
“The Sun Is the Poor Mayo’s *Cobija*”: Mayo Weavers Encounter Neoliberalism

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Abstract: Mayo women of southern Sonora, Mexico have woven textiles for centuries. We undertook a study of contemporary Mayo weavers to determine the state of Mayo weaving, its significance to the homes and communities in which weaving is done, and its future prospects. We also wished to ascertain whether or not Mayo weaving is in a state of precipitous decline, as we had heard anecdotally from numerous sources, or in a state of expansion, as predicted by Burns (1979). Mexico’s adoption of neoliberal economic policies within the last two decades has affected weavers. The isolation of Mayo weavers in an environment of increased organization of the Mexican economy along capitalist lines makes them an anomaly. Although weavers control the entire process and marketing of their cobijas and serapes, they lack support of government agencies and alternative trade organizations in facilitating the purchase, advertisement and sales of their textiles. Although the women face difficulties, they view weaving as fundamental to their identity, an important Mayo tradition they hope will be perpetuated.

Résumé: Les femmes mayo du Sud de Senora au Mexique ont tissé du textile depuis des siècles. Nous avons entrepris une étude des tisserandes mayo pour évaluer l’état du tissage mayo, son importance pour les communautés et les foyers dans lesquels on le pratique et ses perspectives d’avenir. Nous voulions aussi déterminer si le tissage décline rapidement comme plusieurs sources le rapportent ou si il est en expansion comme l’a prédit Burns (1979). L’adoption par le Mexique, dans les deux dernières décennies, de politiques économiques néo-libérales a affecté les tisserandes. L’isolement des tisserandes mayo dans un environnement économique de plus en plus organisé autour des ambitions capitalistes en fait un cas spécial. Quoique les tisserandes contrôlent le processus entier de la fabrication et de la mise en marché de leurs *cobijas* et *serapes*, elles n’ont pas le support des agences gouvernementales et des autres niveaux de l’organisation du commerce pour l’achat et la promotion des ventes de leur textile. Même si les femmes font face à des difficultés, elles considèrent le tissage comme fondamental à leur identité; elles y voient une tradition mayo importante qu’elles espèrent voir perpétuer.

Introduction

Mayo, an indigenous, Cáhita-speaking group of northwest Mexico,¹ are concentrated in small villages of several hundred residents and hamlets (*ranchos*) in the arid to semi-arid valley of the Río Mayo in south-eastern Sonora, in the Río Fuerte in northwestern Sinaloa, and in small autonomous watersheds in between.² In the 1990 census they numbered roughly 60 000, making them the largest indigenous group in the region (INEGI, 1990).

Nearly all males over 14 and many women of all ages are employed—regularly or intermittently—as day labourers in commercial agricultural operations. Following World War II the delta of the Río Mayo and adjacent coastal lowlands were cleared of native thornscrub and extensive agricultural infrastructure was installed mostly at government expense. The river was dammed and an excess of 80 000 hectares (200 000 acres) of irrigated farmland were opened for cultivation (Calderón Valdés, 1985: 299-301). Mayos were hired for the clearing and construction of the water delivery system and have since provided the labour force for intensive planting, cultivation, and harvesting the varied crops, most of which are exported. Until recently, the increased demand for labour due to expansion of agriculture has absorbed most of the population increase in Mayo communities, so that most Mayo young people remain in the region. While other parts of rural Mexico have experienced high rates of emigration, mostly illegal, to the United States, few Mayos have migrated. While this has kept families intact, it means that Mayo kin have not benefited (as have hundreds of thousands of other Mexican families) from wages remitted to them by family members working in the U.S. (Yetman, 1998).

While vast wealth has been created by the export-oriented agriculture, little of it has trickled down to the Mayos, the inhabitants of the region at the time of con-

quest and well into the 20th century (O'Connor, 1989). Virtually all day-labourer jobs require few skills. As day wages tend not to keep pace with inflation, Mayo poverty has gradually worsened in recent decades. Mayo irrigation farmers, few in number, have experienced great difficulty in obtaining credit or government agricultural assistance that has been readily available for Mestizo farmers (German, Luis, Ríos, Flores, & Ayala, 1987: 108-112) primarily due to their poverty and racist ideologies that construct all indigenous peoples as such (O'Connor, 1989: 47; Yetman, 1998: 224). Many Mayo adults are illiterate and education beyond the sixth grade is not generally available. Young Mayos learn early that they will be scorned if their identity as Mayos is revealed, so they often repress their knowledge of the Mayo language and find themselves increasingly drawn to Mestizo values associated with urban areas (O'Connor 1989: 54; Yetman, 1998). Mayo settlements are marked by Mayos' social marginalization and poverty. Few homes have interior running water or plumbing. Cooking is carried on under outdoor *ramadas*. Though some remain unwired, most villages have been provided with electricity in the last decade. Few Mayo own motor vehicles. Most travel by public bus or mule-driven carts. Mayo families are large, usually five or more children. Women cook, wash, clean, sew, gather firewood and care for children and grandchildren. Weavers typically integrate spinning and weaving activities into their daily household routines.

Mayo Weaving

For centuries Mayos, notably Mayo women, of southern Sonora have been known for their weaving (Acosta, 1949; 126-27; Beals, 1945; Cabeza de Vaca, 1972; Pérez de Ribas, 1645; West, 1993). At the time of contact with Europeans they wore woven cotton garments and slept on cotton blankets (Pérez de Ribas 1645). They almost certainly were weaving with wool after sheep were introduced by Jesuit priests by the late 18th century. European-style looms using foot-operated treadles were introduced to the nearby Yaquis in 1774³ but, according to Mayo weavers, do not appear to have been widely adopted by Mayos. Earlier in the 20th century, locally woven wool blankets graced most homes in the Mayo region, and were a favourite of Mestizo cowboys as well. Mayos' reputation as weavers extended to a minor extent throughout the republic, but was especially well-established in the state of Sonora. Before World War II, Beals (1945) provided detailed descriptions of Mayo textiles. In the 1970s, Fontana, Faubert and Burns (1977) published a catalogue and history of contemporary Mayo weaving patterns and techniques in conjunction with an

exhibition during summer 1977, held at the Heard Museum in Phoenix, Arizona. Burns (1979) published an illustrated article on a blanket collection from the 1930s. In the 1940s Mayos wove *cobijas* (heavy blankets or rugs), *serapes* (heavy, wide blankets intended to be worn) and *fajas* (sashes) used as belts (Beals, 1945: 23). While Mayo blankets and designs are well-known in the Mayo region today, they are not well-known abroad beyond the southwest United States, and have not been described in national publications or exhibited in museums. The cultural and economic importance of Mayo weaving has not been carefully analyzed.

Figure 1



Elvira Tajia Moroyoqui and Ana Lordes Tajia Moroyoqui (daughters of Vicente and Teresa), warping the *telar*.

Photo by Kathy M'Closkey

Although weavers may bring prestige to their village by attracting tourists and occasional buyers and even photographers, Mayo women's intellectual contributions are minimized in current social institutions. Nearly all of the women interviewed live in *ejidos* (communally owned, individually parcelized lands) or *comunidades* (communal lands reserved for indigenous people) governed by assemblies constituted by members.⁴ In both cases the lands until recently could not be bought, sold, rented or loaned (for the recent changes see Yetman and Búrquez, 1998) and were thus characterized by long continuity in land tenure. In general, *ejidataria*, (female *ejido* members) and *comuneras* (female members of the *comunidad*) are subject to severe limitations on their ability to participate in the general economic life of the *ejido* or community (Zapata Martelo, 1996). While some women are *ejidatarias* and some are *comuneras*, they derived this standing due to the death of a husband, i.e., by default (Deere, 1993). Women per se are not viewed as legiti-

mate holders of usufruct rights. They are usually not permitted by the male members to express opinions during meetings of the *ejido* or *comunidad* (Yetman and Búrquez, 1998). Women find in their daily life that attempts at organizing or addressing questions other than domestic ones are usually met with scorn or contempt by males. The same men, however, usually approve of weaving, enjoy the additional income it brings to the household, and often bask in the publicity their wives' accomplishments bring when tourists or buyers admire their work, sometimes even taking credit for the production itself.⁵

Figure 2



Mayo weaver with her cobija.
Photo by Barney Burns

Craft Production and Globalization

In many Latin American countries, intensified artisan production is frequently used as a viable household strategy to offset increasing impoverishment (Burns, 1996; Cook, 1993; Cook and Joo, 1995; Nash, 1993, 1994;

O'Connor, 1996). Stringent austerity regimes in the form of structural adjustment policies (SAPs) imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have negatively affected Mexico's poor and Mayos are no exception (Loker, 1999; Nash, 1994: 11). Most families are primarily dependent on wages received by kin working as day labourers in commercial, export-oriented agriculture. In keeping with Mexico's commitment to privatization and decreased government intervention in the social sector, government subsidies to the poor for food, medical care and education have been drastically reduced as Mexico struggles to service its massive foreign debt (Barry, 1995; Beaucage, 1998).

The overwhelming proportion of Mayo weavers are women, a situation that is not unusual for Mexico. Identification of weaving and cloth with women's social roles has deep pre-colonial roots and is probably a perpetuation of precolumbian ideology (Klein, 1997; McCafferty and McCafferty, 1991). Mesoamerican men typically weave on mechanical floor looms (Cook, 1993; Hendrickson, 1995; Stephen, 1991, 1993). Stephen (1993) reports an increase in the number of male weavers in three Zapotec villages since the 1970s. In southern Sonora, art and craft objects produced primarily by men have achieved more notable market success than women's weaving. Men carve ceremonial (*pascola*) masks and kachina-like ceremonial dolls, wooden trays and utensils, and weave horsehair rope, hatbands, belts, wire baskets and agave-fiber *morrales* (satchels). These items find a more receptive market and are sold in retail outlets in the region and in the United States. They also cost far less than the most inexpensive woolen Mayo textiles. Ironically, a weaver from Camahuiroa recalled that, in the past, her best customers used to be Mayo men—*Pascola* (ceremonial) dancers who bought sashes from her as part of their costumes. Today the *Pascolas* tend to wear commercially woven and dyed sashes, and she no longer weaves. The isolation of Mayo weavers in an environment of increased organization of the Mexican economy along capitalist lines makes them an anomaly. Although their textiles are almost exclusively woven for sale, weavers still retain control over the entire process of production and marketing of their weaving. Although an aficionado primarily concerned with authenticity may celebrate weavers' autonomy, it is disadvantageous in several respects. Thus it is worthwhile to note the differences between the production and marketing of Mayo handweaving and that of several other Latin American examples.

In the literature on crafts and globalization, we are struck by the fact that many Latin American weavers frequently use commercially spun and dyed yarns and floor

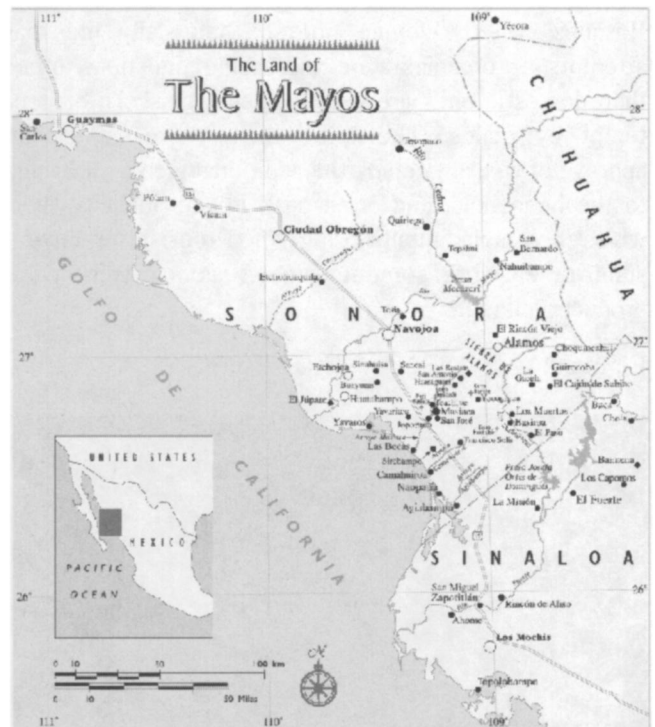
looms to expedite the process (Nash, 1993; O'Connor, 1996; Stephen, 1991). Many workshops utilize pieceworkers, as the production process is divided or farmed out among specialists (Cook, 1993: 62-3). O'Connor (1996) describes the changes in raw materials, organization of labour, transformation in technology and types of articles produced over the past 50 years in Peru to capture a viable share of the global handicrafts market. Merchants may also extend credit to producers and make suggestions concerning the creation of new articles to attract market interest (Lynd, 2000; Stephen, 1993: 47). Waterbury (1991) describes similar developments among Oaxacan embroiderers. Klein (1997) highlights the concerted efforts by museologists and scholars to conserve textile traditions in several Oaxacan villages.

To offset the impact of recently imposed neoliberal policies, administrators of non-governmental and fair trade organizations, co-operatives and microfinance schemes have developed strategies to provide more favourable returns to impoverished Latin American crafts producers. The variable success rates and shortcomings of such strategies are discussed by several contributors to *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternative Trade for the Global Economy* (Grimes and Milgram, 2000). None of these agencies or policies are in place to aid Mayo weavers. For example, neither Mexico's National Indigenous Institute (INI), nor FONART, (Fomento Nacional de Artesanías) who have actively purchased handicrafts from indigenous producers for three decades (Eber and Rosenbaum, 1993: 166), has facilitated the sales and marketing of Mayo textiles.⁶ Thus in several respects, the marginalization of Mayo weavers and their textiles parallels the decline in women's economic autonomy as exemplified in the women and colonization literature (Deere, 1993; Ehlers, 1990; Etienne and Leacock, 1980; Mies, 1982, 1988; Nash, 1993).

Methodology

In December 1997, we interviewed 33 current or former weavers in 17 locations, ranging from small towns to dispersed *ranchos*.⁷ These locations represent nearly all the places where weaving is done in the region (see map), nearly all on the coastal plain southeast of Navojoa. Thirty-two weavers live in southern Sonora, one in Sinaloa. The interviews ranged from one-half hour to more than two hours. With some weavers we were able to engage in conversations that extended over several days. In the case of five weavers from Teachive (Mayo "scattered round stones"), Yetman has discussed their weaving with them over a period of nearly five years (Yetman, 1998).

Figure 3
The Land of the Mayos



Map by Paul Mirocha

We proceeded informally, chatting about many topics in addition to weaving. Several of the older weavers were more comfortable speaking their native Mayo language rather than Spanish. In those cases our questions and their responses were translated by Vicente Tajia Yocupicio, a native Mayo speaker familiar with the region and with weaving, who accompanied us at all times. His presence and familiarity with the Mayo language also served to make the informants more comfortable during the interviews. Some of our information is derived from extensive studies in the region between the years 1991 and 1998 (Yetman, 1998).

With one exception, the weavers were women ranging in age from 32 to 90 years. Several weavers reported that younger women and girls assist with spinning, but none actually weaves. A weaver from the impoverished village of Cucajaqui proudly pointed to a young daughter who was learning to spin (but not to weave yet). Another woman ordered her daughter to demonstrate her spinning technique. The wool (cotton has not been spun for many decades) is spun with a *malacate* (spindle), and woven on a *telar* (horizontal loom) strung up on two permanent beams (Mayo: *jiotori*) which are held in place by four upright posts (Mayo: *huicas*).⁸ (Most of the loom

parts have Mayo as well as Spanish names.) The single male exception was the Sinaloan weaver, a man in his late 60s.⁹ He spun a coarse yarn on an old wheel weathered from many seasons out of doors (the only weaver to spin on a wheel), and wove on a floor loom with pedal-operated shafts, adapted from a Spanish model. His loom was unlike any used by Sonoran weavers, and he described it using Spanish terminology. This weaver probably carries on a more purely Spanish tradition and traces his ancestry and weaving technique to Cáhita-speaking groups distinct from the Mayo. His language is technically Mayo, but is probably a Cáhita variant (Ahome or Zuaque) labelled Mayo by Hispanic chroniclers. (See Yetman, 1998 Ch. 2 for elaboration of this point.)¹⁰ Although reasonably fluent in the Mayo language, he was only somewhat familiar with the Mayo terminology for the loom and its parts. His weaving is promoted in a regional artisan shop in El Fuerte, Sinaloa, where he is noted as the only remaining Mayo weaver on the Río Fuerte.

Figure 4



Adobe home built by Vicente Tajia Yocupicio (1964) with Teresa's cooking ramada adjacent.

Photo by Kathy M'Closkey

We interviewed these active or former weavers in their homes. Several women were in the process of weaving blankets. In some households the loom was either temporarily or permanently dismantled or there were no active weavers. We asked the women when and how they learned to weave, where they acquired fleeces and dyes, how they sell the finished product and other questions pertinent to their weaving histories, including whether they wove with one or three *chomas* (string heddles).¹¹ We queried whether there were as many weavers today as in the past. We also asked whether weavers could recall any songs or stories associated with weaving. We discontinued the last question after the first

dozen or so interviews. None of the women interviewed recalled any song or story associated with weaving.¹² Our lack of success in obtaining this information may be a reflection of inadequate interviewing technique on our part, cultural reticence on the part of the weavers or the dampening presence of a male (or outsiders) in a discussion that may be intrinsically female and Mayo. It also may arise from our inability to detect indications of ancient themes symbolized in the weaving. Through these interviews and the associated conversations we attempted to determine the number of weavers in the Mayo region, the cultural and economic importance of weaving in Mayo life, the types of textiles produced and the viability of weaving as an art and as a commercial enterprise. More important, we hoped to gain an overview of the significance of weaving in Mayo culture, past and present.

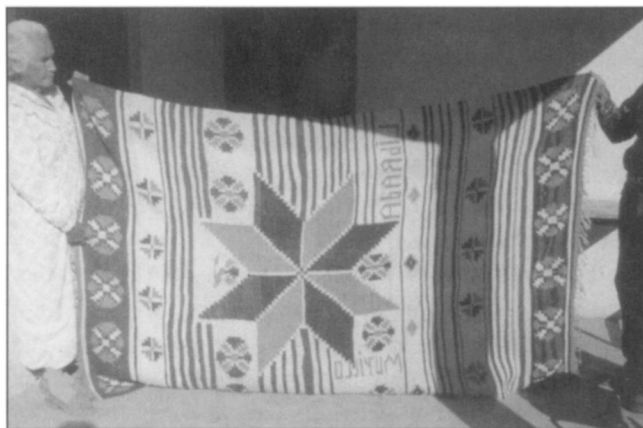
From our survey we estimate that 50 Mayo women and two Mayo men are active or former weavers.¹³ All of the weavers we interviewed spoke the Mayo language. One spoke only haltingly (by her own admission) but said she understood others when they spoke. The average age of weavers is 50. No women under 20 are known to weave. A weaver from the very poor hamlet of Cucajaqui nodded toward her two granddaughters and noted that they were learning to spin and would someday weave. They smiled in agreement. This was our only such experience.

Mayo Weavers' Responses

In general, the women we interviewed enjoy their weaving and reported finding it fulfilling, in spite of the difficulties attendant to it—the arduous work in obtaining fleeces, carding/cleaning, washing, spinning, dyeing, weaving and marketing. One weaver extolled weaving as a way of doing something productive while chatting with her daughters or neighbours. “I can enjoy myself and make a little money for the house,” she said. Nearly all of the weavers recalled the first textiles they produced and what became of them. Most women spun before they began to weave, often learning to spin before they reached 10 years of age, only learning to weave over many years and usually producing a finished textile between the ages of 14 and 20, but occasionally earlier.¹⁴ One woman revealed that she began to weave when she was seven and made her first real *cobija* when she was 10 years old. She is clearly an exception. The majority, but by no means all, learned weaving from their mothers. “I opened my eyes seeing my mother weave,” joked an accomplished weaver from Teachive. One weaver learned to weave against her mother's wishes. “My father knew I wanted to weave, so he took me to another

house and, in secret, a woman there taught me to weave," she related with obvious delight. Another woman revealed that she did not weave her first *cobija* until she was 40 because her mother wanted her to spin the wool for her (the mother's) *cobijas*. An elderly weaver laughed when she recalled selling her first sash for 25 centavos. She was 15 at the time.

Figure 5



Dona Francisca Moroyoqui Mieyillo of Rancho del Padre, with a *Libra Choqui*, or star, woven in the centre of her blanket.

Photo by Kathy M'Closkey

In several cases, weavers remarked that weaving is an excellent occupation, for they could take it up in hours when household requirements slacken. By selling their homespun product, they supplement household income without the disruptive effect of being absent when they were most needed by husband, children or other family members. For the most part the weavers expressed fondness for weaving, especially seeing and selling the finished product: "just the smell of a *cobija* is a good thing," one said. Another remarked to us, "isn't the *carpintero* (a ripple design) pretty?" This fondness for a completed blanket, however, was seldom expressed by their daughters.

Few mentioned that weaving is physically hard work, especially hard on the back and knees, a message not lost on younger women. Two of the weavers interviewed had been forced to quit due to repetitive-stress injuries, and others complained of soreness and discomfort while weaving. One swore that her back pain tormented her so much that if she did not have to weave to survive she would quit. Preparation for weaving, that is, cleaning, spinning and dyeing of the wool and warping the loom takes more time than the actual weaving. Cleaning fleece and spinning are monotonous, even though they can be done while the spinner is engaged in conversation.

All weavers expressed fear for the future of weaving, and hoped that it would not die out. Most of them felt it was an important *tradición* (cultural tradition),¹⁵ involving a knowledge that should not be lost. Women explained to us that pattern names pertain to plants, animals or places like Teachive, Saneal, Sinahuisa and Yavaritos. One weaver laughingly but proudly revealed to us a distinctive zigzag design from Bacabachi, where she was born. She called it *huitcha cantojoa* ("they make it with thorns"). A number of different villages have access to various plant dyes and often are known for their distinctive patterns. Unless they married men from nearby villages, weavers for the most part have lived in the same village, often in the same house, nearly all their lives. These places are, in turn, defined by the people and the cultural traditions they have perpetuated for generations, perhaps even prior to conquest. In *monte* near their homes the weavers and their ancestors have gathered wood, roots, bark, stems, trunks, leaves and flowers—materials for dyeing and for constructing their looms. The patterns (such as the design they refer to as *carpintero* [woodpecker] and another known as *chóparaguoqui* [raccoon track]) and plant-based colours—blue, red, yellow—they weave into their blankets are as much a product of the land as they are a product of the weavers' creative artistry. Thus they weave their textiles in a social and physical setting that reaffirms cultural values in addition to providing income.

Weavers also have a more independent existence than women who do not weave. In general, weavers, because of the respect they enjoy in their communities, are afforded greater freedom from the confines of the home than are non-weavers (Yetman, 1998). They travel (usually in the company of a relative or friend) to distant farms to purchase fleeces, which are not generally available near the villages, and into the *monte* to collect plant materials for dyeing.¹⁶ Several women demonstrated for us the plants and plant parts they gathered in the *monte* to make their dyes. Women also venture regularly into other parts of the village when potential buyers (primarily tourists from the United States) arrive. (This is especially true in Teachive, which is spread out for nearly a kilometre on both sides of an *arroyo*.) The few weavers who raise sheep also walk into the *monte* from their homes to tend to their small flocks. In the case of one weaver, her meager income from the sale of her fine blankets enabled her to become a *fiestera* (fiesta sponsor) in the community, a post of great prestige and responsibility. As a *fiestera*, Aurora Moroyoqui was responsible for arranging the countless details of Mayo traditional and religious celebrations during Holy Week and the fiesta of San Miguel in late September. In addition the 24

fiesteros maintain and clean the cemetery and remind villagers of ceremonial events throughout the year. Without her weaving Aurora could not have undertaken that public and ritual commitment.

For most of the weavers, their work is a source of pride. They control the items they produce and are in charge of selling them. They take pride in controlling the entire process: cleaning fleeces, spinning, dyeing, setting up the loom, weaving and selling. Although Beals (1945: 27) reported men selling weavers' blankets, we found not a single man selling blankets made by women. The money women receive is theirs. A high percentage of men in the region are given to heavy drinking (Yetman, 1998) and spend a major portion of their earnings on beer or other alcohol. Some women explained that it is the money they receive for their weaving that sustains their families and not their husband's or father's earnings which is spent on alcohol.

Mayo culture has reinforced many of the machismo elements of Mestizo society, imposing more restrictions on women while correspondingly lightening the responsibility for family maintenance on men (German et al, 1987; Nash, 1994). Under Mestizo mores, women are usually expected to remain in the home, raise children, and provide meals, housekeeping, succour and tolerance for the philandering and excessive drinking of the husband and other male members of the family. A woman not at home must have some excuse, some justification for not being in her "proper" place. Women must seek their husbands' permission to carry out activities other than those associated with household maintenance. These expectations among Mayos do not in theory vary greatly from Mestizo values, but Aboriginal Mayo values placed far more responsibility for family maintenance on the father's shoulders (Beals, 1945: 62). Villagers tend to decry the tendency of fathers to drink away a family's assets or abandon their children or have children by women other than their wives; the same villagers ostracize a woman who deviates from the received standards of female decorum. One woman whose sexual affairs are well-known is scorned by other weavers, despite her considerable weaving talent.

The Decline of Mayo Weaving

We asked each weaver to estimate how many weavers were producing in their village during their childhood.¹⁷ Based upon that testimony we conclude that the number of weavers has declined, perhaps precipitously, in the last 40 to 50 years. Using statements made by weavers and others we interviewed, we project that 40 years ago there were more than 100 weavers in the region, proba-

bly as many as 150. In all areas we visited, the reported decrease in weavers was dramatic, with the exception of Teachive, where roughly a fourth of the weavers reside. While the number of weavers in Teachive has apparently declined, at least 10 weavers continue to produce *cobijas*. Teachive has long been known regionally and in the southwestern United States as a centre of Mayo weaving.¹⁸ In the early 1940s Beals found Bacabachi, a village now of some 900, producing many fine blankets, but in Masiaca, of which Teachive is an associated village, he found only a few poor quality textiles (Beals, 1945: 26-33). Bacabachi now has one weaver while Masiaca (including Teachive and several other hamlets) has more than a dozen.

What has caused the decline in the number of weavers? The women gave the following reasons: (1) unavailability of fleeces; (2) the preferences of younger women for greater economic remuneration and the general lassitude of contemporary young women, including their unwillingness to undertake the difficult labour involved in weaving; and (3) the lack of a reliable market for their textiles. We discuss each of these factors separately.

Scarcity of fleeces

All of the weavers clean the wool prior to spinning by shaking and beating the fleece, and removing dirt and plant parts with their fingers, as most of them do not own hand carders. Only four of the weavers raise their own sheep, and even these usually purchase raw fleeces to supplement what they shear from their ewes. Several weavers related stories of travelling salesmen who in the past, travelled among the villages by mule-drawn cart selling fleeces. Now weavers purchase their fleeces primarily from growers in the irrigated region around Huatabampo in the lower Río Mayo. These fleeces are usually of poor quality and are fouled with dirt and plant fragments. The need to buy fleeces works a hardship on many weavers, especially those from Teachive, who live nearly 50 kilometres from the wool-growing area and must travel to and from the sheep-growing region by bus. Purchasing the fleeces and the necessary bus tickets may consume 15% of the retail price of the woven item.

Nearly all weavers complained that fleeces are hard to obtain, many stating that the scarcity is a deterrent to potential young weavers. Many growers in the region have switched from a wool-bearing sheep to a meat-producing breed called *peligüé* raised for sale abroad. The hot climate of the region does not under the best of circumstances produce thick fleeces, but the year-round availability of irrigated pasture produces rapid weight

gain. The change in breeds has decreased the availability of fleeces. If the sheep are raised on irrigated pastures (nearly always the case), the owner must weigh the return from raising wool-producing sheep against the anticipated higher return on cash crops such as tomatoes, strawberries, corn, chick peas and beans, all destined for the international market. There are few economic incentives for raising sheep. Most of the herds we visited are grazed on stubble or are raised out of tradition or fondness for the animals, not for calculated economic return.

Even more important than the switch to *peligüé*, has been the increase in cattle grazing, promoted over the last three decades by the state and national governments (see, for example, Camou Healy, 1991). Cattle are raised by men, sheep primarily by women and young boys. Public emphasis on cattle production has increased forage pressure on rainfed rangelands, leaving less biomass available for sheep (Yetman, 1998). A woman in Teachive now has seven sheep, whereas her mother-in-law is reported to have once grazed more than 1 000 sheep. Many others who formerly raised sheep, now have none at all. For the most part, the decrease in weavers' flocks is due to decreased availability of suitable forage. In nearly all cases the weavers commented that pasturage for sheep is now inferior to what it was when they were younger. "There is no pasture for the *borregas* (ewes) now," a Teachive weaver lamented. "I used to have twenty, now I have only two." A weaver from Bacabachi related sadly the theft of her sheep, and suggested young men had stolen them. Weavers usually attribute the decline to decreased rainfall, however overgrazing by cows is the probable culprit for deterioration of pastures. Excessive stocking rates are hardly discouraged by the state and federal governments, which hope that increased beef production will meet national needs and that their sale on international markets will provide a source of needed foreign currency (Camou Healy, 1991: 92).

Preferences of young women for more remunerative work

Outside of Teachive, few women under 40 were weaving in late 1998. Weavers attribute this lack of enthusiasm to the younger women's preference for other work, especially working as day labourers in fields, rather than weaving.¹⁹ This preference is understandable. As one of the best weavers put it "*Batalla mucho la cobijera*" (it's a constant struggle for weavers). Neither of her two daughters weaves. A weaver can hardly hope to net more than two dollars U.S. per day at weaving, while a day labourer can earn up to six dollars. Working as a house-

maid in Huatabampo (population 35 000) or Navojoa (population 100 000) pays nearly as well as agricultural day labour, and allows young women the additional enjoyment of life in the "big city" with its amenities and excitement, and liberation from rigid surveillance by parents, relatives and neighbours. The two daughters of a weaver from Jopopaco had left the community and were working—one in a *maquiladora* (assembly plant) in Hermosillo, the other as a housekeeper in Navojoa.

Nearly all the young women over 15 in the region have worked as day labourers, whether in the fields sowing, cultivating, harvesting or irrigating, or on road crews maintaining local roadways.²⁰ We spoke with several such young women, and found them to be uninterested in weaving, stating vague objections to the work as boring and difficult. They expressed a greater affinity for music, fiestas and fashions than for the perceived sedentary drudgery of weaving. While work in the fields is physically taxing, no young woman complained about the harsh working conditions. And none mentioned any interest in weaving as preserving a cultural tradition.

In some cases the older weavers were scornful of the younger women who refused to learn to weave, labelling them variously as hussies (*sinvergüenzas*), lazy good-for-nothings (*huevoonas*) and pleasure-seekers (*mujeres sueltas*). "The young women from here [Bacabachi] are ashamed to weave. They do not want to be known as *cobijeras*." A weaver from San Pedrito explained that young women would rather be "out in the fields picking cotton, harvesting tomatoes, digging and planting things like chiles and potatoes than stay at home and weave and make tortillas *the way they should*." A hard-working weaver from Cucajaqui denounced the behaviour of young women in general: "they care more about *billetes* (pesos) than about *lana* (wool, also slang for money)." The deeper message is that while the greater freedom weavers enjoy is desirable, women who leave their homes and villages for day labour also leave the protection and control of culturally conservative parents, relatives and neighbours. Several older women hinted that weaving was a good means to keep women (especially younger ones) out of mischief. Several weavers expressed the fear that younger women will not know how to weave and the art will be lost. Accompanying that loss, they fear, will be their way of life, which offers participation in Mayo fiestas, the quiet and uncompetitive lifestyle for which Mayos are known, (Crumrine, 1977; German et al., 1987: 16), and, in the case of older women, the distinct pleasure they derive from speaking and hearing the gentle sounds of the Mayo language. This fondness for the "Mayo way" appears to be rapidly declining among younger people who are edu-

cated in Mestizo schools and are heavily influenced by Mestizo culture. De Avila (1997: 136) found similar circumstances among weavers of many Oaxacan communities.

Figure 6



Cornelia Nieblas Moroyoqui of Teachive, spinning on her *malacate*.

Photo by Kathy M'Closkey

Most of the weavers (and nearly all the young people) have access to television. Television provides a glimpse of the world beyond the tiny villages in which Mayo live, and the young women yearn to see and be a part of the glamour and excitement they see portrayed on television.²¹ Weaving commits the weaver to the comparatively unexciting routines of village life. Even as back-breaking and dreary as work in the fields can be, it is more sociable than weaving. It puts young people into contact with others as they travel by bus regularly through the (comparatively) exciting cities of Huatabampo and Navojoa on their way to the fields.

A corollary of the absence of young weavers is the general lack in young Mayos of any interest in Mayo cultural manifestations. Parents in most of the small villages do not encourage their children to speak Mayo, believing that if it is known that youngsters are Mayos, they will be cast as *indios* (a pejorative term) by their non-Mayo peers and thus find themselves at a severe social disadvantage (Yetman, 1998). As a result the vast majority of Mayo young people do not speak the Mayo language and understand very little of it. Much of the discourse about weaving is carried on in the Mayo language among weavers. Girls are thus left out of these conversations and the profound influence they wield. The conversations among women in Mayo reinforce distinctions between Mayos and non-Mayos, contributing to what O'Connor (1989) calls "Mayoness."

Lack of markets

Although none of the weavers complained of the difficulty of selling their textiles, all mentioned that they usually sold their weavings by taking them to an adjacent city or by selling them to a buyer who paid only a fraction of what they were worth. All the weavers we interviewed sell their textiles individually, each negotiating as an independent producer with the prospective buyer. In some cases, weavers sold their products to a husband-wife team of North American traders well-known in the region, who paid fair prices and bought many blankets. These traders no longer purchase as many blankets as formerly, however (B. Burns, personal communication). The competition from other indigenous textiles woven in Latin America and abroad has placed Mayo weavers at a distinct disadvantage because of sophisticated strategies developed by alternative trade organizations and non-profit agencies to market textiles woven by other indigenous producers (Grimes and Milgram, 2000). Thus it is increasingly difficult for traders to sell Mayo blankets in the United States and cover costs.

Except for two or three weavers who have become renowned for their work through publicity from North American buyers and who manage to sell their blankets at a (comparatively) good price (\$200-300 US), few weavers have an assured market. The sole central retail location is in Teachive, which has a tiny, unmarked cultural centre where blankets can be sold. Although Teachive is frequently visited by tourists, there are no scheduled times when tour groups visit the village. In other villages, weavers either sell to itinerant buyers who pay well below the fair retail price, or they journey by bus to the cities of Navojoa (one hour distant) and Alamos (two hours). In Navojoa they sell the blankets at

several outlets that retail the blankets only as a sideline. One shop, which was for many decades willing to buy blankets at any time, has recently closed its doors. The weavers must now sell to another buyer who will pay them between 50 and 70% of their asking price. Alamos, a colonial town 42 kilometres from Teachive by rough dirt road, is frequented by North American tourists. There the weavers may, if they are fortunate, sell directly to tourists; otherwise, they must sell to one of several vendors who will pay them a much lower price than tourists offer. In short, weavers must rely on their own resources to sell their wares.

Thus women frequently receive \$125 US or less for a 5' x 7' blanket that takes two months or more to spin and weave. Their hourly pay for production is but a pittance. Most rationalize the tiny sums they earn by trivializing it as "women's work" and hence not meriting remuneration as it would be if it were men's work. As one weaver pointed out, "I can weave in my spare time and make a little extra money. It helps with the household." Many weavers mentioned its importance to household income. In fact, for most weavers the income is critical. At least 10 of the women we interviewed are widows or have been abandoned by their husbands. The sale of blankets is vital to their ability to have adequate food, clothing and medicine. Ironically, other villagers refer to the weavers as *cobijeras* (blanket-makers), thus identifying them by their work. In an economy where the vast majority of men are unskilled or semiskilled agricultural day-labourers, few men are referred to by their skill or trade: Men are referred to simply as *jornaleros* (day-labourers). Only weavers are identified by their work.

Competition

Mayo women face stiff international competition for their products. With lowering of trade barriers and organization of weaving industries along pre-capitalist and capitalist lines, high quality hand-woven textiles (including woolen rugs and blankets) from southern Mexico, the Middle East, India and China have flooded world markets, and the Mayo women are ill poised to compete (Schneider and Weiner, 1991; Stephen, 1993: 48). Their techniques are highly labour-intensive and traditional. World markets are indifferent to traditions except as they can be commodified (Brown, 1999: 295; Garcia Canclini, 1993).

We took one of the weavers to visit the male Mayo weaver in Sinaloa. She was much impressed by his technique of spinning with a wheel and weaving while standing and using foot-pedals. He spins the wool for a blanket in less than one-fourth the time it takes the women using the *malacate*. Using the foot pedals (tre-

dles) he produces a finished blanket in less than one-third the time it takes *telar* weavers. The women kneel while they weave and manually raise and lower the warp, alternating with a *choma* (string heddle) and *naibua* (permanent shed stick).²² When the textile is completed and removed from the loom, the *huicas* are left in place, under the *ramada* or front room of the *casa*, until needed again.

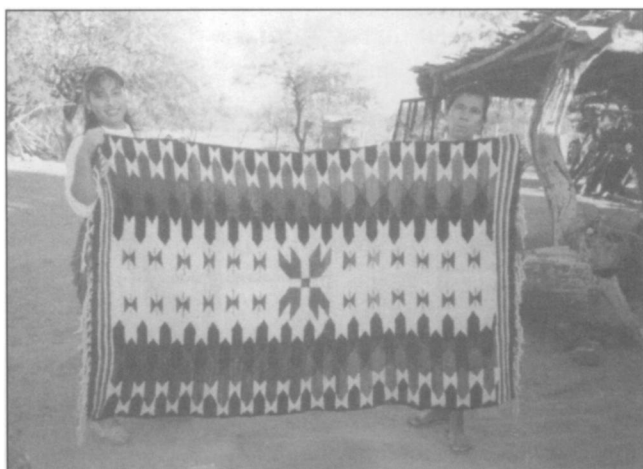
In spite of the mechanical advantage and speed of the foot loom, the woman showed no interest in changing her technique or in suggesting a change to her 32-year-old daughter who weaves. Her way is the Mayo way. "We don't do it that way," she said with finality. To change to the apparent non-Mayo style of production would be to alter a tradition.²³ It would introduce a mechanical device and a technological alteration, which would interfere with the women's vision of their own work. Floor looms are also bulky and consume considerable space.²⁴ They are too large for a Mayo kitchen or cubby hole.

Although the Sinaloan weaver enjoys an open-air "studio" utilized exclusively for weaving, his operation is still highly inefficient compared with more organized production elsewhere. The cottage textile industries of Oaxaca, for example, are sufficiently organized within families and under merchants to permit a consolidation and division of labour into carding, spinning, dyeing and weaving (O'Connor, 1996; Stephen, 1991; see also Waterbury's [1991] analysis of out-putting in the Oaxacan embroidery industry). The resulting textiles are finely woven and increasingly rival Navajo rugs in quality (and often in the design, appropriated from the North American people).²⁵ The costs of production for the Zapotec-woven products are considerably less. Yarn is usually purchased, often already dyed. The organization of production and sophisticated marketing of the textiles permits retail buyers to obtain a rug of quality as good or better than that of the Mayos for less money, and consumers are frequently aware of the price differential. Many of the textiles from India and Pakistan (although often produced with child labour) are of excellent quality and considerably cheaper than those produced by Mayo weavers. The market message is blunt: the retail price for a Mayo blanket is well above that for a handwoven, woolen textile of similar quality available in markets in southern Mexico or imports sold in the United States.

Yet the Taylorisms—the dissection of each motion of work into its component movements²⁶—and the accompanying mechanical applications that are involved in the exploitable division of labour, would quickly undermine the powerful social basis for weaving blankets. Mayo women are willing to weave for less money because of

the satisfaction they experience in perpetuating a tradition apparently handed down for generations and something inexplicably rich in meaning. Almost all women, including weavers, have worked as agricultural day labourers. The work is hard and takes them away from their families, while weaving keeps them at home and allows them to maintain home vigilance. Their weaving complements their work as housewives in a way that, however economically demeaning, brings fulfilment to them. Waterbury (1991) describes the rapid emergence of a class structure that accompanied out-putting in the embroidery industry in San Antonio, Oaxaca, with the vast majority of producers remaining in poverty and only a few benefiting financially from the imposed re-organization. The Mayo women complete a work of art. The embroiderers of San Antonino produce a segment of an industrialized product.

Figure 7



Maria (Choli) Soledad Moroyoqui of Teachive, and her niece with Choli's recently completed *cobija*.

Photo by Kathy M'Closkey

In addition to national and international competition, the weavers' lot is hampered by their independence and isolation, especially in Teachive. While all the weavers there are familiar with each other and know each other's families intimately, they are highly competitive, even jealous of each other's work. They hustle to tourists, hoping to elbow out other weavers who are offering competitively priced textiles. Thus competition among weavers is keen, more so as markets evaporate. Even some sisters compete against each other. While weavers in other nations and elsewhere in Mexico produce textiles under conditions of enforced co-operation (under factory operations, through organized out-putting or by

piecemeal arrangements), Mayo women remain isolated from each other. They seldom assist each other, do not share tools such as shears, hand carders or dyeing materials except perhaps within the family (Yetman, 1998). They construct their looms in isolation and approach visiting tourists on their own (or have a relative sell for them).

The competitive atmosphere also appears in the search for fleeces. The weavers seldom assist each other in acquiring fleeces; they tend to keep fleece sources a secret. Fleeces are scarce in the winter months in the region, when the wool is left on the sheep for protection against chill nights. One of Teachive's best *cobijeras* had suffered some personal and family misfortunes and we found her without any wool to weave and no means of leaving her household to venture to the Mayo Delta where the sheep are found. Much to our surprise (but not to hers), we learned that another woman had obtained good fleeces in a different town, and had kept the information secret so that her competitors would not be able to make their *cobijas*.

Whereas women might benefit greatly by co-operation, sharing techniques, tools, sources of wool and marketing strategies, they remain secretive about all. This individualistic isolation is at odds with the historic sense of community and co-operation that was reportedly characteristic of Mayo culture (See Crumrine, 1977; German et al., 1987; and O'Connor, 1989). It is not surprising, however, in light of the economic desperation they face and the socially competitive Mestizo culture in which they are immersed and in which co-operation beyond the immediate household is rare indeed.

Threads of Identity

Schevill (1991: 5) has argued that "the study of cloth, clothing, and the creation of cloth can be an important index for understanding human culture and history." We agree. Indeed, one of the primary, consistently *enduring* material manifestations of Mayo culture is created through their woven textiles: the *cobija* (rug), *serape* (blanket) or *faja* (sash) and the tools used to produce them.²⁷ The clothing now worn by Mayos gives no clue as to the wearer's indigenous identity. While most older Mayos refer to themselves as *yoreme*, and consider themselves different from and perhaps a little morally superior to Mestizos, they cannot be distinguished from *yoris* (the Cáhita term for non-Cáhitas) by their appearance. Men, women and children wear humble clothing indistinguishable from that worn by poor Mestizos. The custom of women wearing towels or shawls over their heads in public, or twirling a shawl over the head and shoulders is

the only vestige of Mayo material culture to be seen in their dress, and even this may be derived from Mestizo dress of the 19th century (Yetman, 1998). The Mayo blanket, rug or sash represents one of the last vestiges of woven material culture. Through producing their distinctive textiles Mayo weavers transmit identification of themselves as Mayo. Yet their textiles are now made almost exclusively for sale as weavers cannot afford to keep them.²⁸

These lingering artifacts in turn reveal deep ties with the land. That is, the identity of Mayo places with weaving, with history, and with traditions is a vital component of the weavers' product. Because employment for most *ejidatarios* or *comuneros* is sporadic and low paying—usually \$6 US per day, the few extra pesos earned by the weavers may provide a margin of nutrition, medicine or clothing not otherwise available. Furthermore, weaving is a matter of great self-esteem to the weavers, who are noticeably more independent than women who do not weave. Weavers may travel to the cities of Navojoa or Alamos to sell their textiles, an adventure unthinkable for non-weavers. They are acknowledged craftspeople in their villages, with reputations that transcend village boundaries. Photos of Mayo weavers and their work appear infrequently in newspapers and magazines. All of these activities and the prestige are unavailable to women who do not weave. Indeed, a cursory examination reveals that women in Mestizo villages without crafts opportunities, are more restricted in their activities and more confined to their homes than Mayo weavers. One weaver informed us that a daughter married a Mestizo and moved to a Mestizo village. Her husband would not permit her to weave. Weaving was too obvious as a symbol of independence. Apparently, though, the weavers' daughters do not perceive the greater independence they might gain as a *cobijera* as an offsetting incentive to the greater opportunities afforded by the higher wages of field labour or domestic work in the cities. A decline in weaving thus symbolizes both the threat to culturally valued activities and a decline in the power Mayo women have to direct their own lives.

Conclusion

Perpetuation of Mayo weaving is not merely important for its cultural expression and tradition. Weaving also plays a vital role in women's independence and in the economy of the weavers' families. If Mayo weaving is to survive, fleece availability and market conditions will have to improve dramatically. Both of these constraints could easily be addressed with modest government intervention (which would also include the supplying of brush

carders, which women covet but maintain they cannot afford). At this point, however, based on the experience of projects in the Masiaca *Comunidad* (of which Teachive is a part), the *Instituto Nacional Indigenista* (INI, Mexico's Bureau of Indian Affairs) has undertaken only token assistance to weavers, preferring to invest in enterprises involving men. In general, the women are left to their own designs and resources. While it is easy (and perhaps realistic) to be pessimistic about the long-term survival of Mayo weaving, the dogged persistence of many of the weavers is a hopeful sign. We note the weavers' continuing willingness to acquire and clean fleeces—expensive and time-consuming though the processes may be. We note also their willingness to continue the labour-intensive preparation of natural dyes using local plants. The weavers are aware of the availability of aniline dyes, but, with one exception, all those we interviewed eschewed them, preferring the traditional labour-intensive indigenous dyes.

If the weavers know that they can make more money working in the fields, if they know that their work is difficult, time-consuming and economically risky, why, then, do they continue to weave? Our research suggests that women view weaving as their work and as an intrinsic part of their personhood (Hendrickson, 1995; Nash, 1993). This enduring stubbornness may be the salvation of Mayo weaving. We should not pronounce its demise until the last weaver has permanently dismantled her loom.

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Notes

- 1 The term Cáhita refers to the several distinct groups that spoke languages related to present-day Mayo and Yaqui. In Cáhita "cáhita" means "there is nothing." Cook and Joo (1995) have argued "that external observer-analysis should cease to designate a given Mexican population as indígena unless they are prepared to demonstrate empirically" that certain criteria are satisfied. We note that Mayos (1) consider themselves as such (as opposed to Mestizos whom

- they label *yoris*), speak the Mayo language, participate in Mayo fiestas and so on. O'Connor (1989) has proposed a continuum of "Mayoness" ranging from strongly Mayo to largely Mestizo. All the weavers we interviewed are clustered toward the Mayo end of O'Connor's proposed continuum.
- 2 For an excellent introduction to Mayo history see Spicer (1962).
 - 3 This is the date when the secular priest Pedro Valdez retired from the Yaqui village of Potam to Baroyeca in Mayo territory. Valdez imported a weaving expert to teach weaving of wool to Yaquis (who already wove cotton skilfully).
 - 4 Masiaca is an indigenous *comunidad*. It includes the villages of Teachive, Choacalle, San Pedrito, Cucajaqui and Jopopaco in which we interviewed weavers. No lands in the *comunidad* may be privately owned. The other villages are located in *ejidos*, which differ from *comunidades* in that their members need not have shown historic land tenure to be included in the *ejido*. Since 1992, *ejidos* are eligible for privatization. Some have rejected this option, most have approved it. For a fuller description of *comunidades* and *ejidos* see Yetman (1998).
 - 5 Ehlers (1990) in studying weaving among Guatemalan women, found that the more successful women became in marketing their textiles and creating entrepreneurial business, the more likely their husbands were to appropriate their wives' earnings and their family labour into their own enterprises.
 - 6 In its role in encouraging the perpetuation of indigenous cultures, FONART offers expositions of native Mexican arts and crafts and awards prizes for those judged best. Sonorans are at a distinct disadvantage in the competition due to their great distance from Mexico City, where the expositions are usually held, and Sonora's distinct reputation in Mexico City as being a wild, somewhat uncivilized province far away to the north. Sonorans have won prizes in wood carving and a Mayo weaver reportedly received a prize in early 2000. FONART also operates retail artisan shops in several locations throughout the Republic, but none in Sonora. It is FONART policy to purchase items of outstanding quality from throughout the nation and market them in their outlets, but no Mayo women weavers report any contact with FONART officials.
 - 7 Las Ánimas, Bacabachi, Los Buayums, Camahuiroa, Chirajobampo, Choacalle, Cucajaqui, Jopopaco, Rancho Camargo, Rancho El Padre, Rincón de Aliso, Saneal, San José, San Pedrito, Sinahuisa, Sirebampo, Teachive and Yavaritos.
 - 8 See Beals (1945: 23-27) for a description of weaving terminology and techniques.
 - 9 While no men weave blankets among the Sonoran Mayos, men do weave horsehair ropes and hatbands. These are viewed as sufficiently masculine items to permit male production. Mayo men have long woven *morrales* (shoulder bags) from *ixtle* (agave fiber). Their manufacture was noted by Beals (1945) and continues on a very limited basis today. From a technological standpoint, among Mayos the products of men's weaving are manipulative or in the nature of tools, while the products of women's weaving are intended for bodily adornment, bodily protection or floor or bed coverings.
 - 10 As Schevill (1991: 11) points out, under Spanish colonial influence, treadle-operated weaving became men's work.
 - 11 This question enabled us to determine the relative sophistication of the weaver. Weaving with three *chomas* produces a twill. It is more difficult and time-consuming than weaving with one *choma*.
 - 12 This corresponds with information gathered by Yetman (1998). He was unable to document Mayo folklore (myths, fables or sayings) due, he believes, to the suppression of Mayo culture, especially following the repression of the late 1920s carried out under the direction of future president General Plutarco Elias Calles. Calles chose to punish Mayos for supporting his enemies and had his troops burn and desecrate many Mayo churches, plunder their saints and images and harass and persecute Mayos in general. It appears that since that time Mayos have lacked any distinctive dress that might tend to identify them as possible objects of persecution.
 - 13 Our survey did not include extensive searching for weavers in the lower Río Mayo Delta, where we know some weavers continue to produce blankets, albeit sporadically. Based upon reports from other Mayos, including weavers, whose network of information is usually reliable, we estimate that five women in that region continue to weave and we have included that figure in our estimate. Some of the women weave only occasionally, others frequently. We encountered weavers who assured us there were no other weavers in their particular village when indeed there were. This misleading information may have been given to us in an attempt to avoid losing a possible sale to a competitor.
 - 14 In general, spinning is viewed as the work of young girls and older women. Weaving is the work of women of reproductive age. This tradition dates from pre-Columbian times (McCafferty and McCafferty, 1991: 25).
 - 15 The Spanish *tradición* connotes a more deeply embedded and culturally enduring persistence than does the English *tradition*.
 - 16 We have documented 12 different dyes derived from plant sources. Producing dyes requires a sophisticated knowledge of plants of the region. The plants and the colour of dyes they produce are as follows: *Acacia farnesiana*, Fabaceae (blue); *Ambrosia confertiflora*, Asteraceae (green); *Erythrina flabelliformis*, Fabaceae (pink/purple); *Eysenhardtia polystachya*, Fabaceae (blue to black); *Haematoxylum brasiletto*, Fabaceae (red); *Indigofera suffruticosa*, Fabaceae (blue); *Jatropha cinerea*, Euphorbiaceae (mustard); *Jacquinia macrocarpa*, Theophrastaceae (yellow); *Krameria erecta*, Krameriaceae (mixed with others to produce pink or blue); *Krameria sonora*, Krameriaceae, (mixed with others to produce blue to black); *Prosopis glandulosa*, Fabaceae (brown); and *Vallesia glabra*, Apocynaceae (yellow-brown).
 - 17 We found that women were more comfortable responding to a question "How many weavers wove when you began weaving," than they were with the more specific "How many weavers wove 20 (or 30) years ago?" We view the resulting information as approximations. Some weavers responded after carefully enumerating their acquaintances and counting them; others merely guessed. Some responded by merely saying, "Many," or "More than now."
 - 18 From 1994 through late 1997, a Japanese Peace Corps volunteer worked with the women of Teachive, encouraging them to weave, offering suggestions for improved market-

- ing of their wares, and establishing a small cultural centre for selling their textiles. She sponsored workshops for the weavers and encouraged them to co-operate in weaving and in marketing. During the last days of her tour of duty, she expressed dismay about the refusal of weavers to co-operate and their extreme competition over resources. When she left, the co-operative effort lapsed and the cultural centre, which never received regional publicity, fell into disuse.
- 19 Nearly 210 000 acres of irrigated lands lie adjacent to the Mayo villages. The climate is warm and water for irrigation is usually adequate to permit a minimum planting of two crops per year. Consequently, work as agricultural day labourers is usually available, even to women. During harvest times, most adults in the region work as day labourers. Given the wide variety of crops, some crop or other is nearly always being harvested.
- 20 In recent years local governments have been the conduit for national funds to help ease the chronic unemployment in the region, especially following the peso devaluation of 1994, the effects of which are still being experienced. Workers are paid 40 pesos (\$5) a day for work on road crews whose responsibilities are to smooth out the surface of dirt roads and remove brush and shrubbery from roadsides.
- 21 Young women who work as housemaids are profoundly influenced by *novelas* (soap operas). It has become a widespread custom for affluent Mexican women to watch the *novelas* for several hours each afternoon. Housemaids are often "allowed" to join their mistresses in watching the daily romances.
- 22 For a detailed history of the loom and a description of its parts, and of the historical role of women in weaving, we recommend Barber (1996).
- 23 The woman's lack of interest in changing technologies is perfectly intelligible in light of Chayanov's findings in the Soviet Union in 1925. He discovered that labour-saving technology was resisted, not for Luddite motives, but because the technology was gratuitous given the peasant-craftsperson form of production (Chayanov, 1966: 39-41). Mayo weavers may be influenced by proscriptions against significantly altering their looms as well.
- 24 We venture to speculate here about some cultural symbolism, unverified by comments from the weavers themselves. The upright posts of the Mayo looms (*huicas*) are pounded solidly into the earth, possibly symbolizing women's connection to the earth. That connection would be mediated differently with a floor loom. Among Navajo weavers, upright looms are associated with emergence, growth and ascendance (M'Closkey, 1998). The United States government attempted to introduce horizontal floor looms to Navajos during the 19th century. The attempt failed utterly. Furthermore, the *telar* (the Mayo loom), the Navajo loom and backstrap looms used by women, have continuous warps, i.e., the warp is never cut prior to weaving, and remains intact within the textile, whereas the warp of the floor loom must be cut prior to threading the loom. Messick (1987), Niessen (1985) and Tedlock and Tedlock (1985) highlight the linkages between weavers, fertility and reproduction.
- 25 Mexicans view themselves as Americans, but not as North Americans.
- 26 See the discussion of the de-skilling of labour in Braverman (1976).
- 27 Mayo fiestas involve elaborate paraphernalia worn by dancers and *fiesteros*, but these are used only by particular individuals on special occasions. These artifacts are also shared with other indigenous people of the region, i.e., Yaquis, Seris, Tarahumaras and Guarijíos. The musical instruments used in fiestas are derived from Iberian sources.
- 28 Vicente Yocupicio inadvertently provided the title of our article. One morning while waiting for the pre-dawn chill to lift, Vicente quipped: "the sun is the poor man's *cobija*." Most Mayo sleep under cheap manufactured cotton blankets as their handwoven woolen counterparts must be sold to provide households with much needed cash.

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