

## My Afro-Mexican research

In 1998, while I was at the University of Florida, I directed a dissertation based on field work in the Afro-Mexican community of San Nicolás de Tolentino (Guerrero), following up on the pioneering work of the Mexican anthropologist Aguirre Beltrán in the 1940's. The topic of Afro-Mexican language remained fallow for some time thereafter (I was to meet Norma Rosas Mayén, who was conducting research at the same time as I was, incorporated into her 2007 Purdue dissertation). In 2006 the Afro-Latin American Research Association (ALARA) was holding its bi-annual meeting in Veracruz, Mexico, and I decided to take advantage of this opportunity to do fieldwork among the Afro-Mexican communities.

Arriving in Mexico City, I took a local flight to Puerto Escondido on the Costa Chica of Oaxaca, and from the tiny airport I boarded a local van to the small town of Pinotepa Nacional, where I found lodging. My first foray was to the community of El Ciruelo, where I had been given the reference of a priest who ran a school.









I recorded several very interesting encounters in El Ciruelo, then in the neighboring hamlet of Estancia Grande.





Following these encounters, I traveled to Cuajicuinalapa, Guerrero, the “Cuijla” of Aguirre Beltrán’s study. Today Cuaji (as it is currently known) is quite urbanized, and the Afro-descendent culture is acknowledged in several places.





After conducting some interviews with knowledgeable elders in Cuaji (including one who had known Aguirre Beltrán), I visited San Nicolás for several days, where I interviewed many people, including the incredible 86-year old story teller Catalina Noyola.







I also recorded some interviews in the coastal community of Punta Maldonado “El Faro”.





Eventually I took a bus from Cuaji to Acapulco, and another bus to Mexico City, where I took a flight to Veracruz. After the ALARA meeting was over, I decided to explore the Afro-Mexican presence in Veracruz, particularly around the town of Yanga, named after a maroon rebel leader who in 1609 had successfully fought against Spanish efforts to re-enslave escaped Africans. Very similar to the history of Domingo Benko Biohó and the founding of the Afro-Colombian

community of San Basilio de Palenque in the same time period. Today Yanga is a small urban area where the Euro-mestizo phenotype predominates, but the Afro-Mexican heritage is very much part of the city.

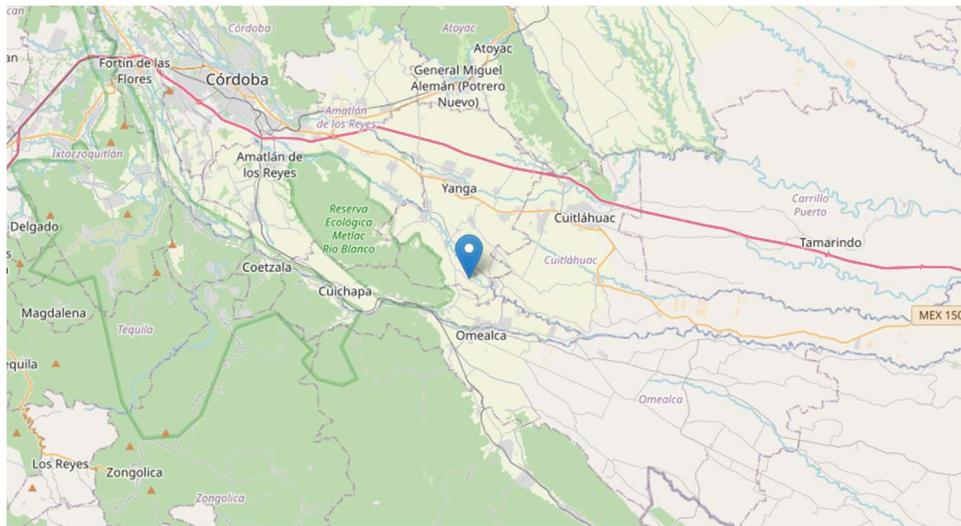








Just outside of Yanga is a tiny settlement called El Mirador, where Afro-descendent residents are still found, and where some aspects of traditional Afro-Mexican culture survive. I carried out some interviews in El Mirador.







On another day I visited the larger Afro-Mexican enclave of Mata Clara (San Francisco), with more interesting interviews during my visit.

