

Priča Agava; A story of two community identities shaped by a plant

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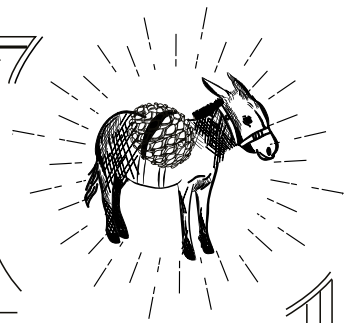
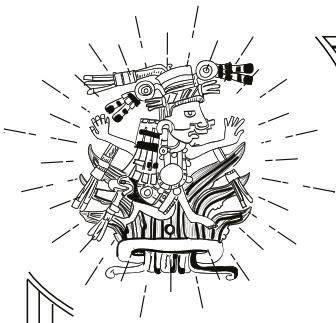
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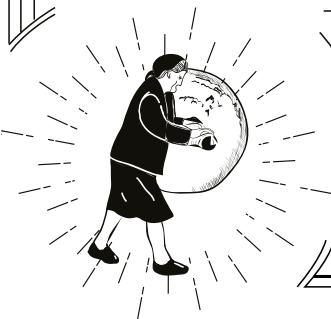


A story of two community identities
shaped by a plant

P R I Č Ā A G A V A

ALEJANDRA ROBLES SOSA

2020



To Julian for supporting my dreams.

Thank you Ivica Mitrović for keeping our spirits up. Thanks Oleg Šuran for sharing your tiny detailed ideas. Dejan Kršić, thank you for your comments that helped me to polish this project.

For those who have made resistance their lifestyle.

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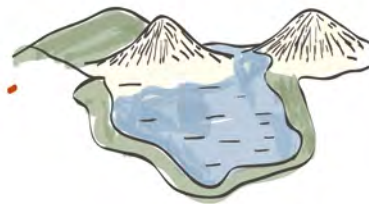
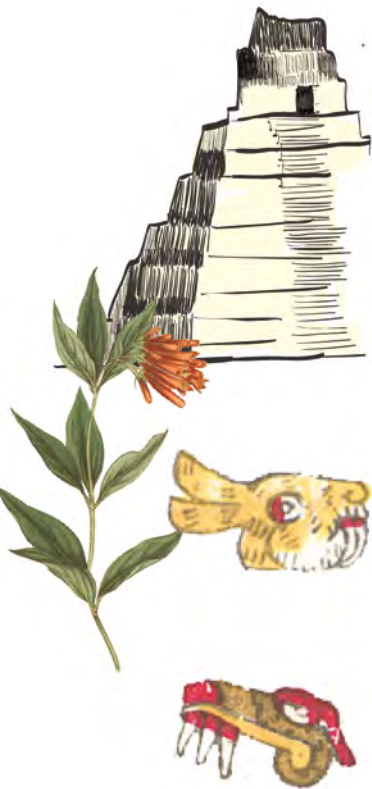
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Abstract

Western concepts of society, nature and technology have oftentimes been shaped by indigenous culture and tradition. Nevertheless, indigenous ancestral knowledge is now widely regarded obsolete. Perpetuating colonial thinking, the Western vision of our global future considers it only a matter of time until it is fully eliminated by the advancement of “progress”.

In a framework of Critical and Speculative Design (CSD), I investigate the legal, political, and social consequences of producing mezcal, a Mexican ancestral spirit, on the Croatian coast with Adriatic agaves: A process of production and exchange of knowledge by a Mexican indigenous “Maestro Mezcalero” (master mezcal producer) and a Croatian rakija distillery in Dalmatia. Together they show us a collaborative rural aspect of a potential future reality that employs indigenous knowledge to make use of natural resources, foster intercultural understanding and design alternative ways of production and life.

Let me introduce myself



My name is Alejandra Robles Sosa, two last names because I am Mexican. I grew up in a working class neighborhood at the peripheries of Puebla City. During the 70's this was a government housing project of displacement to gentrify the Colonial city center. While writing this I am an almost 32 years old student in Split, Croatia.

I spent my early 20's making and promoting independent magazines, visiting art exhibitions and independent music festivals, silk printing at my home, and knitting while watching North American low budget, and trash Sci-fi cinema from the 80's.

When I was 27 I decided to start traveling by land around Latin America, from Mexico to La Patagonia, Argentina while working and exploring textiles, codes, organic threads and indigenous communities from past and present times.

Unlike the Eurocentric discourse that I had learned from Pre-Columbian Art museums, I found the indigenous communities of Abya Yala¹ are alive, organized, politically active and struggling from spoils of colonial heritage. Interacting with locals and without an academic background. I visited places from the Mexican Mayan territory to the Chimú empire in Chan Chán Perú, making stops with Tz'utujil and Kaqchikel people at the Mayan territory in Lake Atitlan Guatemala, the independent islands of Guna Yala in Panamá, and Shuar communities of Ecuador.

After two years of living on the road I arrived in Lima, Perú. When my route changed, my boyfriend's brother was getting married, and

¹ Abya Yala is the name given to the territory of Guna people that is now claimed by Panama and Colombia, it is also a term given to the territory of Latin America.



he invited us to the celebration on the island of Java, Indonesia. Since my plan was to continue my nomad life for one more year, changing the scenario for another which was also cheap sounded nice to me. The next six months shaped my perspective about myself, the world and my position in it. I had a lot of free time while moving from place to place or between islands, so it was on this trip where I started digging deeper into my anthropology digital library, I learned about similarities in the construction of SouthEast Asia and Latin America as part of the peripheries modern world, colonization background and the process of becoming third world countries. Similarities on rituals, codes, poverty, exploitation of land, and mass tourism.

I continued backpacking around Europe, mostly the Eastern parts, always with the idea of returning to the academy in studies related with textiles, anthropology or design, in a place where I could enjoy nature. While in the Balkans I thought that the Split peninsula looked very pretty on a map. The next is the answer to the question that every local asks me »Why did you choose this tiny city and the even most tiny Academy?« Well my first impression about the MA in Interactive Media Design at the Arts Academy sounded nice. Then I found articles published by the programme coordinator, and the keywords Sci-Fi, Critical Design, and Decolonial approach from an Eastern European country caught my attention.



Mexican Agave

After graduating from communication media in a Mexican public university, I started working in a small office with two of my friends. We were one of the first labeled mezcal dealers in my hometown. We had brands from the different regions of the country.

My job was to visit restaurants and convince them to introduce mezcal on their menus. I had to learn details from the production process to government regulations, political issues around the denomination of origin, and the rights over its name. Every week we had to test new kinds of mezcal. I fell in love with it.

Mezcal was not part of my community or family traditions while I grew up, Mayahuel, the Aztec Goddess of Maguey¹, became a rockstar symbol to me. Agave

threads, pulque (an alcoholic beverage extracted from maguey), pollinizer bats, mezcal producers and all the aesthetics around agave started shaping my identity.

While traveling I found agaves around South and Central America, which made sense to me since it is the same continent. I saw different kinds of them. And I can remember I was wondering why they didn't have the idea of making mezcal; Why mezcal is only produced in Mexico?

I visited botanical gardens in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, each of them with a »Taman Meksiko« (Mexican Park) showing their best cacti selection, reinforcing the idea of agave as my Mexican identity. It is in the international imaginary. Succulents such as agaves and cacti are Mexican.

Dalmatian coast agave

If you google - Marjan Park Split, Croatia - you're gonna get pictures of long flowers that look like a tree with the Adriatic islands in the background. That's a flower from the heart of Agave Americana.

If you visit the webshop of KLFM, the local community radio station from Split, you will find a t-shirt model called - KLFM agave white - with an agave on it. The same with several Croatian artists painting and representing agaves on their art practice.

Beyond my personal experience, What's the connection between those two countries? The answer is Colonization. »First settlers of American continent fell in love with it so strongly that they brought it back home - first to Italy - in the mid - 1500's. Ever since it spreads in this area mostly as a decoration plant« we read on Split's city website.

Agave becomes part of the local identity and the agave thread lace making in Hvar island is UNESCO's World Intangible Heritage.

Is not a new thought, in the words of Alexander Von Humboldt »The migration of the human race, crops vegetables, fruits and grains have followed our footpads for thousands of years. Take politics and economics, all shaped by plants, empires have been built on tea, sugar and tobacco²«.

During the Pre-Columbian period in the Americas, in the Aztec empire (the one that ruled the area in and around the Valley of Mexico when Spanish conquistadores arrived) agave juices were fermented to get pulque, the root was cooked, the leaves were used to make

paper and threads. It is only after the colonization when the steel alambique arrived in the »new world«, allowing a fast and accessible distillation process.

First thoughts

The last years of my practice as a designer and researcher are strongly influenced by my travels and lectures about Latin American textile traditions and alternative political movements. Anyways, while living in Europe and getting immersed in its western society, again I constantly experience reflections around practices that perpetuate colonialism, both as colonizers and colonized. My *mestiza*¹¹ privilege as a tool of Whitening Colonialism. Design practices such as Speculative Design are not free of it.

In the era of Western Melancholy³ where the mainstream future looks like an inevitable disaster with technology ruling the world. I found that -alternative futures- traced by more optimistic and critical minds are getting linked with nature, and of a vision of »going back« to the roots of the society, agriculture and slow

So this is *Priča Agavea*, the story of two regional identities shaped by a plant.

food. Speculative Designers started to look around and to take care of the rural countryside.

As I saw in the SpeculativeEdu workshop⁴ in Rome (September, 2020), Neo-Rural Futures, where two of the teams generated reflections around colonialism and indigenous futurism.

I find it pertinent to mention that some Western projections of the future show an inevitable extinction of indigenous culture. All this while some of the concepts of the relationship surrounding human-nature/technology came precisely from their ancestral knowledge. Those projections perpetuate colonial practices in Europe, Latin America, and the rest of the global south.

11 For »Latin America«, the arrival of the Spanish colony in 1492 marks the beginning of a relationship of domination by Western civilization; a relationship experienced not only as one imposition of an understanding of social organization based on the European world »Eurocentrism« but also as the imposition of the concept of »race«. Since then, one of the fundamental axes of that pattern of colonial power has been the social classification of the population based on the idea of »races«. Indigenous, and African slaves brought to the Americas, represented the slave sector. For some part, mestizos, who are children of indigenous mothers and Spanish / European fathers, were assigned the role of bureaucrats.



Personal drives

- Is it possible, as a designer, to include indigenous ancestral knowledge in future worlds avoiding cultural appropriation and colonization practices?
- How is national identity defined?
How did nationalism come to be?
How do state and capitalism validate and shape collective identity in order to regulate it as an economic and political tool?

- Who is the owner of this ancestral knowledge – the state, the patents or the people? And how do we share this knowledge in the digital era?

7

- What would be the legal and social impacts of producing mezcal on the Croatian coast with Mexican agave?



Mayahuel

Decolonial reflections and research statement

A critical approach of neo-colonialism practices questions the cultural appropriation of the privileged mestizo who, in his attempt to represent and include indigenous identity in art and research projects, continues to perpetuate colonial practices to obtain an academic degree in Western countries. I don't intend to »represent« indigenous people, or what they want to say, they know how to be organized and resist by themselves in terrible conditions, as I noticed while living in Chiapas Mexico and doing research about the Zapatista Social Model (even though Zapatistas are now the »mainstream« of a complex national indigenous movement in Mexico). In Walter Mignolo's words I am choosing to run away from representation because there is not a world that is represented, but a world that is constantly invented in the enunciation⁵.

This design research is not intended to be the indigenous people's voice. This project is a personal journey, built by my own experiences. It seeks to question and generate reflections on the practices that regulate knowledge and shape our identities. Want to dig in the concepts of nation and nationalism, and the continued

perpetuation of colonial practices to construct a positive collaborative scenario of enunciate a decolonized future world. By speculating, designers re-think alternative products, systems, and worlds⁶.

Making use of the internet as a technology for transmission of knowledge, this project aims to connect two artisans living in two different rural geographies (and therefore different social identities) that share knowledge, weather, and natural resources to produce a trans-geographical artisanal product.

In a framework of Critical and Speculative Design (CSD), I will investigate the legal, political and social consequences of producing mezcal, a Mexican mestizo and ancestral spirits, on the Mediterranean coast, with Adriatic agaves. The process involves production and exchange of knowledge by two producers, a Mexican indigenous »Maestro mezcalero« (master producer), and one Croatian (Dalmatian) rakija distillery. Starting from their own local context and personal knowledge they co-create a different possible future through an alternative product and production system.

Euro-centered capitalist colonial world power

For »Latin America«, the arrival of the Spanish colony in 1492 marks the beginning of a relationship of domination by Western civilization; a relationship experienced not only as one of imposition of an understanding of social organization based on the European world (Eurocentrism) but also as the imposition of the concept of »race«.

Indigenous, and African slaves brought to the Americas, represented the slave sector. Indigenous and sometimes, black people—regardless of which cultural group they may belong to—have been assigned to the lowest rungs of the social hierarchy and, in general, the poverty and extreme poverty are concentrated in this sector of the population.

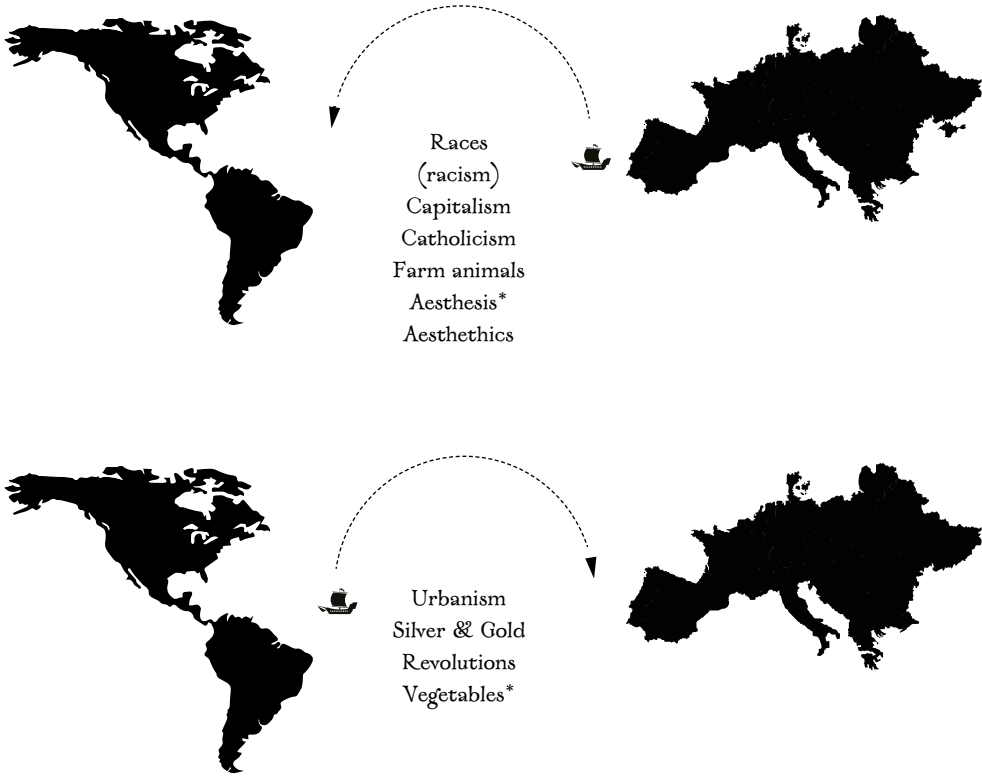


fig. 1 Colonialism.

*Aesthesis, an ancient Greek concept, which broadly describes the senses—‘an unelaborated elementary awareness of stimulation, a sensation of touch’ (Anibal Quijano)

Mestizos, who are children of indigenous mothers and Spanish / European fathers, were assigned the role of bureaucrats to carry out professional activities in the State’s institutions or other private settings. Mestizos live in privilege over indigenous and black communities, mestizos are the tool of the colonial matrix of power to perpetuate ‘Whiteness’.

Meanwhile, the creoles of Spanish descent became the bourgeoisie that took over political and economic power as well

as other spaces of society that suggest social prestige. Accustomed to obtain profit easily and were they expected to over-exploiting the indigenous workforce. They inherited from the Spanish a logic of feudalism⁷.

The unequal power between these groups of society based on the idea of race can be refer to as Coloniality of Power.

That element of the new pattern of world power that was based on the idea of ‘race’ and in the ‘racial’ social classification

of world population – expressed in the ‘racial’ distribution of work, the imposition of new ‘racial’ geocultural identities, the concentration of the control of productive resources and capital, the social relations, including salary, as the privilege of ‘Whiteness’. So, although ‘race’ and ‘racist’ social relations in the everyday

life of the world population have been the most visible expressions of the coloniality of power during the last 500 years, the most significant historical implication is the emergence of a Euro-centered capitalist colonial/modern world power that is still with us (Anibal Quijano, 2000).

»The concept of race is the result of racism«

Within the frame of the 100th anniversary of the death of Ernst Haeckel, former professor in Jena, the University of Jena published the Jena Declaration. They state that precisely because of the supposed connection of the existence of human races and the researchers who began these categorization, modern science must evaluate the possibility of the existence of such races⁸. The question was whether human races, from a biological perspective are a reality as a social construct, a product of the human mind.

Ernst Haeckel, the founder, made a fateful with his supposedly scientific classification of human ‘races’ into a ‘family tree’ contribution to a form of racism that was seemingly based on science. The position of human groups in his tree of life was based on arbitrarily selected characteristics such as skin color or hair structure, presented from a phylogenetic point of view. This resulted in these people being viewed in a particular sequence, which implied that some groups had higher or lower status on biological grounds than others.

During the period of National Socialism, the University of Jena was to be expanded »into an SS university with a uniform

racial orientation«. The ‘racial development work’ and appointment policy repeatedly emphasised had produced a unique academic and political science-related configuration with four successive professorships in racial studies.

In the Jena Declaration, four scientists explain how the concept of races had been »supported« by science in the past, but shouldn’t be anymore, because there is no real science that proves it beyond pure racism. »So, let us ensure that people are never again discriminated against on specious biological grounds and remind ourselves and others that it is racism that has created races and that zoology/anthropology has played an inglorious part in producing supposedly biological justifications. Today and in the future, not using the term race should be part of scientific decency«.

So races are a social and colonial construction. In the frame of this research to name segregated population by race in Latin America represents an act of resistance. To enunciate them in a world that considers them extinct or not segregated is to claim their existence.

Reflections from Post-Colonial Societies

As researchers, artists and designers, we have a responsibility to know that

we design for a world full of diversity. In an attempt to succeed we could be

reinforcing stereotypes, reproducing colonial practices, racist or cultural appropriation practices. The result could also be just misunderstood in different contexts. Design practice is political and we must be aware of it.

In 2001 the United States government started to drop rations of food over Afghanistan, in yellow bags, exactly the same color as the cluster bombs dropped by British forces. So it was very confusing to people to take them. Then the color was changed to pink⁹.

I took the example above from *The Politics of Design*, a book that acknowledges that design has political implications. It is a compilation of examples and »mistakes« committed in the history of design

around the world. It explores the cultural meaning of symbols, maps, typography, and colors, as a guide to create a more effective, politically correct, and responsible visual communication.

We found an example that politics and design are wed together in the world of map-making. -Maps have always been a method of exercising control over territory and its peoples and resources. During colonial times, mapping an area was sometimes enough to consider it 'conquered'. In the present, borders are traced as political strategies. Even the translations of countries' names in different languages can say a lot about the historical identity of one country¹⁰.

11

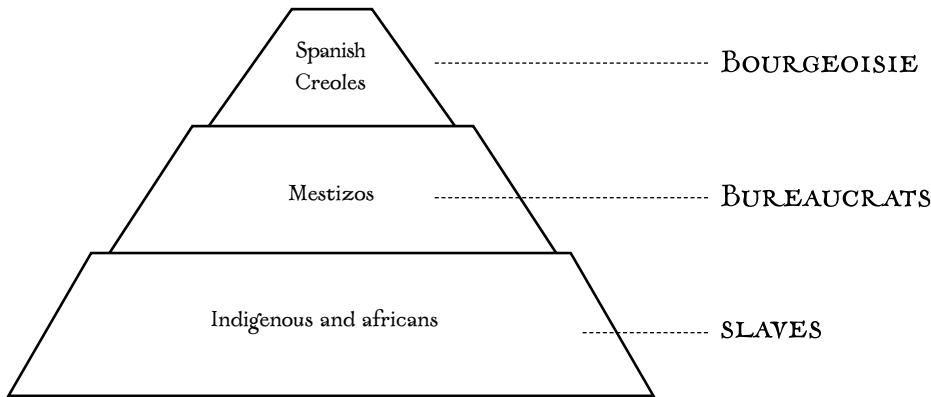


fig. 2 Colonial racism in America.

»Coloniality is a matrix of power that produces racial and gender hierarchies on the global and local level, functioning alongside capital to maintain a modern regime of exploitation and domination« (Anibal Quijano)

An example of a more inclusive communication of history can be found in Mexico City. After the Mexican civil war in 1920, a new government was elected that strived for a more egalitarian society. Years of dictatorship had ignored the thousands of years of indigenous history. The population, of which two-thirds was illiterate, was largely unaware of the country's history. Artist Diego Rivera was commissioned to paint the history of Mexico in a series of murals in the Palacio Nacional in Mexico City. By using murals as a form of public education, Mexico's history became accessible to all citizens¹¹.

If we look at visual communication today, we see that ethnocentrism, sexism, and racism are far from eradicated. This is a clear sign that we should keep addressing these issues among designers and communication specialists¹¹. Fortunately, the number of designers questioning their role in a Eurocentric capitalistic world is increasing. Acknowledging this can give designers more agency in their practice to »either serve or subvert the status quo« as Tony Fry said.

This wave of critical designers started to develop methodologies to speak in schools to future generations of designers beyond the frame of academic research where this approach was being stoked.

Mike Monteiro is one of the most rude and fearless voices in North American Design. He is the co-founder and design director of Mule Design. He writes and speaks frequently about the craft, ethics, politics and business of design. He is the author of »A Designer's Code

of Ethics« and »Ruined by Design« he printed a low-cost zine version for students which is half the price of his hardcover book congruent to his design practice.

He spread his word on his blog »Dear Design Student« for a more ethical next generation of designers, with pop and sometimes informal language but always assertive.

In his article Thoughts on Critics of Critical and Speculative Design at the intersection of critical reflection and pedagogic practice. Matt Ward, being aware of his position as a white man with middle-class privilege, proposes reflections of the pedagogic methodology at schools of Critical and Speculative Design. He says that is the place to start teaching the deconstruction of colonial practices on the new generations of Visual Communication producers.

He proposes that it's helpful to ask students to frame their work in terms of their intention. Declaring what they wish to achieve, for whom, and why, helps bring into focus the role they wish the work to play in the world¹².

We can see an example of success with this auto-critical methodology in the field of Speculative Design I Did Something for Africa¹² (September, 2019). The main character in this scenario is the satirical stereotype of the European white male design student that goes to Africa and from his position of privilege is trying to solve problems in a third world country during the few weeks he spends there. Making visible these attitudes the authors are presenting a political statement in an art gallery.

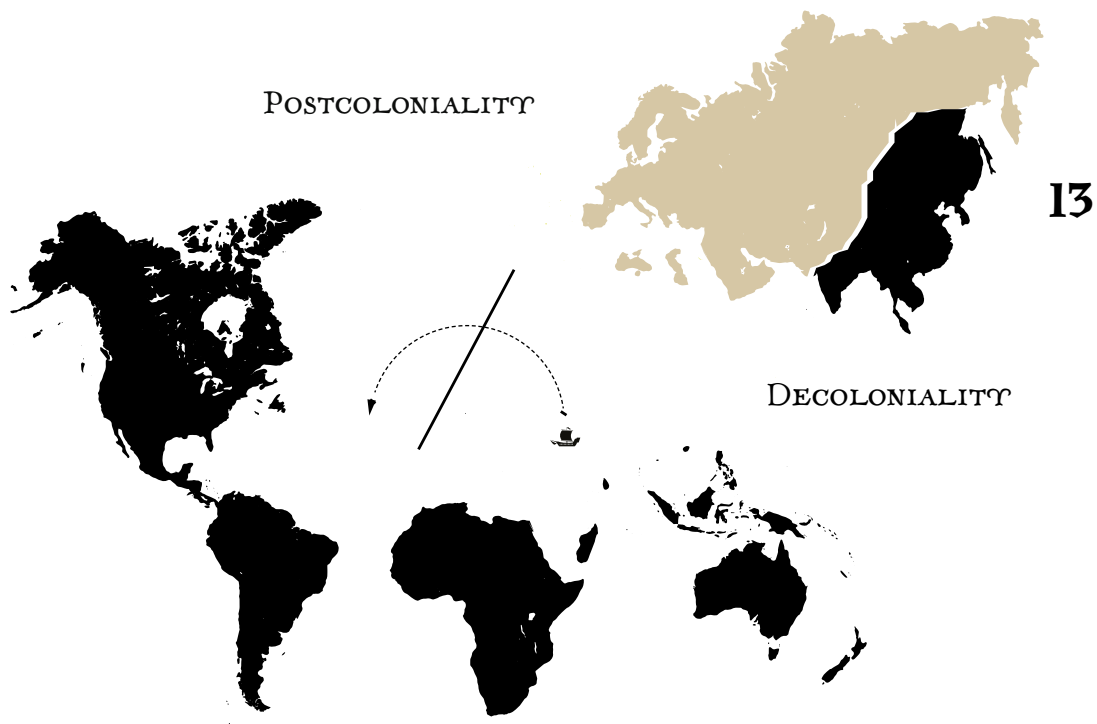
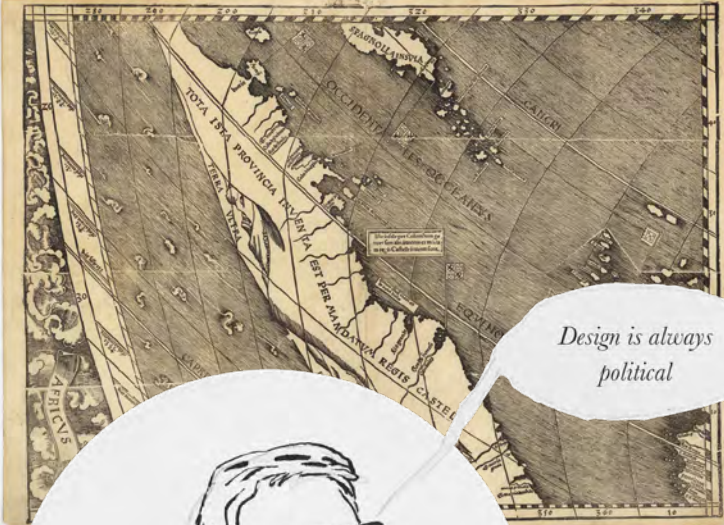


fig. 5 Decolonial & Postcolonial

Decolonial means »De-link the aesthetics and aesthesis represented in art based in the difference of how we experience the world from different context and societies« (Walter Mignolo, 2014)
Postcolonial means »Questioning dominant power dynamics in practices from a position of white, northern European, culturally colonising, patriarchal privilege« (Prado de O. Martins & Oliveira, 2014)

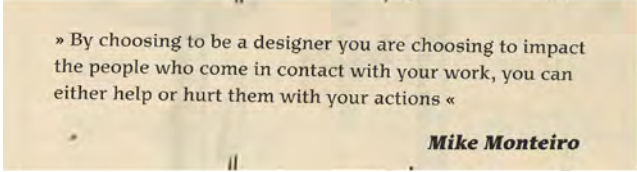
The Waldseemüller map from 1507 is the first map to include the name »America« and the first to depict the Americas as separate from Asia. Credit: Martin Waldseemüller / Public domain.

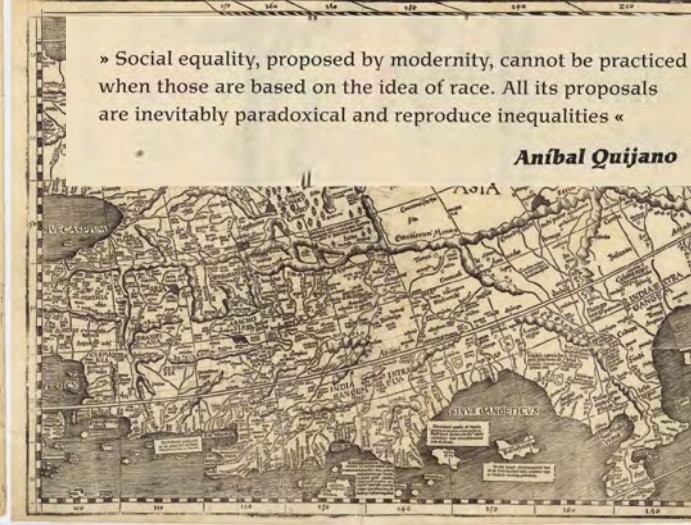


Design is always political

» By choosing to be a designer you are choosing to impact the people who come in contact with your work, you can either help or hurt them with your actions «

Mike Monteiro





Reflections from the geographical souths

Coloniality is part of our daily life, even when the formal period of colonization is over. This is perpetuated through manifestations of racism, sexism, ecocide, ethnocide and genocide, and also in the art, music and literature we consume, and in consequence the way we shape our knowledge of the world and our experience on it.

Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano has described coloniality as a 'matrix of power that produces racial and gender hierarchies on the global and local level, functioning alongside capital to maintain a modern regime of exploitation and domination.' He argues that if knowledge is colonised, then one of the tasks ahead is to decolonise knowledge¹³.

The concept of decoloniality, started in Latin America and third world countries. It is a movement based on the critical theory of Westernisation and the current relation of power between colonizers and colonized societies in the capitalism era.

The aim of the Decolonial Theory, in the context of the curatorial and art process, is to de-link the parameters of aesthetics and aesteSis (sic). Which has recently

gained currency primarily through the work of Argentinian semiotician Walter Mignolo. Mignolo argues that aesthesis, an ancient Greek concept, which broadly describes the senses—'an unelaborated elementary awareness of stimulation, a sensation of touch'—was absorbed in the seventeenth century into Immanuel Kant's concept of aesthetics¹⁴.

Pedro Lasch underlines that the point of decolonial art projects is that none of their aims is success, but decolonization. So, then, one thing is to »succeed« in the art world and the other to use the art world in decolonial projects¹⁵.

Although all of these instances are crucial steps towards healing the colonial wound, decoloniality is not limited to academics and curators.

Decoloniality is a cultural call for arms, an invitation to rearticulate our collective past experience, questioning its weight and biases, in the hope that with every step forward, we might make increasing sense of our condition and contribute to the possibility of a future world without coloniality: *The World Otherwise*¹⁶.

Benvenuto Chavajay Guatemala

Benvenuto Chavajay is one of the most prominent decolonial artists of Guatemala. His work fuses the past of his indigenous family, his language Tzuthuhi'l and his community.

This piece, on Benvenuto's words, is his biggest example of »de-sculpure« . »In Western esthetics, the artist most sculpt the rock in order to get beauty. That means transforming nature«. In Mayan worldview, indigenous people say, human beings are the guardians of nature, those interact with each other and have conversations. So in the quietness of the rock, Benvenuto wants to listen to the silence that the rock keeps.



Carlos Motta Colombia

Carlos Motta's multi-disciplinary art practice documents the social conditions and political struggles of sexual, gender, and ethnic minority communities in order to challenge dominant and normative discourses through visibility and self-representation.

The America project, places a map of Latin America alongside a map of the United States. The position in which the North American country is placed, and its disproportionate size, question the historical influence of the U.S. over Latin America.



Daniela Ortíz Perú

Daniela Ortiz aims to generate visual narratives in which the concepts of nationality, racialization, social class and gender are explored to critically understand structures of colonial, patriarchal and capitalist power.

Réplica was a performance taking place at Fray Bernardo Boyl's monument in Barcelona. The monument represents the Fray whit an indigenous resting on his knee in front of him. Spanish citizens celebrate here the conquest of the Américas every year at the - Fiesta Nacional de España. She is replicating the indian.



State tools

Throughout our lives, as individuals we learn the cultural baggage we need to live in society which includes roles, attitudes, and behaviors provided by the different agents of socialization, having the family in the first years of life as the first reference group; subsequently other agents appear – which have now become more important than the family itself – such as schools, the media, particularly television, groups of friends, religion, sports clubs, and so on. Thus, through all these agents, individuals acquire a wealth of knowledge necessary to live with the members of their group and with others¹⁷.

According to the *Embodying the Nation* theory, the State is the main actor in the creation of national cultures and identities.

The State through different »normalization mechanisms« manages to create power relations between themselves and citizens. The creation of national cultures is achieved through institutions and speeches that unite the State and the national population. Citizens assume that national identity through the teaching of the national language and the education system. In other words, the State plays a fundamental role in the organization of society and in the production of ideas about culture and identity considered as »normal« in a society¹⁸.

Cinema

The stereotype of the Mexicans as illegal immigrants that international mass media is showing to the world, is shaping the identity of the Mexican population outside of the country such as Netflix showing Latin America as a Narco paradise. Those stereotypes are being shaped by media.

So don't feel guilty if whenever you hear »Mexican« you imagine a guy wearing a sombrero and drinking tequila. That's a national construction built by the government during the Mexican Golden Cinema period.

Since 1986 the Mexican state found in cinema an appropriate tool to spread nationalism and the status of races to a mostly illiterate audience. The figure of the revolutionary as a prototype of the true Mexican, clinging to his land and risking his life for the freedom of his people.

The cinema was used to promote the transition from a creole identity to a mestizo identity. Where mestizos are represented by characters from the poor class who live with dignity and christianity.

The natives are folk characters, noble but wild when speaking. They suffer with humility. Represented by white actors anyways.

Painting

Painting has been a tool for the construction of the identity of the illiterate Mexican. In my chapter on Decolonial Design, I mentioned Diego Rivera's murals in the National Palace that were commissioned by the government. The idea was to educate the public about contemporary Mexican symbolism:

»The center of the mural is dominated by the elegantly dressed skeleton La Calavera Catrina holding arms with the Mexican graphic artist who first conceived and drew her, José Guadalupe Posada in a black suit and cane. La Catrina wears a Feathered Serpent boa around her shoulders. On La Catrina's right she is



» Once you realize that you have also been colonized, that your mind, your body, your senses, your sight, your hearing have been modeled by the colonial matrix of power, that is, by its institutions, languages, music, art, literature, etc. – or what is the same as Western Civilization – you begin to heal «

Walter Mignolo

holding hands with a child version of Diego Rivera in short pants. Rivera's wife Frida Kahlo is standing just behind and between him and La Catrina; Kahlo has her hand on Rivera's shoulder and she is holding a yin-yang device«.

Fortunately it is not all about the state. Collective identities are shaped by its members too, through rituals and community practices.

Rakija in Grad Duga Resa

Individual and collective identity is not static, it moves and changes. It is also consciously constructed and modified. So I visited two locations to investigate a bit more about the local tradition of Rakija.

Grad Duga Resa is an industrial town located 65 km southwest of Zagreb. The hearth of its economy is the textile factory founded in the late 19th century. Far away from the touristic glam of the Dalmatian coast, Duga Resa is a more natural countryside town, and the birth place of my friend Marija who was the contact to get me immersed in a small community of neighbors that produce Rakija every year.

Those guys, between their late 40's and 50's have been friends since a long time ago, all of them grew up in this town and they just agree to build their distillery in the backyard of my friend's father. All the equipment is from the community and they have turns to produce. At the end of the season, they make a party to test everyone's production.

This season we were a bit late, so we caught just the last day of production, and proudly they were waiting for us to speak about it.

We talked about how they are organized and basically I asked the questions from my Interviews chapter. While I recorded with a very low quality video.

Rakija in Brač

Since I started I have been interested in the idea of producing Mexican spirits in Croatia. I was bringing the subject into almost every regular conversation with locals. Some of them offered me to make some calls to visit big distilleries. But Jugi was the only island guy who gave me the answer I was looking for »Yeah, I know a guy. Puče is old, and a bit - weird - person, he produces in his backyard next to the chickens and olive trees«.

It was a cloudy day when Jugi, my two german friends and I came to Brač to meet our local producers. »If something happens to him I don't know after how much time someone would find him« Jugi said. »There are not too many people coming to visit his place«.

He was waiting for us, and he was curious about us too. »Any stupid could make Rakija, why are you researching about that?« Puče said. That made us laugh a lot while he was bringing three different types of rakija to the table. »This one is for the Mexican« referring to the orahovac, the walnut Rakija.

»There is a permit by the Croatian law. I can produce 20 liters of spirits and 50 more liters of Rakija per year « the men were telling us very proudly. Proud of his work and of his olive fields around the house. He is a retired sports trainer who buildt himself an outdoor gym just at the entrance of his place.

Jugi gave us the tour around the backyard distillery while telling us facts about the island and the process of distillation. We saw the tools, that even if they were originally meant for other purposes, this DIY lab was also well planned.

After the tour, at Jugi's living room we meet three ladies drinking orahovac, made by the grandma. »Have you ever tried to make rakija from agave?« I asked

her »You could make it even from shit!« grandma said.

One of my conclusions and I think the most important one is that Rakija production, is a community hobby, and not precisely a nerdy one. The distillation process is mostly male, inherited by the fathers and previously by the grandfathers. It is such a natural activity that the community does not necessarily have specialized knowledge in chemistry to do so, I mean that I have the impression that some do not know exactly what they are doing, how to manipulate the process to control the final taste, beyond adding lots of sugar at the end when the taste is too strong. It is after distilling where the women's labor comes in, it is the grandmothers and the wives who are responsible for giving the last flavor, to make it pleasant or »drinkable«. Adding herbs and aromatic spices. Some with medicinal purposes and others just for the taste.

Unlike mezcal and wine, that have more things in common. The entire process is highly controlled. The final taste will be surely not random, it will have characteristics of altitude, climate, and humidity. Producers know it and control these variables throughout the entire process.

Rakija production is a community ritual among friends but above all it's a family tradition, where the quality of the product has small relevance if it is not for a commercial brand.

Mezcal in Oaxaca, Mexico

Maestro Mezcalero they call the man who has all the knowledge of the process to make mezcal, who dedicates his life solely to this profession. Maestro(s) are masculine because this practice has been exclusive to men in Mexico. However, with the modernization of gender roles and with free time obtained by not dedicating exclusively to home maintenance or

the distribution of mezcal, more women have been involved in this process.

ALEJANDRA. TELL ME MARILUZ, ARE YOU A MEZCAL MASTER?

MARILUZ. No. I know the entire production chain of mezcal, from planting maguey, going to lift it, throw it in the oven, crush it, do the distillation, make the preparation and finally present the mezcal to make the packaging, to the distribution. However, I do not define myself as a mezcal master because I would have to dedicate myself exclusively to that activity and have knowledge of everything. If an alembic breaks down, I would have to call someone and a Maestro Mezcalero has to know how to maintain their alembics, their tubs, and manufacture their furnace.

I don't know how to do it because I haven't given myself the time to do it, but if at some point I run out of a Mestro Mezcalero for my brand, I could easily produce it. Obviously with all the materials ready, alembic, tub, and oven. However, I do know how to make it, I do some small productions because I am learning to work with new magueys because each maguey has a particular production mode, not that you have already learned to cook and distill with maguey and you have already learned everything.

Each maguey gives you different times due to the amount of sugars and the reaction to distilling. So when I am learning from maguey I do small productions.

A. WHO DO YOU THINK OWNS THE MEZCAL RECIPE?

M. There is quite a strong and quite a reactive controversy because it creates many polarizations among those who know about mezcal and there are claims that mezcal was post-Hispanic on the alembic issue. However, there are discoveries of







You can make agave rakija.
My husband use to say that you
could make rakija from everything,
even from shit



Nona

Si vende anche in Parigi presso Gio Battista Rolin con privilegio di S. Maestri

Leche comuni di

Mezzo Gio



Brac

STATO DI VENEZIA
RAGUGLIANO
Dalla Sovranissima Repubblica di Venezia
Sig. Domenico Federici, Abate di Vaska, Canonico di Santa Maria della Salute

ALMATIA

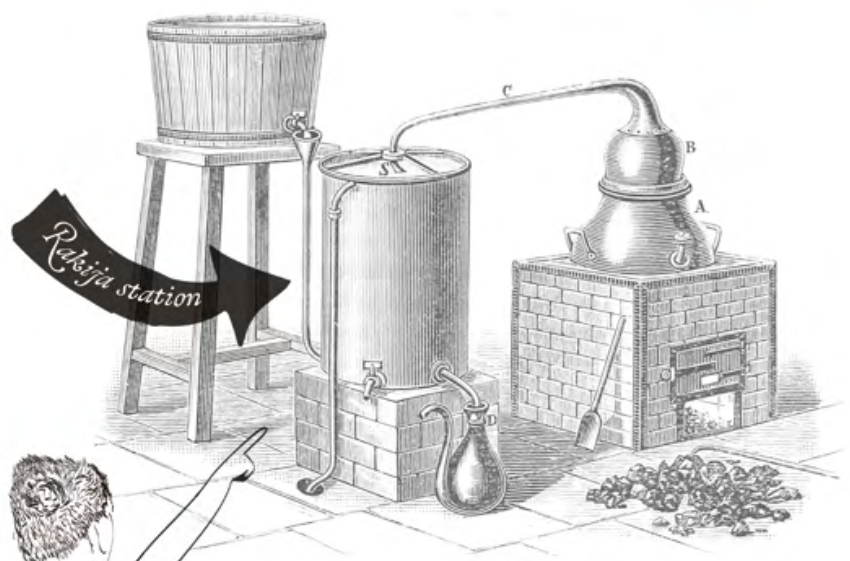
O DI NARENTA
NTINUS SINUS

ALMATIA
A nel GOLFO DI VENETIA

Orunti
MONTE NEGRO
BULGARIA

GuDDep917

Visiting Brač during winter...



a) is the boiler, b) the dome, c) a tube passing into the condenser, where it is twisted into a spiral form called the * cenanthic ether, a liquid with, a powerful odor, which causes the peculiar smell of grape-wine. fermentation. 199 worm, in which the vapor from the boiler is con-densed, and drops out at d).

185879





Let's try to catch some squids before sunset



pre-Hispanic clay distillers and instead of the tube alembic, the outlet was a reed. Pots dug in stone have been found to ferment. So I think that the owners of the recipe are Mexicans, especially the states where mezcal has always been produced. There has always been a mezcal culture, it is impregnated in our beliefs, in our celebrations, in our sadness, so the recipe is for Mexicans and more for Oaxacans (laughs)

A. BEYOND THE NEW DESIGNATION OF ORIGIN THAT GOVERNS MEZCAL, WHY DO YOU THINK THAT MEZCAL IS ONLY PRODUCED IN MEXICO WHEN WE CAN FIND MAGUEY IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD?

m. To support my previous answer. It is more of the same but to reinforce this belief. There is the legend of Queen Mayahuel and her grandmother Tzintzimitl, and the 400 rabbits. When you hear that story of how maguey came to earth and how it was a gift from Mayahuel, you analyze again and realize that we had a pre-Hispanic experience with maguey and mezcal, it was said that it was only used for mead or pulque but that's not true, because the word mezcal in Nahuatl means »cooked maguey«, then there was already a knowledge of the recipe of mezcal and what was done with cooked maguey, it is proven that agave gives you up to 80% of the resource you need to live in your daily life.

We see it with the Ixtle (agave thread), with the honey (agave syrup), with the quiote (agava flower), we can do 50 thousand things with just one maguey. It serves you for many things. And, when the maguey is cooked, what did they do with the cooked maguey? Well, it begins to ferment, if there was a need to know what was done when it was cooked, it is easy to know that it fermented and became tepache and from tepache comes the most logical thing that is distillation. So this process and these theories reinforce the idea of the existence of mezcal since pre-Hispanic times.

A. WHY DO YOU THINK MEZCAL IS ONLY PRODUCED IN MEXICO WHEN WE CAN FIND MAGUEY IN OTHER PARTS OF THE WORLD?

m. The story tells that a lightning strike fell on maguey, that cooked it and began to ferment for the sugars in it and so they began to taste it. Surely it was a slow process, for some reason the food in Mexico is quite abundant and generous because I think they did pay a lot of attention to the edible plants and if they liked, they continued experimenting. I think it is because of the research and investigation of pre-Hispanic Mexico. I do not know in other parts of the world, I know that in Peru, until just recently, they are only experimenting with maguey. I don't know how it got to Peru, there is no record that the maguey existed in other parts of the world before it did in Mexico, I think it got there because of migration in modern times. But they do not have such a deep history with the maguey. The maguey is native to Mesoamerica and that's why we know how to work the plant, that's my personal theory.

A. WHAT WOULD YOU FEEL IF SOMEONE OUTSIDE OF MEXICO STARTED PRODUCING MEZCAL?

m. In the United States, in the south that is the border with Mexico, mezcal is already being produced there, I mean maguey is being planted. A maguey distillation is being done in Peru, but we will see. Mezcal can only be produced in Mexico by the designation of origin, the rest is distilled from agave or aguardiente or I don't know what it's called. But in reality, the designation of origin is ours. I am going to tell you an open secret, even within the same country and having the same designation of origin and having the basic knowledge of mezcal production, it does not compare with mezcal from Oaxaca. The same countrymen from Mexico, Durango, San Luis Potosí,

Michoacán come to Oaxaca to become a Maestro Mezcalero. They can even hire a Maestro Mezcalero and take him with them, which is what is happening. The Maestros Mezcaleros are stolen and taken to other states to produce, but that is the secret, not the production system, it is not the Mezcal Master, it is not the maguey; it is the Earth.

The land of Oaxaca has minerals that are not comparable with those of other parts of the world, not even in Mexico, and the maguey has a lot of flavors even if it is small. It tastes a lot and smells a lot, which has no comparison. The subject of the theft of Maestros Mezcaleros, of modes of production, to take it away. I tell my countrymen, things do not go well here because maguey is what contributes to mezcal, it does not give me courage or I think badly because it will never be compared to the maguey that grows in our land. Not even the same countrymen of Mexico with the denomination of origin are fortunate to have a land like ours (Oaxaca) and that the maguey feeds on it, that is my theory and I believe that for many it is a reality.

The quality of food that we have in the region helps the composition. The mezcal is made up and the mezcal is divided into three parts. The tips first, which is where the highest alcohol content comes from, the strongest flavors, the first thing that comes out of the distillation. Then a very long section of several liters comes out, it is called the body, in the end, the tails come

out with very low alcohol content but very heavy with metals, however, they are part of the same thing. When the Maestro Mezcalero has all three parts, you start to mix, little tails, a lot of tips, until you get to mix a moment that you want. And we think my friend, who I consider the best Maestro Mezcalero in the region, why there are such good Maestros Mezcaleros in Oaxaca? And we come to the conclusion that it is for the taste buds, it is for the food, we eat very deliciously. In our towns, Ocotlán and Ejutla divide us 26 km and there was a strong migration of Spanish, French, and Germans.

It is made very good mezcal because the taste register forces you to have everything well seasoned, everything has to have a lot of flavors and a strong smell and we apply the same to mezcal. For me, if a German makes mezcal, I would be afraid because they have a lot of knowledge of tastes, as well Catalans. If an Italian also starts producing I would be afraid too.

A. MARILUZ, YOU KNOW I AM MEXICAN AND I WANNA MAKE MY OWN MEZCAL WITH CROATIAN AGAVA. DO YOU THINK I COULD? WHAT ABOUT JUST AN SMALL AMOUNT?

M. Is not simple, the maguey is a very hard plant. You have to have prior knowledge of distillate. You can, if you have the raw material that is maguey, then everything is possible. Knowledge is empirical.

Colonization in Croatian Imagination

I did not intend to do formal interviews, but rather to bring three questions to our daily conversations:

1. What do you know about colonialism?
2. As a European country. What do you think was the role of Croatia in colonization?
3. Do you think there are still colonization practices?

Colonization it's like when a rich country arrives in a poor one and they exploit them, the country and the people, like slavery. I think Croatia was never a colonizer, instead, this country was always part of someone bigger. Like the Austro-Hungarian Empire, then Yugoslavia and now the European Union. Foreign companies open some factories in Balkan countries because labor is cheaper here, somehow I think that is colonization. But then I think we are not so bad,



Well, I think everybody sometimes reproduces stereotypes. I mean in West Europe, they are always waiting for some style from ex-Yugo artists, you know? Political, communism aestheticist. About colonization practices in think, we had different situations in different regions of Croatia. For example, Ottomans never arrived in Split but in the southern parts and inner land of the country yes.



Colonizations it's what France did in Africa, I am not sure if England or The Netherlands in some Asian countries and I don't know who colonized Mexico.

I'm not sure about Croatian role in Colonization, but I think none.

I think colonization also refers to the imposition of a lifestyle. And I don't know before but at least on the coast of Croatia people would like to have the American lifestyle (USA), the people here



I have never traveled outside Europe, beyond Serbia or Montenegro. And I think there are poorer countries that were colonized in the past and have not had the same opportunities as developed countries.

I don't think there are dumb people in poor countries, I think there are people who don't have the same opportunities that we have in this part of the world. There is still colonization. Maybe not savage and with murders as before but what about chocolate and coffee? And modern exploitation?

—Marija

In the northern part, you have Rijeka that used to be an important commercial port during the Austro-Hungarian empire.

And in the Pula and Istria region, during the fascist regime, Italians took Slavic names to convert them to Italians, which is colonization. So I think Croatian identity has been more colonized than colonizer.

—Edvin



I think colonization it was when a rich big country went to a poor one, like Africa, and then conquered them.

—Filip

realized that they can have it through tourism. Renting rooms to tourists is easy and fast money with which they can travel or simply eat in restaurants and drink coffee with their friends every day. Somehow I think trying to have a lifestyle that we see in American films, in a way it is ideological colonization.

—Noemi



Croatia in Mexican Imaginary

What Mexicans know about
Croatian national identity?



It sounds to me that it has gypsy culture like the Balkans. It was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, I think so. I am not sure if it was also part of Yugoslavia. But yes, I relate it to the Balkan and Gypsy culture.

-Sofia



I only know that it is a country in Eastern Europe, and that it was involved in the Balkan war, but it is not clear to me if it was part of the URSS. I also don't know much about its history or its culture. Thanks to your photos I know that it is a country with a lot of nature. I guess that is also why it does not have an industry or many services.

I don't know what the engine of the economy is. I know they speak Croatian and I guess it's a very difficult language to learn. And that's all, I am very sorry to know almost nothing about Croatia.

-Sabine

Croatia was part of
Czechoslovakia

-Alma

Croatia is a great place in
the Balkans that experienced
terrible moments in the
war in Bosnia Herzegovina.
Conservative Catholics, much
like Mexicans

-Israel

It is a tourist destination
for the landing of Game of
Thrones. But as for culture
I don't know anything.

-Paulina

Nothing, what a shame.

-Mariana

What I know about Croatia?
Game of Thrones, Dubrovnik,
cool beaches and beautiful
people.

-Liz

I didn't know anything until
you sent me photos.

-Jessica

What I know about Croatia is very little, but the only thing that comes to my mind is football, which was third in 1998, they had a very famous player. Right now I remember only Rakitić. The only thing I remember right now is that meme, that they have a big coast and they don't let the Bosnians swim because they have a little edge there.

-Ulises

I know that Croatia was part of the kingdom of Yugoslavia a long time ago like Serbia, Slovenia and other countries. Also last year they reached the final of the World Cup.

-Ernesto



I know it makes a very advanced electronic music festival in Pula. It's called Outlook. And since the nineties the football uniform, red with white. Also its separation as Eastern Europe, something with Russia. I also think they had problems with Serbia.

But more football and the last World Cup that reached third place. And politically, the divisions of the countries and then nothing that has a very beautiful girls, surely.

-Ricardo



DUBROVNIK



St. Blaise Church

Population of
12,000

until 1667

GOA, INDIA



fig. 3 Croatian in colonialism.

Dubrovnik had a Colony in Gandaulim, Goa, in the 16th Century: »The Croatian, Melik Jesa Dubrovcanin, arrived in India in 1480 and went on to become a Viceroy in Gujarat. The Croatians established a colony, by the name of Ragusan, on the Malabar Coast in north Goa, India. The Church of Sao Braz-Saint Vlaho, which still stands now in Goa, was built in 1565. The church bell came from Dubrovnik. At one time the colony had a population of 12000 residents.« published by Coldnoon (International Journal of Travel Writing & Travelling Cultures).



» As educator, if you'r not working to change the system, if you'r not empowering learners to take actions in their own worlds, then you'r working to reproduce the status quo «

Paulo Freire

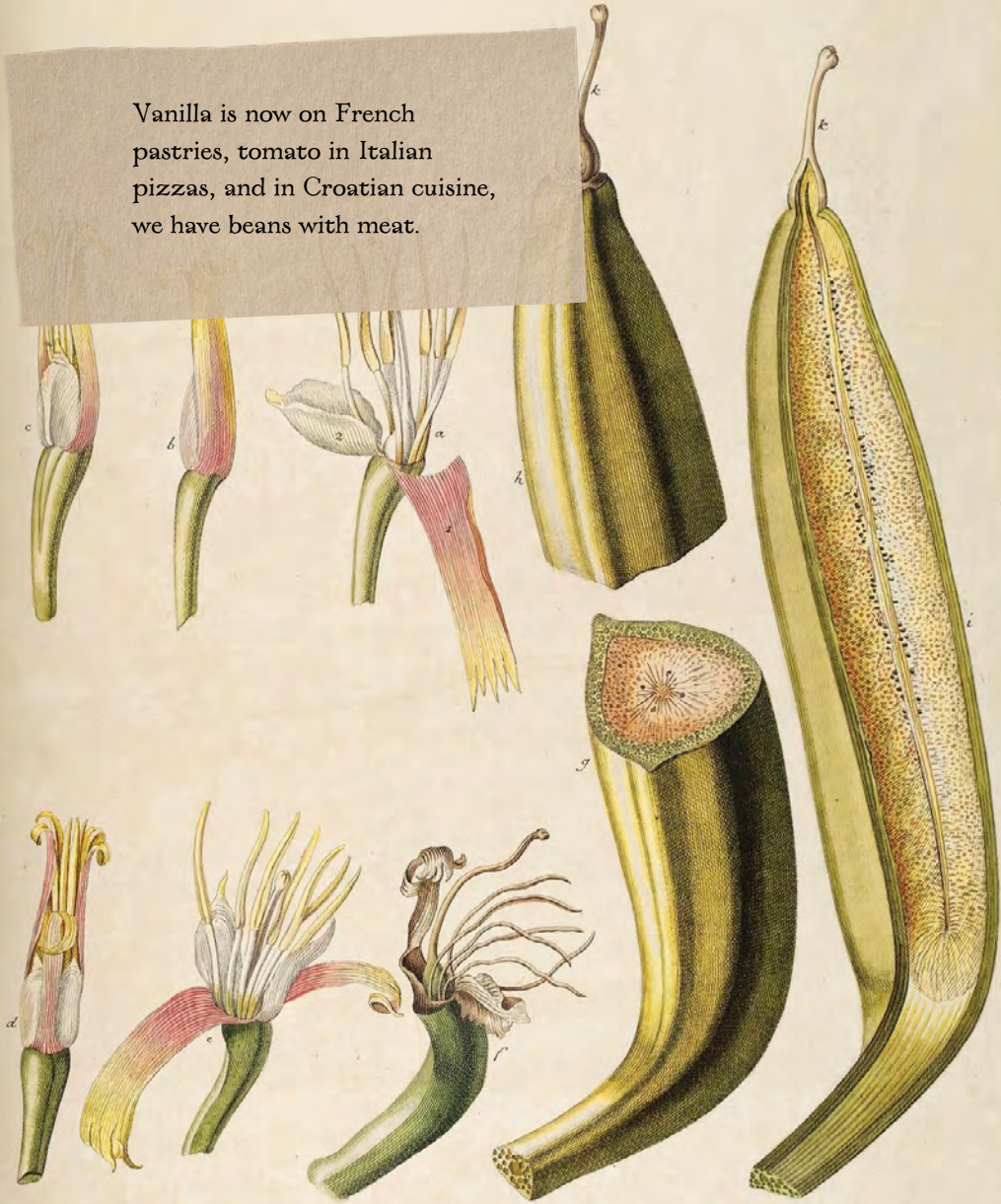
The conquest of the Americas and the migration of human race also brought an exchange and exploitation of natural resources such as fruits, vegetables, legumes and spices that are currently part of everyday life and European cuisine.

Potato, chili, tomato, corn, chocolate, vanilla, sweet potato, pumpkin, peanuts, pineapple and guava, avocado, beans, yucca, and agave have followed travelers' footpaths.



Kartoffel (*Solanum tuberosum*).

Vanilla is now on French pastries, tomato in Italian pizzas, and in Croatian cuisine, we have beans with meat.



37

MVS.Æ fructu longiori flores e

a. f
fau
iden
nien
vifa



Which of these vegetables are still imported and being part of the neo-colonial exploitation of people and land?

Mezcal labels

Unlike other distillates produced inside and outside of Mexico, mezcal has earned its reputation for the transmission of ancestral knowledge represented by Mezcaleros Masters and for the qualities of the maguey, such as the time it takes to mature.

Most brands include pre-Columbian and Colonial Mexican symbolism, and often resort to handmade techniques such as linoleum and engraving to give an artisanal touch.

Some brands resort to pre-Columbian legends that refer to the maguey, as the case of the brand Mezcal 400 Conejos (400 rabbits) named after the ancestral belief that agave spirits were occupied by 400 rabbits. Those who ingested the agave spirits would be controlled by one of the 400 rabbits, but no one ever knew which rabbit you'd get with each mezcal.

In mezcal branding it is important to mention the Maestro Mezcalero since everyone has their own recipe. Some labels include government stickers for denomination of origin and bat friendly certifications.

Other details that define the taste and are included on the labels are:

- Agave variety
- Roast
- Crush
- Still
- Village / State
- Distillations
- Water
- Yeast
- Fermentation Vats
- Batch size



Pelotón de la Muerte

The logo is based on the »Death Squat« flag, a movement to avenge the death of Miguel Hidalgo, a Spanish Roman Catholic priest, leader of the Mexican War of Independence.



Alipús

Mezcal Alipús branding is a good example of syncretism. In the upper label, in San Andrés Alipús there is a hand-made carved agave behind a bible, which represents Christianity and the colonialism period in the Americas. While in the bottom label (pink) according to the author Joel Rendón, there is a series of symbols linked with the deep Mexican culture.



Ilegal

According to the brand owner, the name refers to all the Mexican mezcal producers that in the 90's dreamed about leaving the country to follow the American Dream.

The logo itself is a Christian cross. The paper looks like old colonial documents from the Spanish crown.

In the islands of the Adriatic coast we find all the resources for the production of mezcal, from the plant, the old stone mills to extract olive oil, stone ovens and stills used to distill rakija. I consider it a blessed paradise of the Mayahuel.

—

As we learned the word mezcal is protected by the laws of the Mexican state, so from here on hopefully and with the blessing of the Mayahuel we are going to call it

AGAVUŠA



AGAVUŠA

THE MANUAL STEP BY STEP



STEP V
FERMENTATION

STEP II
HARVESTING

STEP I
HUNTING THE
AGAVE



STEP VI
DISTILLATION

STEP IV
GRINDING

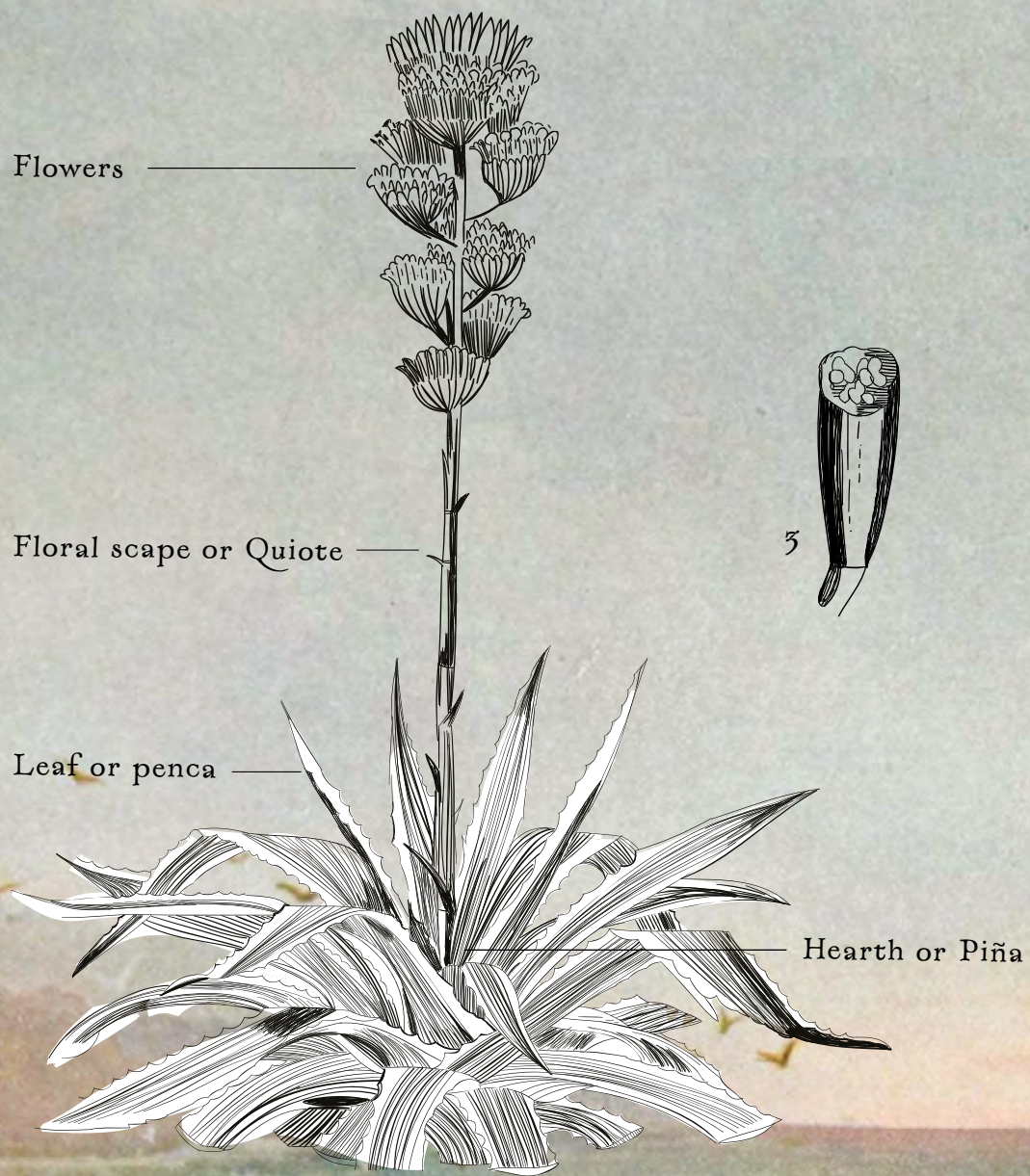
STEP III
BAKED

IN THE ISLANDS
OF THE ADRIATIC
COAST THERE IS A
PARADISE TO MAKE

AGAVUŠA

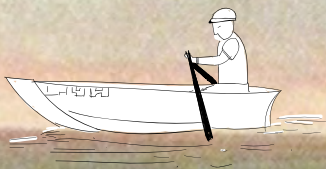
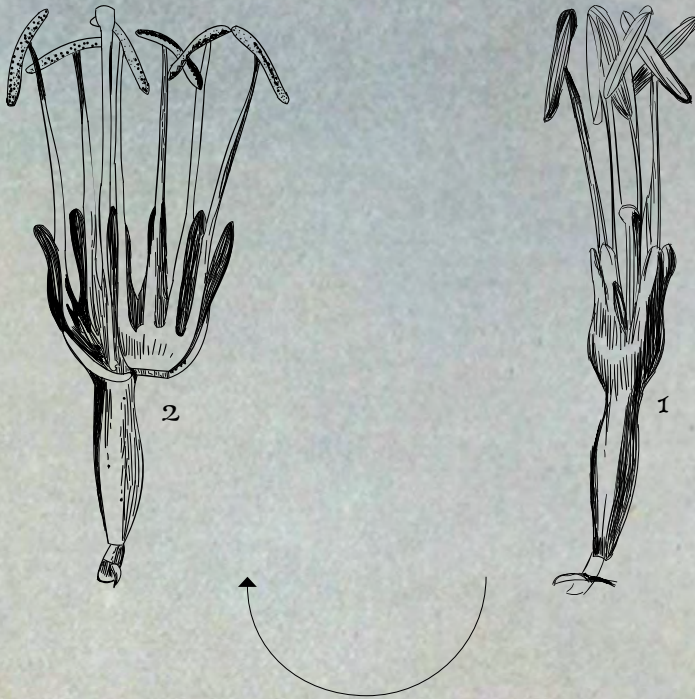


STEP I HUNTING THE AGAVE



AGAVE AMERICANA, Century plant or American aloe.

Once the maguey has reached the stage of maturity, after seven to ten years, in the part central bud begins to sprout the quiete or escape, indicating that the plant has entered its flowering stage. When the quiete has reached a height of one meter above the leaves, you cut it and leave it to rest for at least one month, to accumulate enough sugars in the piña.

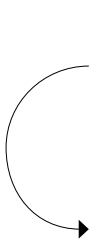


Note that approximately, eight kilos of agave are needed to get one liter of *Agaveña*.

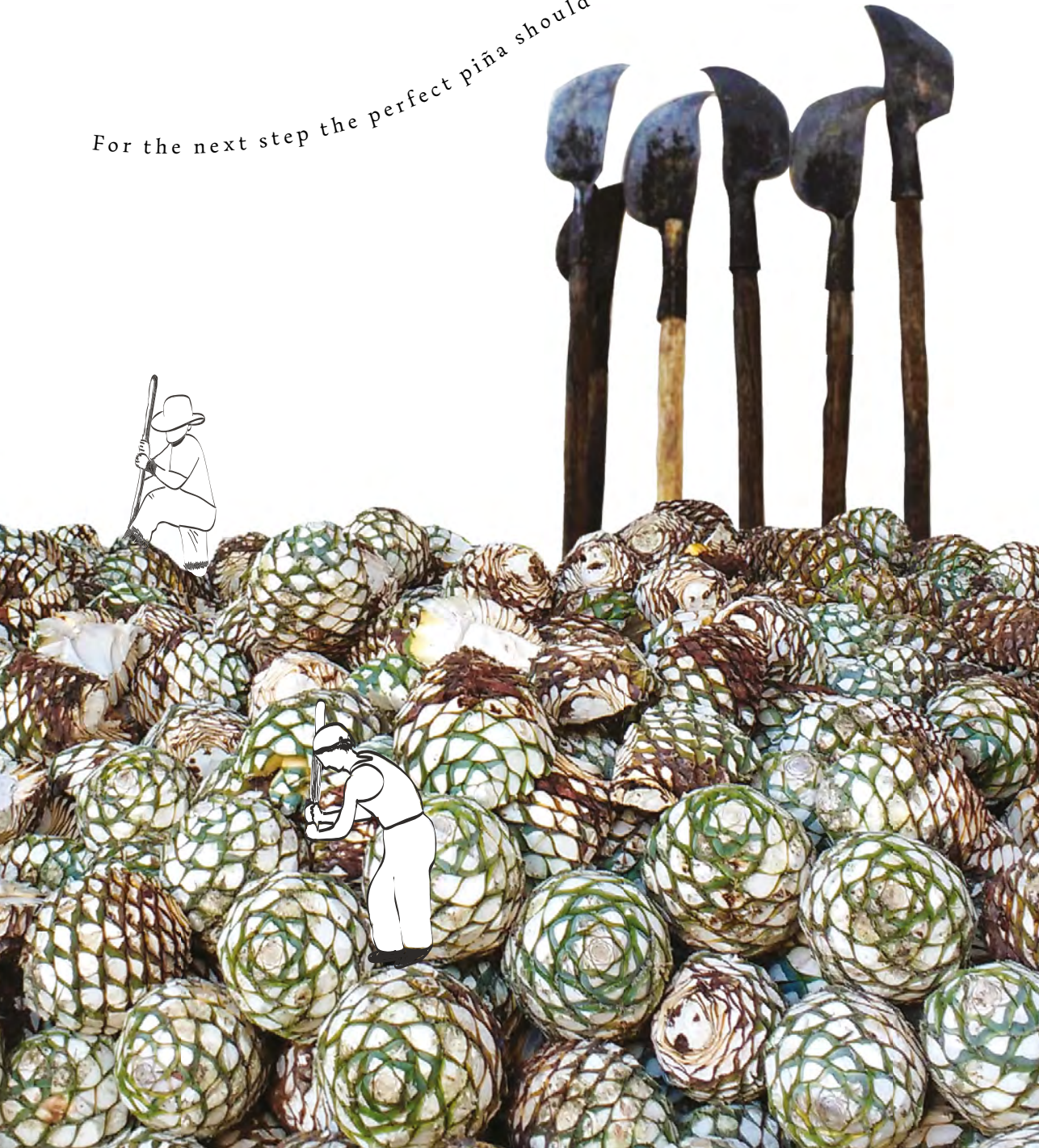
STEP II HARVESTING

Begin with the cutting of the pencas arranged around the heart. Then the piña is detached from its base,

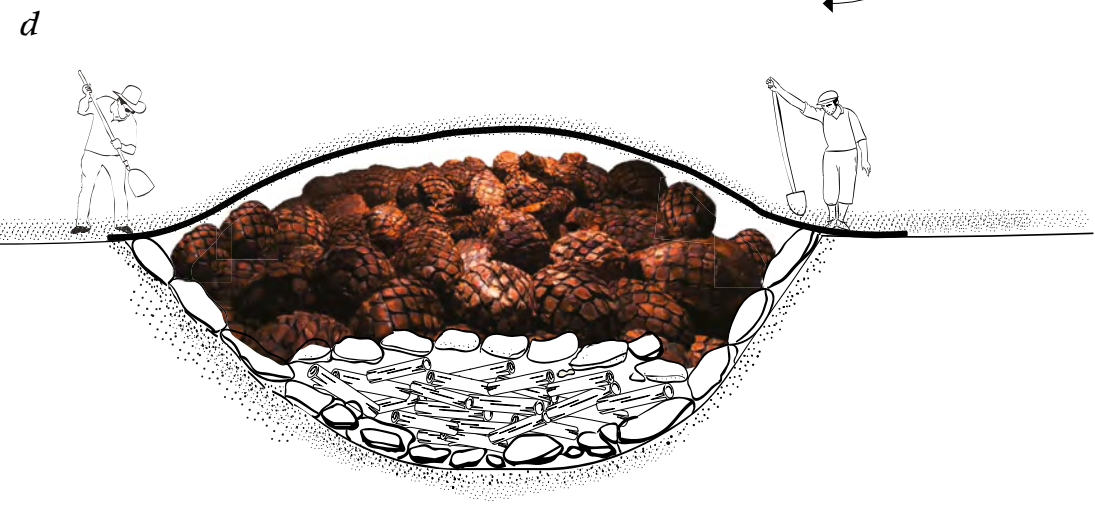
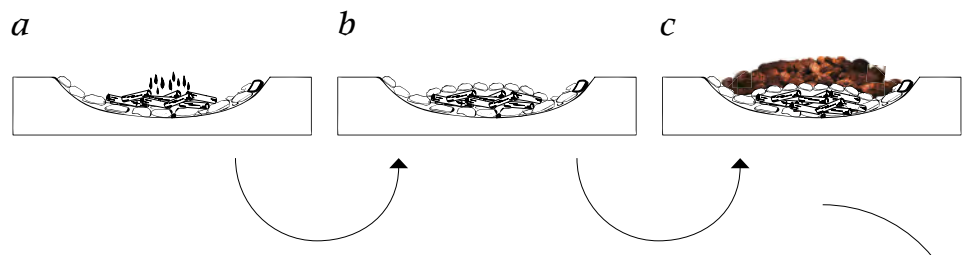
separating the stem from the root.



For the next step the perfect piña should look almost white.



STEP III ROASTING



Do this step no more than 24 hours after cuts. And before you start all pieces must be weighed and the data recorded in your notes.

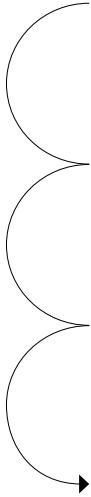
The Oven

This kind of oven is used in Mexico for big batches of mezcal, still artisanal but big.

For a local taste, you could avoid the construction of this one and do it on a wood-fired brick oven, better known in Dalmatia as *komin*.

- a. Start with the excavation in the floor, generally circular and conical, covering it with a layer of big stones.
- b. Add substantial firewood.
- c. Cover the coals with small rocks and wait for the stones to gain temperature and coals to be mostly consumed; that is the case when no smoke is produced anymore.
- d. Isolate the stones by placing a bed of bagasse or palm leaves so that the pineapples will not have direct contact with the stones, avoid charring. Place the pineapples evenly on that bed so that there are no gaps, stacking them circularly to form a dome.
- e. Cover the pineapples with palm leaves or any other insulating element such as mats or blankets, preferably made with natural fibers like wool or cotton. Cover the dome again, this time with a layer of soil in a homogeneous way to avoid heat. Let everything cook during the next three days.

STEP IV CRUSHING



Wash the grinding area with water before and after grinding if possible.

It is necessary that the cooked agave be selected by eliminating those agaves that suffered overcooking, get rid of hard parts to prevent the mill from clogging. It is also recommended to remove the buds to avoid bad flavors. Weigh the cooked agave to be ground and record it on the registration forms.



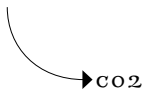


STEP V FERMENTATION

glucose



pyruvic acid



acetaldehyde



ethyl alcohol



From here you may want to call your chemist friend, the rakija distiller from your town, or at least to figure out the terminology, and the measuring tools you going to need. I'm pretty sure you don't want to blind your loved ones.

Inoculum

- a. Place at least 1 part of freshly ground agave bagasse in a 19L bucket.
- b. Add warm water at 35°C.
- c. Squeeze the bagasse to release the sugars and remove the residual bagasse to leave only the juice.
- d. Measure the ° Brix with a brixometer and a graduated cylinder.
- e. If the ° Brix is less than 6, add more freshly ground bagasse until reaching the 6 ° Brix, but if the ° Brix is greater than 7, add more warm water, just enough to adjust the ° Brix between 6 and 7.
- f. If you have a very active fermentation vat or previous inoculum, add only 2 l of juice without fiber. If they do not have fermentation or other inoculum, it is necessary to prepare inoculum and leave it for at least 24 h or 36 h.
- g. Add air to the bucket with a compressor (which would be the most recommended) or shake with a glass dropping the juice from a certain height so that it forms foam. Perform the process at least every hour.
- h. Wait at least 12 h to add the inoculum to the fermentation vats with the trays covered to prevent dirt from falling on them and, if possible, in a warm place.

Fermentation

- a. Wash fermentation vats before use.
- b. Fill the vats to one quarter with a part of freshly ground agave previously weighed in your notes.
- c. Add warm water at 30°C up to fill the vat to the half.
- d. Measure the ° Brix to bring the sugars to a maximum of 12 ° Brix and record it on the binacle.
- e. Add a small amount of the inoculum prepared the day before and shake the vat.
- f. Add more bagasse similar to the initial one for fill the fermentation vat to three quarters, shake the vat until reaching a concentration from 12° Brix.
- g. Add another small amount of inoculum.
- h. Shake the fermentation vat.

STEP VI DISTILLATION



First distillation

- a. The pot of the alembic or kettle must be empty and clean.
- b. Load the fermented wort into the pot.

NOTE Observe and record the temperature rise in the kettle in order to prevent and avoid sudden heating and prevent the load from being ejected to the coil by sudden evaporation.
- c. Record the number of buckets on your notes, as well as the time.
- d. Light the fire in the hot zone of the alembic.
- e. Once the wort in the alembic kettle reaches its temperature of boiling, that is, it begins to boil and vaporize, receive the distillate in containers.
- f. Feed the fire but avoid too rapid and violent evaporation and prevent the jet from decreasing so much so that it causes too slow a distillation.
- g. Record the temperature of the kettle, the temperature of the cooling water in the pile, the alcoholic degree and temperature of the distillate at least every 15 minutes.
- h. Once the alcoholic strength reaches 6% alcohol, volume in the jet or stream distillate, suspend reception.
- i. Mix the distillate in a container and measure the volume obtained and the alcoholic strength. The resulting mixture is called ordinary or simple.
- j. Record in your notes the volume of ordinary obtained as well as its alcoholic strength and the temperature at which it was measured.

NOTE The cut-to-tail alcoholic strength must be established before starting the distillation of according to the methanol and acidity content that has been obtained in previous batches.

Second distillation

- a. Follow the steps from the first distillation from a to f and continue.
- b. Record the temperature of the the kettle, the temperature of the cooling water in the sink, the alcoholic strength and the distillate temperature at least every 10 minutes.
- c. Once the distillate begins to be obtained, receive the distillate in a container.
- d. Continue receiving the distillate, also called body or core, until that the actual alcoholic strength measured in the distillate jet is 30% alcohol volume. At this time you must change the bottle to start receiving the tails.
- e. Mix the core of all the carafes that were filled during rectification, and measure the volume obtained and the alcoholic strength.
- f. Record in your notes the volume of the body obtained in this way and its alcoholic strength and the temperature at which it was measured



Make a party, invite your friends.

You just made your own

AGAVUŠA

Should I label this agaviša?

Mediterranean Trade

The origin of wages as a capital exchange conceived as the buying and selling of the individual living force of labor it dates back to the IX century, due to Muslim hegemony with the minor association of the Judaic population in the Mediterranean¹⁹.

In the Americas, which before the colony was not organized as we know it now, capital was marginal but not dominant. It is with the conquest of the Americas that the capitalist regime arises and is reconfigured into racial slavery. With the colony the mercantile and wage model conceived in the Mediterranean is installed in the Iberian Atlantic basin, thus giving rise to what Aníbal Quijano defines as Global Colonial Capitalism. (See The origin of races in Latin America chapter)

It is within the framework of this new pattern of social exploitation, and nowadays neoliberalism, that capital absorbs rituals (See Art and Cinema in the Construction of National Identity chapter) and, as far as this project is concerned, the sacred, ritual and community character of the distillation of mezcal in some regions of what we know today as the Mexican territory (See Mayahuel Representations). Rituals that have undergone a process of regulations from the modern state (Neocolonial practices chapter) through norms that recode mezcal as a mercantile product and through a currently nationalist »ancestral« propaganda add surplus-value to the national and global capitalist market.

Exploiting – indigenous identity- as an ancestral concept of the past, depersonalizing them and perpetuating practices of territorial exploitation of the indigenous inhabitants of the present. Stripping agave, and its derivatives such as mezcal of its ritual community character.

In Croatia where in the pre-COVID-19 world, its main industries is tourism (20% of the GDP). The distillation of the Rakija preserves its community ritual symbolism (See Rakija in Grad Duga Resa). As well as the associations of persons to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations, the so called Croatian Agricultural Cooperatives. Both survive the regulations of the European Union.

Therefore, in a decolonial anti-capitalist scenario, it would be necessary to remove from the bottle any label that adds surplus-value, to return to the historical value of the liquid as community ritual. But while dropping any label I would be denying our entire professional practice. So come on, we are designers, and this is a nice imagination challenge to answer my first question Is it possible, as a designer, to include indigenous ancestral knowledge in future worlds avoiding cultural appropriation and colonization practices? If yes, then how?

Let me describe a few label scenarios for our Croatian Mezcal, Agave Rakija or Agaviša



Homemade rakija style.

A handwritten label on a white piece of paper/sticker is a recurrent resource by Croatian producers, and very useful when spirits are in random reused glass and plastic bottles, you don't wanna drink by mistake the one for cleaning surfaces. We should also include the year of production, and if it's flavored by a grandma, writing down the list of fruits or spices on it. Although with a flavored version we lose the purist public of mezcal.



Mexican style.

The international stereotype of Mexico. Easy, let's just use a tequila brand for exportation as reference. A guy wearing a sombrero, drinking from the bottle. Since the target is Croatian I decided to use Chico, a grotesque character from the old Italian comic Zagor. My intention while labeling this bottle was to make me feel uncomfortable, I succeed. I even feel guilty.



Agavarica

Fraktur typeface is often used by Mexican brands because it reminds of street art and Latino subcultures originated in Los Angeles. In Croatia I think would remind of Hajduk supporters. So it's also a fail.



Mediterranean style

Old Mediterranean style. This is a mix of European botanical with Eastern Mediterranean illustrations. It represents a wide range of geographical space, while what I intend is to show a local tradition.

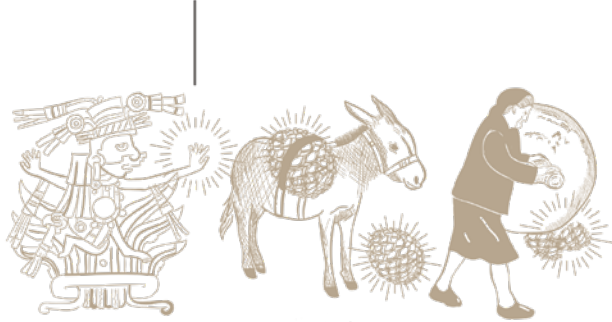
Packaging would be very expensive.



The picture was taken from the ethnographic museum of Split. It shows the traditional process of olive grinding from the island of Šolta. Although the bottle is wrong, this label begins to represent the context in which the Agavušarises.

I labeled the bottle

Mayahuel
blessing the penca and
the process.



Mayahuel
Aztec goddess
of agave.

Donkey
Unofficial symbol of Dalmatija.
In Mexico it is used to transport
the agave pencas.

A lady from the
islands crushing
olives.





Front.

I want to make enfasis on the procees of making it, so the story is on front,
At the button, next to BY will be the signature of the Maestro distiller.



Back.

Here we have the context where Agavušà arises.

Let me start this section with a quote so you, Dear Reader, get the immediate context from which this *Priča Agava* has surged, the principles with which Arturo Escobar starts his book *Designs for the Pluriverse: Radical Interdependence, Autonomy, and the Making of Worlds*.

»(1) We live in a world where everybody has to design and redesign their existence; hence, the goal of design becomes the support of individual and collective life projects. (2) The world is undergoing a great transition; design may contribute to fostering a culture of cosmopolitan localism that effectively links the local and the global through resilient infrastructures that bring production and consumption closer together, building on distributed systems. (3) People's actions to change their everyday life conditions increasingly take place through collaborative organizations; design experts thus become part of creating the conditions for collaborative social change. (4) All of the above takes place within an international conversation on design, intended to transform the cultural background for both expert and nonexpert design work«.

This has been a project that tried from the beginning to be about community. The first obstacle for a foreigner to access that community has been the language. Obviously, without the help from Marija and Jugi this project would not have gotten very far. Agavuša, the name that this project acquired along the way, required field research, sitting down with distillers and having a chat while sampling their produce.

I would like to add that the SARS-COV-2 pandemic that we are currently experiencing has not only delayed the actual production of mezcal in terms of the time it took from cooking and fermentation; it slowed down my field work that was indispensable to get into the local

community and build trust and relationships. It made it hard to go beyond the first contact to imagine and design a system of production adapted to the reality on the islands.

Initially, I thought that the Maestro Mezcalero and the local distiller would be the ones to construct an intercultural (future) reality. However, all the ones involved in discussing the possible scenarios, the meaning of that plant, the spirits, rural life, activism as a design, we all have imagined this together. Ever since the idea for this project came up in the gardens of the DVK while talking to Oleg, there have been intercultural questions about resources and our ways of production. This has, reinforced by the pandemic, inspired us to think more about the importance of life in the countryside and about community, on the global scale but foremost on the practical issues of implementing something on the local level.

IS IT POSSIBLE, AS A DESIGNER, TO INCLUDE INDIGENOUS ANCESTRAL KNOWLEDGE IN FUTURE WORLDS WHILE AVOIDING CULTURAL APPROPRIATION AND COLONIZATION PRACTICES? That's the question I asked myself at the beginning of my investigation. I cannot say how pure the ritual of making mezcal currently is; as we saw, that ritual from the past has undergone changes due to technology and politics. I also cannot introduce the ritual from a European perspective because I do not have that perspective. But for me the importance resides in the process of distillation that is a process of community here in Croatia. It is precisely in that process where I see the intercultural link that regards distillation as a ritual. A ritual that connects generations and that has survived outside of a studio and without academic involvement. It appears to me that what has held this ritual alive in Croatia are its

economic and geographic characteristics and currently its precedence from a less regulated socialist past that is bound to be changed by further integration into the European Union.

From an ontological focus on design, and that appears to me where this work fits, I would like to rephrase my initial question: »Is it possible to include knowledge from communities of the Global South who live in resistance in our design practice to imagine alternative futures in the local context?« It is not only possible, but it appears indispensable to me. We need to understand their ways of organizing and building community to imagine new ways to relate to each other in our local contexts. It is difficult to imagine things from our comfort zone. If we insist on seeing the Global South and its ways of organizing like a step back, we are losing the opportunity to imagine futures, not all positive ones but alternative ones that could be turned into realities.

When we think about »technology« we think about robots and artificial intelligence but forget that the alembic and the stone mills are technology as well. In the process of designing our digital identity we have forgotten how to use that other technology. We have forgotten how to live in the countryside independent from the global markets. Adding to that: »If it doesn't rain this week there will not be any olive oil in this season« titled a local newspaper a month ago. As the human species we have produced irreversible change on the climate. Change that can be felt in our daily lives just when we

have forgotten to work with our natural resources. It is therefore now that intercultural knowledge could contribute to our attempts to organize with other local actors.

Let me recall one of my favourite characters of this book: Puće the distiller on Brač. You probably would not quite call him a person that seeks community but at same time he has involuntarily designed his way of life that gives him his place and purpose in the community. A way of life that appears to be sustainable and far from the urban lifestyle. »Why would you want to live in Split when life on Brač is better?« he asked me when I first met him. He himself repairs all his equipment in his home and keeps himself busy with all the projects he has going on. His place in a corner of the island receives the community of distillers who come to see him once a year during the rakija season. Let me point out that Puće and others that I met on the islands are privileged in a sense: he owns the land he inhabits and he has not had to experience the process of marginalization that we can see in the Global South. Nevertheless, this does not make him any less inspiring: To me Puće is a punk living the resistance.

The Argentinian anthropologist and feminist Rita Segato recently said that she was having mixed feelings about the term *Decoloniality* since we cannot *de-construct* what has happened in the past. But she notes that we are in the process of building a new society. Let us work out together how to build it.



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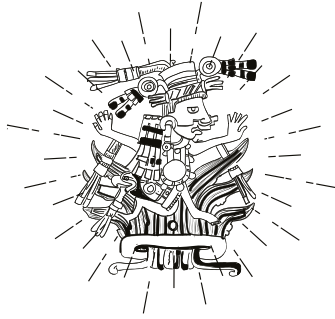
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AGAVA BY TINA BOŽAN



Western concepts of society, nature and technology have oftentimes been shaped by indigenous culture and tradition. Nevertheless, indigenous ancestral knowledge is now widely regarded obsolete. Perpetuating colonial thinking, the Western vision of our global future considers it only a matter of time until it is fully eliminated by the advancement of “progress”.

In a framework of Critical and Speculative Design (CSD), I investigate the legal, political, and social consequences of producing mezcal, a Mexican ancestral spirit, on the Croatian coast with Adriatic agaves: A process of production and exchange of knowledge by a Mexican indigenous “Maestro Mezcalero” (master mezcal producer) and a Croatian rakija distillery in Dalmatia. Together they show us a collaborative rural aspect of a potential future reality that employs indigenous knowledge to make use of natural resources, foster intercultural understanding and design alternative ways of production and life.