indigenous cultures came to form a Mestizo, uniquely Mexican identity through colonial violence, religious expansion, and modern state building.

Stephen de Riel
Graduate Student, History

II. SITES OF COMMUNITY, ANCIENT AND MODERN

A VISIT TO XOCHICALCO

The visit to the pyramids of **Xochicalco** offered a profound exploration of the historical and sociocultural dimensions of Mesoamerican civilizations, as well as the religious meanings embedded in the ancient architecture. The site's architectural grandeur and strategic placement on a hill reflected the intricate power structures, cosmological beliefs and religious practices of the builders' civilization. Xochicalco's urban layout, characterized by massive pyramids, ball courts, and residential complexes, was organized vertically, to reflect the social hierarchy that governed society: elites literally at the top, and largely out of sight from the masses at the bottom. The precise alignment of the city's buildings with celestial events, meanwhile, suggests a spiritual connection to the cosmos, emphasizing the role of celestial bodies in religious rituals and the delineation of sacred time.

At another level, Xochicalco's historical timeline, marked by influences from the Olmec, Toltec, Teotihuacan, and Mayan civilizations, helped me cultivate a broader understanding of cultural diffusion and assimilation. As a sociologist, I was inspired by the amalgamation of architectural styles and cultural elements to reflect more closely on the processes of cultural exchange, adaptation, and the construction of a collective identity over time. The site also moved me to think about how religion and politics each foster a sense of collective identity, and how both interact with each other.

Yinan Xu
Graduate Student, Sociology

A TRIP TO THE MARKET

On the second day of our itinerary, we visited a large **market in Cuernavaca**. Initially, the market's size was overwhelming. It was a massive collection of merchants in stalls, mats, and on foot selling a wide array of goods that needed to be negotiated for. Yet our guide, Professor Antonio Ortega, explained that this market wasn't just a commercial space but a social hub. It's common to see sellers' children playing in arcade areas, and people weren't there solely for shopping; they also came for the barbershops, salons, meeting spaces, and prayer shrines.

Professor Ortega also spoke to some of the threats facing these markets. Many of Mexico's poorest people work in informal sectors like the marketplace, where financial exchanges are untaxed and minimally monitored by the government. Yet the COVID-19 pandemic hit these markets particularly hard. And even as the pandemic waned, globalization continued threatening the market as a community social space. For example, Walmart's presence in Mexico continues to grow. While Walmart provides fixed prices and a cleaner storefront to purchase goods, it offers a marketplace focused on profit rather than being a community-centered space. Interestingly, the same forces of globalization are threatening more communal marketplaces in the United States. Though starker in Mexico, the decline of physical marketplaces as community hubs is a worldwide phenomenon brought on by globalization.

Marcus Trenfield
Graduate Student, Psychology

III. THE PAST IS PRESENT: MEXICO CITY

CHAPULTEPEC CASTLE
&
MUSEO NACIONAL DE ANTROPOLOGÍA

After three days in Cuernavaca, our group traveled to Mexico City. Our visit there began with visits to the **Castillo de Chapultepec** and the **Museo Nacional de Antropología**. Today, Chapultepec castle is home to the National Museum of History, showcasing various exhibits that highlight Mexico's history, art, and culture. It was home in the 1860s to the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian I, whose living quarters have been preserved for view from the wraparound marble terrace.. The National Museum of Archaeology, meanwhile, houses an extensive collection of archaeological and anthropological artifacts from pre-Hispanic civilizations that inhabited the region now known as Mexico. Its exhibits span thousands of years and showcase the cultural achievements of civilizations such as the Olmec, Maya, Aztec, Zapotec, and many others.

While going through these exhibits, I found many items interesting to the extent that they are almost "memeable" to modern eyes. At first I felt bad for finding some of these historical artifacts funny, but then I reflected further. We often think that the lives and cultures and rituals of people who lived centuries before us were noble and mystic, but is that all they were? Looking at the daily objects that they had touched and used, I felt a weird sense of vicinity that connected all of our lives together, even though they are centuries apart. It reminded me of the continuous influence of pre-Hispanic culture and civilization in Mexico, the brutal interruption of colonial invasion, and the subsequent struggles of independence. Modern Mexico derived from all of these events, not just one single moment. It also reminded me that research in the humanities, in the end, is about humans. And as humans, even though we might live in different temporalities, we might not be that different.

Ophelia Wang
Graduate Student, English

III. THE PAST IS PRESENT: MEXICO CITY

THE HEART OF MEXICO, THEN AND NOW

Our walking tour of Mexico City's historic center began at the **Museo del Templo Mayor**, the pyramid which was once the religious heart of the Aztec empire. As our guide, Carlos Sánchez Gómez, pointed out, it was built "onion-style," that is, layer by layer over a period of hundreds of years. But Templo Mayor is now only a ruin; it was dismantled by the Spanish early in their conquest of Mexico. And the stones that Aztec priests and emperors once climbed now adorn the southern façade of the **Metropolitan Cathedral's Tabernacle**. After exploring the Cathedral and the other buildings in the **Zócalo**, Mexico City's massive central plaza, we explored Avenue Cinco de Mayo, ending our tour at the magnificent **Palacio de Bellas Artes**.

The narrated walk through downtown revealed the remarkable plurality of human experiences that Mexico City has hosted. The Zócalo, home to the Templo Mayor and the Metropolitan Cathedral, has been the site of Aztec ceremonies as well as Catholic ones and political protests both of the left and right. It is the proper home of Mexican Nationalism, but its government buildings have flown Spanish, American, and French Flags. Places are not singular; they are vessels for meaning that are filled by those inhabiting them. And meanings are not random; they are the consequences of history and politics, as much as personal experiences.

Casey Richard Puerzer
Graduate Student, Political Science

IV. VOICES FROM THE LAND AND ITS PEOPLE

NACHO RAMÍREZ

On our third day we met community leader Ignacio "Nacho" Torres Ramirez in the **Indigenous land of the Nahua** to learn about their struggles for land and conflicts with the Mexican government. In several ways, Nacho's talk highlighted the points of tension between the indigenous Nahua peoples and the Mexican government. For example Nacho emphasized how land in the Nahua community is considered communal, which sharply contrasted with the developmentally driven, capitalistic conception of land as privately owned, economically exchangeable, and easily exploited. The Nahua, in his account, have long sustained a symbiotic and even spiritual relationship with their land, water, and forests, but this relationship has been severely damaged by national and global development projects, in which they were denied the right to participate in the decision process.

Another theme that emerged from his talk was the discontinuity between the Nahua's identity and that of the modern Mexican state. Nacho, who started the talk by describing his Spanish name as the "slave name", repeatedly emphasized the wish of some indigenous communities to gain greater autonomy from the Mexican government. The underrepresentation of Indigenous people in the Mexican government has contributed to this problem, but it is also a more complex issue, because of the accumulated historical injustices that have been done to indigenous communities. As Mexico's election season looms, it is uncertain whether these issues will be addressed in a way that encourages the incorporation of indigenous communities into the Mexican national project - or not.

Kelvin Li
Graduate Student, Philosophy

DON LÁZARO RODRÍGUEZ

On Wednesday morning, we had the opportunity to visit the home of Don Lázaro Rodríguez, the founder of **Los Tejones ("The Beavers"), a grassroots environmental group** which he founded decades ago. There Don Lázaro spoke to us about the organization's work protecting the land in his town, Tepoztlán, from cooptation and exploitation. Efforts to develop the land, he explained, involve a complex (and often conflictual) negotiation among various stakeholders, including community members, churches, tourists, government, and business, and disproportionately tend to benefit the latter groups. Ultimately, he maintained, the community wants development but is opposed to that which destroys traditional ways of life and benefits only the powerful few. He accordingly described how Los Tejones have responded to various potential threats, from golf course and highway development projects to negligent campers, organized crime, and the loss of communal lands to wealthy outsiders.

Many of the readings we have discussed in the Clough Doctoral Seminar this year have centered on the variety of stakeholders vying for the ability to define place. Our conversation with Don Lázaro about the history of his activism in Tepoztlán grounded these ideas in concrete reality. The opportunity to learn about how these dynamics play out in a specific place, from an advocate for the stakeholders with the least leverage in development decisions, illuminated the unwavering effort required to protect local communities from predatory investment that displaces long standing residents.

Learning about the history of Los Tejones also shed light on the practical aspects of organized resistance, especially the challenges of cultivating communal participation. Today, Don Lázaro worries that young people in the community feel less rooted to place, because of their disinterest in the community's traditions and the churches that often sustain them.

Alexa Damaska,
Graduate Student, Sociology

V. CENTERS OF POWER

LA MAÑANERA

The pomp of the **Palacio Nacional** is overwhelming, seeming to extend temporally and spatially in every direction. Time and place are tightly intertwined in the executive offices of any elected president, but especially here. Built from Aztec ruins in colonial style, its façade runs two soccer fields, commanding over the largest public square in the hemisphere. If the trappings of chief executive office are intoxicating, however, a constitutional term limit sobers its occupant. The immensity of presidential power is fleeting: the voters' message self-destructs on cue.

A window of opportunity to observe the current inhabitant of the national palace came during the mañanera: an early-morning audience with the charismatic President Andrés Manuel López Obrador. Known as AMLO, he spends the first two hours of each day basking in the attention of the national press corps.

After multiple military checkpoints, lengthy credentialing and clipboard wrangling, one suddenly sits unencumbered, on pandemically-spaced chairs. A few meters of empty stage separate him from the assembled journalists, with no visible security aside from a velvet rope. Entering the ballroom, the silence is striking. In this hushed sanctum at the center of the megalopolis of Mexico City, journalists neither bustle nor hustle.

AMLO sets the tone for the desired coverage: "With eight months and ten days left, we're going to end this well." He holds forth for two hours, stopping only a handful of times to solicit a formal question. Aware his days in the national palace are numbered, he ruminates aloud about his place in the gallery of Mexican chief executives. The spotlight would fade soon but for now, there was plenty of room to fill with presidential communications.

Jonathan Laurence,
Director, Clough Center

V. CENTERS OF POWER

THE NATION IS FIRST

As part of our annual theme, we at the Clough Center have investigated the spaces and places of political power. How does a government, particularly a powerful government body like the Senate, place itself within the narrative of its nation–and how is that narrative reflected in the physical spaces it occupies? Through our private tour of the **Cámara de Senadores del Congreso de la Unión**, home to Mexico's national Senate, we were able to explore that question up close.

The Senate building is beautiful. It is a modern building, built in 2011 after the Senate outgrew its older, 19th-century trappings. It is the only building expressly constructed for legislative purposes in the country. The new campus comprises several buildings for offices, committee rooms, and the main Senate chamber, where we spent most of our time. In the chamber, the 128 members sit facing a podium where people stand to speak on issues before the entire body, with a Board of seven officers sitting, elevated, behind them. Looming above the entire chamber are the words "The Nation is First"--a reminder, our guide told us, of where the Senators' loyalties should lie.

The seal of Mexico is also conspicuous throughout throughout the chamber, in large, bronze plaques flanking the bench where the Board sits, and on the front of the podium.

> "The seal of Mexico is also present several times throughout the chamber, in large, bronze plaques flanking the bench where the Board sits, and on the front of the podium. The seal, a Mexican Eagle eating a rattlesnake atop a cactus, comes from Aztec legend and holds significance for the nation's identity, representing the blending of the country's ancient, Indigenous roots with traditions from its Spanish colonizers."

A slim skylight on the ceiling yields a view of a massive Mexican flag, flying atop the building and over the entire Senate square. It is the first thing the speaker addressing the Senate sees when he or she looks up: a further symbolic reminder, embodied in the building's very architecture, that the nation is first.

Elijah Rockhold
Graduate Student, Law

VI. A PLACE FOR THE PLACE-LESS

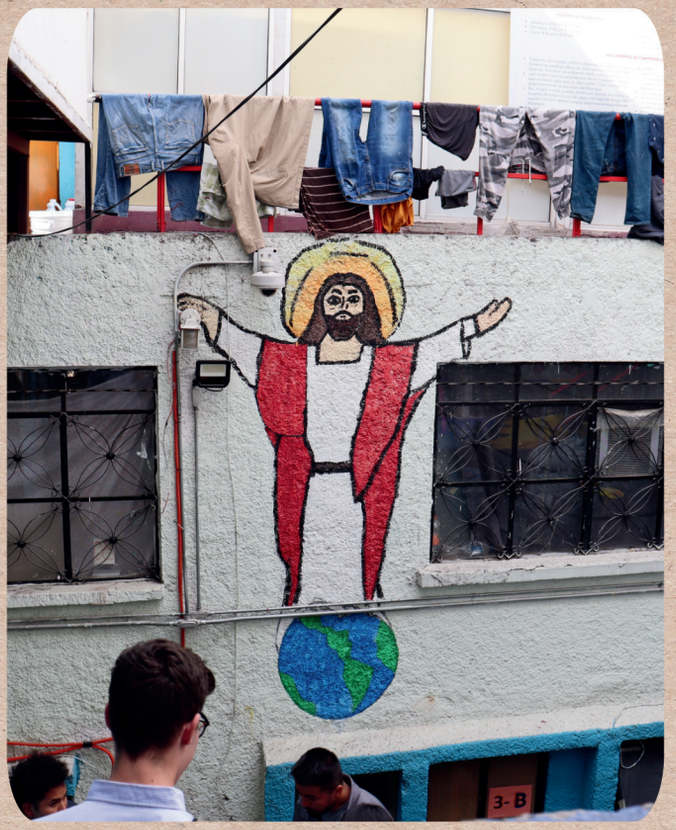
FINDING HOME ACROSS BORDERS

Toward the end of our stay in Mexico, our group visited **Casa Tochan, a temporary shelter for migrants** stopping in Mexico City for rest, shelter, and care as they planned the next stages of their journey from their home countries to wherever they hoped to later settle. Tochan, which means "Our House" in Nahuatl, has hosted people from all over the world, including the Caribbean, Central and South America, and even Afghanistan. Guests at Tochan receive not only three meals a day and a place to sleep but also access to medical care, social and legal services, and psychological care. I was particularly glad that these services were available when we spoke to one young man - only eighteen years old - who explained that he had fled from his home in Honduras after fearing for his life. He had traveled alone - he'd had to leave his mother behind - and his goal was to apply for asylum in the United States. Although he spoke calmly and didn't seem too perturbed by his experiences, I could only imagine the hardships he'd been through to reach this point. And after three months at Tochan, he hadn't even ventured to the United States yet.

After we left Tochan, I kept thinking about how all of our lives are structured and maintained by borderlines both invisible and very real. For this young man, he had been forced to run away from a politically bordered community that had defined his childhood and still contained his mother, a person I imagine he loved very much. And now, as he resided within the borders of Mexico City and waited to hear about the status of his asylum application, this young man had joined one of the most vulnerable and transient populations in the world. His day-to-day fate depended upon whether another bordered community would recognize him as an asylum seeker or an illegal immigrant and treat him accordingly. If the U.S. rejects his application, which border should he turn to or stay within? Where exactly would he be expected to go?

It is a beautiful feature of the human spirit that it will always fight for its own survival and flourishing, as well as that of its loved ones–even if that means crossing countless borders. Governments and societies are mistaken if they think that making themselves as unwelcoming as possible will somehow stop people fighting for life from trying to cross their borders. Our visit to Tochan showed me that while shelters like this may not be able to solve these global-level problems, they do have a plan for ensuring that, at least within their walls, people who have been forced to leave the places they once called home have aII place to stay that recognizes and affirms their human spirit.

Meghan McCoy
Graduate Student, History



The Clough Center delegation *(L-R): Kelvin Li, Stephen de Riel, Yinan Xu*
Casey Puerzer, Ophelia Wang, Shaun Slusarski
Prof. Angie Picone, Barb Kozee, Elijah Rockwell, Alexa Damaska
Dr. Fernando Bizzarro, Dr. Nicholas Hayes-Mota
Prof. Jonathan Laurence, Meghan McCoy
Pictured on p.7 (Center): Trys Lousteau and Marcus Trenfield

VII. PLACES OF MEMORY AND PILGRIMAGE

THE BIRTHPLACE OF A PEOPLE

"*Heroicamente defendido por Cuauhtemoc, cayó Tlatelolco en poder de Hernán Cortés. No fue triunfo ni derrota. Fue el doloroso nacimiento del pueblo mestizo que es el México de hoy.*" Heroically defended by Cuauhtemoc, Tlatelolco fell to the power of Hernán Cortés. It was neither victory nor defeat. Rather, it was the painful birth of the mestizo people that represent the Mexico of today.

In the corner of the **Plaza de las Tres Culturas** reads this sign that offers an almost poetic, even pastoral understanding of Mexican history and the tragic conflicts that have marked the birth of the modern Mexican nation-state. The Spanish built the Iglesia de Santiago de Tlatelolco in the same place where Cuahtehmoc was captured. Pre-Hispanic pyramids are visible alongside modern housing projects, where a student uprising was violently suppressed. As a highly symbolic and affective "place" in the Mexican national imaginary, Plaza de las Tres Culturas could be easily forgotten. Its history is difficult to package into a neat narrative of diversity and multiculturalism where peace has always prevailed. Rather, the Plaza tells a story that is much more painful, that holds difficult truths.

In the Plaza, we remember the deaths of Indigenous peoples who defended their identity and belonging. We remember students who protested unequal economic growth and state investments that came at the expense of the Mexican people and the working class–students who were tragically massacred in 1968. And yet amidst these struggles for survival, for land, for voice, we remember that this is what it means and has meant to be modern Mexico. Questions of dignity and justice, power, and political economy rightly define the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. Rather than an ethic of forgetting or telling simple stories, the Plaza retains memories that challenge all those who witness it to consider what the Mexico of yesterday and today means for the people of tomorrow.

Barbara Anne Kozee
Graduate Student, Theology

VII. PLACES OF MEMORY AND PILGRIMAGE

THE MOTHER OF A NATION

One of the most famous images in the world is the tilma of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The image is located in the **Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe at the foot of Tepeyac Hill**. As our guide, Prof. Carlos Sánchez Gómez, informed us, long before the arrival of the Spanish, the hill had been regarded as a sacred site where worship of the mother goddess Tonantzin took place. It has since become a sacred site for Catholics from across Mexico and beyond, with the distinction of being the most visited Catholic pilgrimage destination in the world.

The syncretic dimensions of Guadalupe, who is supposed to have appeared to Chichimec peasant Juan Diego in 1531, reflect the reality of mestizaje, the fusion of Indigenous and European cultures that has animated Mexican society since the time of colonization. The reality of mestizaje is visible in the mingling of the Aztec mother goddess with the Christian mother of God in the woman, Guadalupe. It is also visible in the design of the Guadalupe image itself. As we learned from the Guadalupana missionary sisters who hosted us for dinner, one of the virgin's hands is brown and the other is white, symbolizing the joining of European and Indigenous Mexican cultures. Indeed, beyond her religious significance, Guadalupe is a potent symbol of Mexican identity, whose image has been mobilized in support of various political, cultural, and religious projects throughout the centuries. Don Miguel Hidalgo raised the banner of Guadalupe in the 1810 Mexican War of Independence. Emiliano Zapata raised it as well during the 1910 Mexican Revolution. Meanwhile, for the Guadalupan missionaries, the image is more than a symbol. It represents a living, divine reality, who beckons its beholders towards greater solidarity with the marginalized of society.

Shaun Slusarski
Graduate Student, Theology

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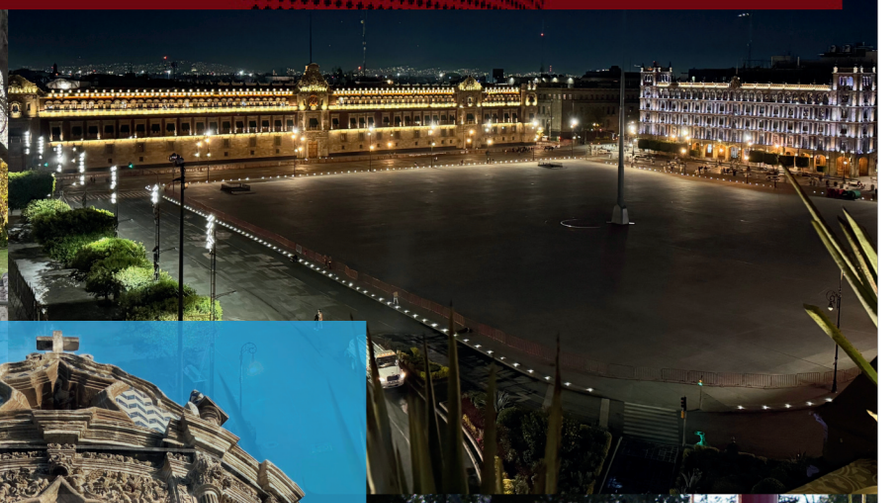

Attachment to **Place**
in a World of **Nations** '23–'24