About the “El Movimiento de la Serpiente”

This was a collaborative research project about non-human and human migrations. It was created in a collaborative rhizomatic process focused on Mesoamerican cultures and ecosystems. It was made, designed, painted, stitched, cut, folded by many others, including you.

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The Olmec domesticated cacao around the year 1900 BCE. It is believed that a fermented alcoholic drink made from cacao produced visions. It was consumed in religious ceremonies and rituals during ancient times by the Olmec, Maya, Aztec, Toltec, and Incas, among other groups. The ancient Maya wrote about cacao in ideo-pictographic form in the Dresden and Madrid codices.

Spanish, British, French, and Dutch colonies began planting cacao using Indigenous and African slave labor. Slowly, European chocolate production became more and more specialized as cacao was ground and refined and mixed with butter and sugar. Starting with the early 20th-century, chocolate has been advertised as an important element of European culture.

Advertisement of Peter’s Swiss milk chocolate in The West China Missionary News (vol. XI, no. 1; January 1909). Chentu, Szechwan Province.

Squash was domesticated before corn and beans. Similar to beans, squash grow on vines. Beans, corn and squash are the three sisters that form the Mesoamerican polycultural cropping system, which means multiple crops are grown together on the same land. They are not only nourishing for plants, they also regenerate the soil as they grow together. This idea of polycultural cropping spread through the Americas by 1,000 AD, a practice that has continued to flourish beyond the Americas.

Beans

The combination of corn and beans was central to the diet that enabled the emergence of great Mesoamerican civilizations. The combination of corn and beans allowed ancient Mesoamerican peoples to nurture their bodies and to absorb protein. Corn is a tall grass and beans grow in a vine, together they are stronger, they grow together in corn fields called Milpas.

One beautiful garden that teaches us so much about ancient forms of agriculture is located in Joya de Cerén, located in the Zapotitán Valley, 36 kilometers northwest of San Salvador, El Salvador. In this place, a volcanic eruption froze in time a regular day in the life of a small Mayan village, and it preserved their fields and gardens. This is how we learned that ancient plants were grown together in diversified gardens and these included great varieties.

Joya de Cerén Archaeological Site

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PLANTS

Corn

Approximately 9,000 years ago, Toecintli or Teocintle was nurtured into becoming the most sacred plant for Mesoamerican cultures: corn.

This collaboration between humans and teocintle also gave birth to deep forms of spirituality for which corn is central in ancient sacred stories; humans were created from corn.

Samples collected by Dr. Ariel Álvarez, in Erongarícuaro, Michoacán; Photo: J. M. Hernández.
Amaranth

According to the BBC, amaranth grain was a staple food of the Aztecs and was also used in Mexico. The plant is still grown today in Mexico and South America as a source of food. It is a hardy plant that can tolerate drought and is often grown in rocky or sandy soils.

Amaranth is also used as a decorative plant, with its bright red flowers adding color to gardens and landscapes. It is a popular plant for cutting and is often used in floral arrangements.

Avocado

The avocado is a large, tropical tree that produces a distinctive green fruit with a thick, hard shell. The fruit is divided into sections, or "pits," which contain the edible flesh that is the source of the popular food item. The avocado is native to Central and South America, and is now grown in many parts of the world for its tasty and nutritious fruit.

Avocado trees require a warm climate and plenty of sunlight to thrive. They are often grown in orchards, and the fruit is harvested when it is ripe and ready to eat. Avocados are a rich source of healthy fats, vitamins, and minerals, and are enjoyed by many people around the world.

Calabash

Calabash is a large, African tree that provides many useful products. The fruit is used as a vessel for storing water, and the wood is used for furniture and other household items. Calabash is also popular in the music industry, with calabash instruments such as the calabash drum commonly used in Africa.

Calabash trees are native to tropical regions of Africa, and are known for their longevity and robust growth. They are often grown as shade trees in urban areas, and are an important part of African culture and tradition.

Cauliflower

Cauliflower is a member of the cabbage family, and is grown for its edible flowerheads. The plant is native to southern Asia, and was brought to Europe in the 16th century. Cauliflower is now grown in many countries around the world for its delicious and nutritious vegetables.

Cauliflower is a good source of vitamins and minerals, and is often used in salads, soups, and other dishes. It is also known for its health benefits, including its role in cancer prevention and its effect on cholesterol levels.

Date palm

The date palm is a tall, spiny tree that is native to the Middle East and North Africa. It is a popular crop in many countries around the world, and is grown for its edible fruit, which is known as a date. Dates are a nutritious and flavorful food item, and are often used in desserts, snacks, and other dishes.

Date palms require a warm climate and plenty of water to grow, and are often grown in orchards or on large farms. They are known for their durability and ability to grow in arid conditions, making them a valuable crop in regions with limited water resources.

Healing Plants and Rituals

The use of plants and herbs in healing and ritual practices is a long-standing tradition in many cultures around the world. Plants are often used in traditional medicine to treat a variety of ailments, and are also used in religious and spiritual practices to facilitate healing and spiritual connection.

Many cultures have a deep respect for the power of plants, and use them in their healing rituals and ceremonies. The use of plants in healing can vary widely, depending on the culture and tradition, but often involves the use of specific plants and techniques to facilitate healing and spiritual growth.

Oranges

Oranges are a popular and nutritious fruit that is grown in many countries around the world. They are native to Asia, and were brought to Europe in the 12th century. Oranges are widely enjoyed for their sweet, juicy flesh, and are used in many dishes and desserts.

Oranges are a good source of vitamins and minerals, and are also known for their health benefits, including their ability to boost the immune system and improve digestion.

Potatoes

Potatoes are a popular and versatile food item that is grown in many countries around the world. They are native to the Andes Mountains in South America, and were brought to Europe in the 16th century. Potatoes are now grown in many parts of the world for their delicious and nutritious tubers.

Potatoes are a good source of vitamins and minerals, and are often used in a variety of dishes, including soups, stews, and casseroles. They are also a popular starchy food item, and are enjoyed by many people around the world.
Owls

Unlike in Western traditions, where owls are a symbol of death, owls in Mesoamerica carry positive meanings of life and survival. They are considered messengers with a deep connection to the spiritual world.

Owls migrate in different patterns. They cross borders all the way from the Arctic across Canada and the United States and into Mexico and Central America. Some types of owls migrate searching for warmer weather. Other types of owls have periodic migrations, every 3 to 4 years. They migrate further south for reasons unknown.

Owls often migrate at night.

Salmon

The annual reproduction of Salmon's is celebrated in many indigenous Pacific Northwest cultures. Salmon undertake long and strenuous journeys during their migrations from freshwater to the ocean. Some salmon travel thousands of miles during their lifetime. Sockeye salmon from the Pacific Northwest might swim up to 4,000 miles round trip from the ocean to their spawning grounds. They navigate long distances to return to the exact stream or river where they were born to reproduce. This ability to find their way home is not completely understood but is believed to involve a combination of geomagnetic cues, sense of smell, and memory. After reproduction salmon often die, and their carcasses provide important nutrients to rivers ecosystems.
HUMANS

Whales migrate in pods. They have vocal chords and it is believed that each pod has a certain type of language or form of communication. The song of the whale moves through the water forming networks of communication and long distance conversations as they travel south to north and north to south.

Whaling became a practice that could be defined as the genocide of the whales. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth century whales were killed in massive numbers in order to use their blubber to provide heat and to light up entire cities in Europe and the United States. During the industrial revolution whale oil became a common lubricant for machines. Whaling is now illegal in most countries around the world. Whales survived their genocide.

It is believed that there is a whale of interspecies nature that sings at 52 hertz, outside hearing range for all other whales. This whale, also known as S2, S1, or S2, has been recorded traveling the oceans around the world. It is believed to be alone because no other whales can hear its call. To this day, no one has seen it or determined its migration patterns.

The Olmec

The Olmec people emerged in what is now Veracruz and Tabasco and moved from there to other places, especially to trade. The Olmec worked in large basalt stones and small jade and other precious stones but they also made wood carvings and worked in painting. Their most epigraphic paintings did not survive but some of their cave paintings did. Olmec ideas about the cosmos or about the underworld, the sacred nature of a jaguar, or the movement of mountains, as well as forms of art including facial features, carving stone steles, making throne and tombs in stone, making headdresses in feathers and other precious materials, have been found in Teotihuacan, in Tenochtitlan (today Mexico City) and in Maya art. The Olmec traveling ideas and forms of art are evidence of their migration. The Olmec had trade routes along the Pacific coast all the way to Chichén Itzá, in what is now El Salvador, this is more than 500 miles away from the Olmec heartland.

Some of the Olmec monuments have also migrated, sometimes out of their context, sometimes against will.

Remnants of manta whales in the Arctic Circle. Photo by Benjamin Cortez.

The Mexica (Aztec)  
1300 C.E. - 1523 - present

The Mexica migrated, according to their own story of creation, from Aztlan, which is believed to be located in today’s state of Nayarit, in what is now Mexico. They established an empire, the great city of Tenochtitlán in central Mexico over lake Texcoco, and they grew an empire that expanded all over Mesoamerica. The Aztec traded, and labored in different territories in order to maintain this empire.

The Toltec  
550 CE or 100 BCE - 1100 CE

The Toltec emerged in what is now Central Mexico, they spoke Nahuatl and are the ancestors of the Mexica. They established the great city of Tula and practiced the cult of Quetzalcoatl. They migrated to the south east, impacting the ideas, art, and architecture of many sites, but especially Chichen Itza, where the stone warrior columns from Tula are replicated.

The Spaniards, Portuguese and French  
1492 - 1803

The Europeans arrived with ideas about purity of the blood, which created hierarchies and was the foundation of a system of racism that survives until present times all over Latin America and among immigrants in the United States. During this period the Europeans colonized, destroyed, and enslaved Indigenous peoples in the Americas in the name of Catholicism.

African forced migrations  
1521 - 1863

For the most part, Black migrations were not voluntary; they were forced and were a result of the enslavement of African peoples. While slavery was abolished in other territories much earlier, in the United States, slavery was abolished in 1863 through the Emancipation Proclamation.
The Panama Canal

The construction of the Panama Canal required the destruction of the northern tip of the Andes using dynamite. It also required leveling two oceans that at this juncture are not at the same sea levels. The construction of the Panama Canal required the construction of a series of locks capable of elevating and lowering cargo ships in order to accelerate global trade at the cost of human casualties.

This passage and the control of global trade was desired by the Spaniards since the 1500s and the French in the 19th century. The construction of the Panama Canal by the French brought thousands of Jamaican, Caribbean workers as well as large numbers of Chinese construction workers. Over 20,000 workers died in the process.

Between 1904-1914, the US constructed the Panama Canal and supported the creation of the new republic of Panama that also brought more people from the Caribbean and the United States to work and finish the most destructive ecological project in the region during the 20th century.

The Colorado River / El Río Colorado

The Colorado River is a 1450 mile long river that flows through seven US and two Mexican states. For at least 10,000 years, the river basin has been home to Native Americans. Dammed by the US in 1935, the Colorado River ends in the US at the All American Canal, at the base of the US Mexico border wall in Calexico, CA. Running parallel to the border, the canal creates deadly rip-current conditions where over 500 migrants have perished upon entering the US. The All American Canal and its systems are the largest irrigation canals in the world, bringing water to farmlands in an area previously one of the driest in the world.

The Colorado River and its neighboring Rio Grande are currently considered one of the most controlled and disturbed river systems in the world. After 1944 treaty between the US and Mexico, the US allocated 1.5 million acre-feet of water, or 93% to Mexico each year. In 2018, Constellation Brandy, the third largest US Brembo threatened to use the majority of the allocated Mexican water for America's beer as they built a massive plant in the Mexican border city of Mexicali. The pressure over the years has led to the plants' planned relocation to the interior of Mexico in 2023-2024.

More recently, on June 22, 2023, The US Supreme Court ruled that the US did not have any treaty obligation to allocate Colorado River water rights to The Navajo Nation.

The Rio Grande / El Río Bravo

The Rio Grande is one of the longest rivers in the Americas and different communities have been nurtured by its fertile lands for over 3,000 years. Its waters are considered sacred for Native American peoples. They flow in lowlands and in high elevation mountain regions, and they flow long distances. The Rio Grande is the main water source for several states in what are now both Mexico and the United States. It has played an important role in trade and transportation, and in navigation. However, since the mid 19th century, the Rio Grande (Río Bravo) has become a symbol of tension, violence, and borderlands. Thanks to anti-immigrant policies such as
Central American Migrations in the XXI century

1998-2002: Thousand fled to the US due to environmental hazards such as the case of hurricane Mitch in 1998 that devastated Honduras and Nicaragua destroying the banana plantations and killing almost 30,000 people. In 2001, El Salvador was hit by two powerful earthquakes that added uncertainty to the fragile economy of the population.

2008-2023: Massive migration mainly to the US due to gang violence in El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. Families joined massive concentrations of people that together marched in caravans through Mexico toward the US.

2019-2023: Tens of thousands of Nicaraguans fled the country due to political instability.

Central American migrations to Mexico and the United States

The massive migration of Central American peoples to the United States began in the 1980s as a result of the civil wars that took place in El Salvador and Guatemala. These wars, which were largely funded by the United States, turned civilian population into targets of disappearances, human rights violations and murder. The majority of the immigrants who came in this decade and in the first few years of the 1990s were escaping these wars and were traumatized by the violence they had endured. They worked hard to bring their families and also to turn their homes into safe havens for other immigrants who continued to arrive. After the wars ended other reasons generated the continued migration of immigrants: the need for family reunification, but also poverty and other forms of violence.

In more recent decades immigrants from Central America continue to leave their countries of origin searching for opportunities, safety, the reunification of their families and escaping gang and institutional violence. In Mexico and in the United States they other forms of violence: sexual assault, organized crime, drug violence, and kidnappings. Immigrants are often turned into commodities and their lives and their well-being are traded for profit.

Mexican migration to the United States

Mexican people also migrate to the United States. People from all over the country but, especially, from poor rural communities in the southern part of the country. They migrate escaping the violence. Since 1948, people from Mexico were trapped in the new US/Mexico border and were forced to initiate a process of family exchange and communication from both sides of the border. As a result, often their identities were recreated. The Mexican revolution of 1910 also generated a massive migration that culminated in the resettlement of many families in the border cities in the US and beyond. In the 1940s an arranged agreement between the governments of the two countries created the Bracero Program that mobilized millions of Mexican rural workers to US and was extended with legal modifications and restrictions until 1964. The economic disparity in southern Mexico has forced the movement of entire indigenous communities to the US. Today hundreds of thousands of Zapotec, Mixtec, Maya, Pampacha, Cocoy things continue to migrate and establish a transnational movement that has become permanent.
Instructions for printing and folding your own zine

**Printing**

- Print on tabloid size paper: 11 x 17 inches
- We recommend using a regular printing paper and not cardstock
- Print pages: 1 - 7
- Print pages single-sided
- Remember to print the pages as landscape and not as portrait
- Select “fit to page”
- After printing follow the folding instructions
- Stack all folded spreads to make one large book
- We invite you to stitch or alter your book in your own way.
- Send images of your finished book to: ambosproject@gmail.com