

## Art, Archaeology and Socialism: The Life and Work of Laurette Séjourné, Interpreter of Mesoamerica

Ian William Merkel

Freie Universität Berlin

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Laurette Séjourné (October 24, 1914–May 25, 2003) was an archaeologist and anthropologist of Mexico. Born in L'Aquila, Italy, Séjourné spent her formative years in Paris before fleeing Vichy France alongside her partner, the revolutionary, Victor Serge. After her early career as a film editor, Séjourné became one of the few female archaeologists of Mexico, working with the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia (National Institute of Anthropology and History). Her works include field-based monographs, notably on Teotihuacan, and broader synthetic works such as *Pensamiento y religión en el México antiguo* (published in English as *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico*). [1] These books popularized archaeology, helping to consolidate its place in Mexico's nation-building projects, in the international community, and among artistic vanguards. In 1989, she received the coveted Alfonso Reyes Prize, a lifetime achievement award for contributions to Mexican literature and criticism.

Through her excavations at Teotihuacan, Séjourné became interested in Quetzalcoatl, the "feathered serpent." As one of the major deities of Mesoamerica, Quetzalcoatl figures prominently in Séjourné's first major monograph, *Un Palacio en la ciudad de los dioses, Teotihuacán* (1959). [2] The man, the deity, and his universe would provide the subject of her essay, *El Universo de Quetzalcóatl* (1962), in which she not only examines Quetzalcoatl as a symbol but also as a metonym for the rise and fall of Mesoamerican culture. As opposed to the Aztecs (or Mexica), who were violent and dictatorial, he represented a "militant pacifism"

that allowed for the cultural flourishing of what is now commonly referred to as the Classic period of Mesoamerican history. [3] For Séjourné, Quetzalcoatl's importance extended well beyond the historical figure, high priest and king of Tollan (Tula). He served as a “central archetype in which humankind, sovereign in its decisions, manages to convert a perishable mass into luminous energy.” [4] Séjourné's symbolic interpretation of Quetzalcoatl, prefaced by Mircea Eliade, sought to uncover and indeed revive a broader religious and philosophical system.

Despite occupying a somewhat controversial role as a cultural interpreter at a time in which the discipline of archaeology became much more professionalized and scientific, Séjourné's studies on religion and Teotihuacan influenced various scholars such as Miguel León-Portilla. [5] Furthermore, the author Octavio Paz and other prominent intellectuals used her work to understand the Mexico and Mesoamerican culture more generally. [6] Today, Séjourné's works continue to provide a convincing introduction to and interpretation of pre-Hispanic Mexico, as well as a relevant source for archaeologists, ethnologists, and historians. Her archive is held at the Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). [7]



Image 1

Séjourné in France, 1930s.

© IIE-UNAM Fondo Laurette Séjourné

## Cultural and Intellectual Milieu

Laurette Séjourné, née Laura Valentini on October 24, 1914, settled in Paris with her family after the First World War. It is there that she attended school, married her first husband (Bernard Séjourné), and changed her name to Laurette Séjourné. Although little is known about her early life and education, by the mid-1930s, Séjourné was immersed in the world of cinema, ultimately becoming a film editor like her husband. [8] She may have also been an actor. [9] Around 1937, she met intellectuals such as André Breton, Jean Cocteau, and Victor Serge. [10]

Séjourné edited Henri Cartier-Bresson's first documentary on the Spanish Civil War in 1937, *Victoire de la Vie* (Return to Life). [11] In 1938, she edited a film directed by Jacques Lemare called *Les Métallos* about the working conditions among Parisian metallurgists and their strike. [12] She also edited Ladislav Starevitch's *Le Roman de Renard* (The Tale of the Fox), one of the first animated films of all time. On these and other political films, she is listed on the credits as Laura Sejour, Laura Séjour, and Laura Séjourné, respectively. At the outbreak of the Second World War, Jean Renoir had hoped to work with her on *Tosca*, a film whose directorship would be passed to Carl Koch midway for reasons related to the war. [13] Séjourné's experience in cinema would lead her to work in Mexico on commercial films such as *El Gran Makakikus* (1944), directed by Humberto Gómez Landero [14] and *Entre Hermanos* (1945), directed by Ramón Peón. [15]

If cinema defined Séjourné's early career, her immersion in the worlds of literature and anti-fascist politics would prove a more durable source of inspiration. She is best known as the wife of novelist and revolutionary Victor Serge and later Arnaldo Orfila Reynal, director of the Fondo de Cultura Económica and founder of the publishing house Siglo Veintiuno Editores. Serge (Victor Lvovich Kibalchich) was the principal reason for which she fled Vichy France for Mexico, although her contact with Spanish Republicans, of whom some 10,000 made their way to Mexico, may have also influenced her decision. [16] Serge—whose Bolshevik past made escape from particularly urgent—embarked from Marseille in 1941. Séjourné followed in 1942, accompanied by Serge's daughter Jeannine. [17] During her relationship with Serge, the anti-Stalinist left would define her immediate social circle and influence her understandings of dictatorship, totalitarianism, and human sacrifice that she would later attribute to the Mexica. [18] Beyond this immediate network, Séjourné's personal, aesthetic, and even spiritual preferences led her to engage with many other artists and writers prior to and concomitant with her social-scientific training in Mexico.

Séjourné and Serge had stayed at the Villa Bel-Air, a château outside of Marseille prior to their departure for Mexico. [19] Although no longer residing there, Séjourné frequently visited the Villa and the many intellectuals who resided there during her year alone. (As earlier mentioned, Séjourné waited a year before joining Serge in Mexico.) American heiress Mary Jayne Gold wrote of the Villa Bel-Air and Séjourné in particular in her memoir *Crossroads Marseille 1940*, as did Daniel Bénédite in *La Filière marseillaise*. [20] Ever since, interest in the intellectual milieu of wartime Marseille and the Villa Bel-Air has exploded, largely because of the presence of prominent surrealists such as André Breton, Benjamin Péret, Marx Ernst, Remedios Varos, Wilfredo Lam, and Victor Brauner. [21] Séjourné's correspondence with Brauner in Marseille, in transit to the Americas, and in Mexico demonstrates that they shared a particularly close relationship, one which would culminate in Séjourné returning to occupied Paris to collect around 30 of Brauner's paintings. [22] She would personally bring many of these paintings to Mexico. Séjourné was also a close companion of Consuelo de Saint-Exupéry. [23] Whether or not Séjourné had a previous interest in ethnology or indigenous cultures, it is clear that this artistic milieu drew her attention to these subjects in France and in Mexico. [24]

## Ethnology and Archaeology

During her early years in Mexico, Séjourné continued to work in film, albeit with great frustration, and studied archaeology at the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia. [25] Her transcripts show coursework in some ten disciplines, including Mayan and Central American archaeology, inscriptions, mythology, and prehistory. [26] As early as 1946, she had begun to conduct archaeological fieldwork, writing to Victor Brauner: “I am in an archaeological zone “doing digs.” It’s rather amusing, but I don’t think I will dedicate myself to it.” [27] A biographer of Serge, Susan Weissman, captures the difficulty of this period in Séjourné’s life, writing: “She took on the task of supporting Serge, typing his manuscripts in the morning before going to work, returning in the evening to study for a degree in anthropology.” [28] By the early 1950s, Séjourné had dedicated herself full time to her studies and fieldwork.

Séjourné’s first book, *Supervivencias de un mundo mágico: Imágenes de cuatro pueblos mexicanos*, contained drawings by Leonora Carrington. [29] Anthropological in nature, *Supervivencias de un mundo mágico* (Survivals of a magical world) was based upon several months of fieldwork in Oaxaca in towns that included Santa Catarina Juquila and San Mateo del Mar. [30] Her attention to the “irrational” elements of religion and magic as well as the choice of Carrington as the artist demonstrate an affinity with surrealism. It is worth noting that this collaboration preceded Carrington’s mural painting for the Museo Nacional de Antropología, *El mundo mágico de los mayas* (1963–4), by a decade. After this short book, translated from French to Spanish by Arnaldo Orfila Reynal (like so much of her work) Séjourné moved from anthropology to archaeology, from the present to the distant past.

Séjourné, whose interest in archaeology was already visible in *Supervivencias de un mundo mágico*, used sources such as Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal as a long-historical introduction to her anthropological fieldwork. [31] Over time, her excavations and close reading of chroniclers such as Bernardino de Sahagún and specialists of ancient America would encourage her to examine the Mexica and the Classic Mesoamerica that preceded them, largely through a reassessment of the codices compiled by the generation following conquest. [32] At the time that Séjourné was producing her most important works on Teotihuacan, she recognized the German Americanist Eduard Georg Seler as responsible for “almost all that we know today concerning the religious codices.” [33] Combining her earlier interests in the relationship between aesthetics and objects with the increasingly scientific field of archaeology, Séjourné synthesized the work of specialists and provided an interpretation of her own.

Séjourné worked alongside Alfonso Caso in Mont Albán and Alberto Ruz in Palenque before conducting her own work in Teotihuacan. [34] In Teotihuacan, she was entrusted with a grant from the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia. [35] Between October 1955 and February 1956, she uncovered new aspects of Teotihuacan’s palaces, tombs, sculptures, and wall paintings beyond its major temples. [36] These included the apartment complexes of Zacuala and Tetitla. [37] She worked largely autonomously with full authorization and minor

suggestions from Ignacio Bernal, then director of the Pre-Hispanic Monuments as part of the Instituto. [38] Based upon these excavations, she published her first major work, *Un Palacio en la ciudad de los dioses* (A palace in the city of gods). This book offered a global interpretation of the relationship between interior and exterior spaces, as well as the belief system that undergirded the city's architecture.

In *Un Palacio en la ciudad de los dioses* and almost all of Séjourné's publications on Mesoamerica, the visual is privileged with the text serving as an accompanying essay or interpretation. In this sense, Séjourné's books not only introduce readers to recent archaeological findings; perhaps more importantly, they showcase the art and culture of Mesoamerica with countless illustrations, photographs, and other visual representations. By collaborating with artists such as Abel Mendoza and architect Graciela Salicrup, Séjourné provided readers with unparalleled access to the art and urban texture of Teotihuacan. [39] This editorial project worked well with Fondo de Cultura Económica, which, at least in the social sciences, served as kind of hybrid between an academic and commercial press.

## Method, Interpretation, and Advocacy

As mentioned above, Séjourné spent significant time conducting fieldwork, in places as varied as Oaxaca, Palenque, Teotihuacan, and Culhuacan. Nevertheless, she never completely embraced archaeology as a science. As opposed to archaeology as a "sterilizing technique," Séjourné argued for the importance of a synthetic vision that not only described but "resurrected" pre-Hispanic cultures. [40] It is for this reason that Séjourné's work is both so ubiquitous and also so little institutionalized: it was largely born outside of the academy and continues to circulate outside of the field.

Séjourné privileged spiritual and aesthetic interpretations that gave unity to Mesoamerican culture, sometimes to the detriment of historical specificity. Admitting that the concepts that she examined were "highly speculative," both in their moment of origin and for present scholarship, Séjourné preferred the examination of the "symbolic whole." [41] If her interpretive method could be characterized as a bricolage, it was based upon two fundamental elements: first, the compilation, classification, and comparison of a vast material of material objects (especially ceramics) and paintings, and second, the reading of this material in light of an indigenous world view. Her extensive use of Sahagún's work and Nahuatl codices served as the fundamental point of access to an indigenous world view, work made possible by the scholarship of her Mexican contemporaries such as Ángel María Garibay and Miguel León-Portilla. [42]

Despite her Marxist and materialist predispositions for contemporary history, Séjourné attempted to treat Mesoamerican spirituality on its own terms. This is especially the case in *Pensamiento y religión en el México antiguo*. Séjourné sought to give meaning to what she called the "transcendental principle" within pre-Columbian works of art. [43] In the case of deities such as Quetzalcoatl, this meant exploring the "problem of human duality"—that is to say,

how they could be at once a human being existing in history and a god that transcended this world. [44] In *Pensamiento y religión en el México antiguo*, Séjourné places Quetzalcoatl in the symbolic realm of deities that include Xochipilli, Lord of Souls; Xipe Totec, Lord of Liberation; and Tezcatlipoca, Lord of the Smoking Mirror. [45]

According to the art historian Esther Pasztory, Séjourné explored the “heart and soul” of the sites upon which she worked. For this reason, she most admired thinkers of an earlier generation, such as Paul Westheim and Miguel Covarrubias, who had not been professionalized in the same way. [46] Séjourné’s insights and suggestions, however, have influenced scholarship in often unrecognized ways. Even Pasztory, critical as she may have been of Séjourné, would admit that “she had begun the process of severing Teotihuacan from Aztec culture.” [47]

Miguel León-Portilla, a Fondo de Cultura Económica author, called Séjourné an “apostle of Nahua culture.” [48] Beyond her fieldwork and writing, Séjourné was one of the most prominent mid-century voices advocating for the study of Mesoamerican cultures. In this sense, her bricolage and aesthetic preferences not only had to do with her bohemian past or lack of specialization. They were part of a public-facing effort that brought funding, recognition, and acclaim to those who worked with her and followed in her footsteps.

## The World of Literature and Politics

Séjourné’s collaborations with the literary and artistic avant-garde date back to the 1930s. In the 1950s and 1960s they took on new dimensions, notably through her editorial work for the Fondo de Cultura Económica. According to Gustavo Sorá, “Laurette contributed extensively in the editorial work of her husband,” selecting and taking responsibility for European authors. [49] In this capacity, she traveled annually to Europe and was the point person for communication with houses such as Maspero, Gallimard, and Seuil in Paris and Rohwolt and Springer in Germany. [50]

Additionally, she was an active participant in and benefactor of the review *El corno emplumado*. [51] There, her contributions appeared alongside those of established poets such as Pablo Neruda and the literary avant-garde from across the Americas. In terms of both her age and her politics, Séjourné straddled the Mexican nationalism of an earlier generation and the more radical aesthetic commitments of the younger generation who were no longer convinced by the government of the Partido Revolucionario Institucional. [52]

In the mid-1960s, Séjourné shifted from her archaeological work on Mesoamerica and toward politically engaged writing, especially in regards to Cuba and its revolution. Her essays can be found in the *Revista Casa de las Americas*, Cuba’s state-sponsored literary and artistic review. In 1965, she contributed an article “Vigencia del pasado en México.” [53] That was the very same year her husband, Arnaldo Orfila Reynal, was fired from his position of director of the Fondo de Cultura Económica following the publication of Oscar Lewis’s controversial *Los hijos de Sánchez* (*The Children of Sanchez*). [54] Other articles of Séjourné’s for



the *Revista Casa de las Americas* would follow. Furthermore, she frequented the Casa de las Americas in Havana and its organizer, the revolutionary, Haydée Santamaría. [55] This participation in Cuba's political and cultural life would occupy a significant portion of her late career, resulting in two books: one on the Teatro Escambray and the other on the role of women in the Cuban revolution.



Image 2

Séjourné, seated at the right-hand corner of the table,  
at the Casa de las Américas in Havana, 1970.

© Casa de las Américas staff photographer, Casa de las  
Américas, Havana, 1970

Between 1968 and 1972, Séjourné closely accompanied the work of the revolutionary theater group Teatro Escambray in a rural, mountainous region. Her book *Teatro Escambray: una experiencia*, anthropological in nature, traces the evolution of this group and its dynamics with the target populations. [56] Since it was researched and written with the help of the Consejo Nacional de Cultura and Escambray's regional Communist Party of Cuba, it is not surprising that parts of *Teatro Escambray* read as propaganda. Take, for example, the group's self-described goals: "to show the *campesino* a contradictory image of himself in regard to his social behavior within the revolutionary framework that ... raises continuous and new exigencies for his ideological growth." [57] Beyond applying Marxist theory to theater, *Teatro Escambray* is extensively documented with interviews of practitioners and spectators, field notes, and excerpts of theatrical texts written by the theater group. In this sense, it offers insight into the dynamics of participative, community theater.

The timing of *Teatro Escambray* suggests that Séjourné, like many intellectuals in Mexico, was disillusioned by the Mexican state crackdowns of 1968. Her work on Cuba, however, was more than a passing interest. She also organized a book on the role of women in the Cuban Revolution entitled *La mujer cubana en el quehacer de la historia*. [58] Working in collaboration with Tatiana Coll, Séjourné interviewed some fifty Cuban women from different social strata, age and race groups, and educational levels, providing insight into their "personal reactions to the revolutionary process." [59] Séjourné's work contextualizes personal experience within the broader structures of the revolution and its evolving social policy, contributing a useful source book for examining third-wave feminism.

## The Challenge of Recognition and Séjourné's Legacy

If Séjourné's interests allowed her to be part of a broader public sphere, they also led her away from an increasingly scientific field of archaeology. This had important consequences for her reception during her lifetime and subsequently. A more or less definitive history of Mexican archaeology, for example, mentions her once but does not cite her at all. [60] Regardless, Séjourné's experience tells us about the challenges that women faced in being recognized as legitimate social scientists, whether as direct consequences of the patriarchy in their fields or broader social world or subtler critiques of the "scientific" nature of her work. It also provides insight into the circulation of ideas or lack thereof between different national contexts.

Esther Pasztory wondered why Séjourné "had been given the opportunity to excavate at least two apartment compounds at Teotihuacan." [61] Séjourné, after all, did not possess the appropriate academic credentials. Furthermore, according to Pasztory, "her ideas were an embarrassment to archaeologists in Mexico." [62] Séjourné studied at the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia and worked on digs alongside Alfonso Caso and Alberto Ruz. Nevertheless, it is not clear exactly what her academic credentials were. While self-identifying as an "archaeologist at the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia since 1950," her transcripts do not indicate an advanced degree. [63] Furthermore, as an archaeologist without a university position or students, she had no direct protégés to continue her legacy.

Scientific challenges to her interpretation also questioned her legitimacy. As early as 1977, Miguel León-Portilla wrote that many of Séjourné's contemporaries remained unconvinced of her assessment of the "betrayal of Quetzalcoatl"—that is to say, of the spiritualist ideals of the ancient Toltecs. [64] Some of Séjourné's views on Mesoamerican human sacrifice (that the Mexica were particularly systematic as opposed to their more humane predecessors) or on Teotihuacan (not Tollan) being the center of Quetzalcoatl's power remain contested. Nevertheless, even Séjourné's most controversial claims are difficult to disprove. [65] That said, Séjourné's turn away from professional archaeology and (back) toward the literary and artistic world in her later life only further contributed to her marginalization in the field.

As a French national, Séjourné also may have found Mexico a sometimes-difficult place to work. Despite being nationalized Mexican and spending the entirety of her adult life in Mexico, Séjourné was referred to as a "French archaeologist." [66] It is true that Séjourné wrote in French and had her work translated into Spanish, but her training was Mexican, as her bibliography proves. Perhaps that is precisely part of the problem: Séjourné was insufficiently connected to French academic life to be associated with such a tradition in Mexico and insufficiently Mexican to comment on autochthonous subjects. She published French versions of *Pensamiento y religión en el México antiguo* and her book on Teotihuacan, an article in *Annales*, and presented her work at one of Claude Lévi-Strauss's seminars. [67] Otherwise her French circulation and recognition appear to be limited.



Séjourné's gender must also be considered. Pasztory associates Séjourné with her third husband, Arnaldo Orfila Reynal, the publisher of many of her books. [68] Indeed, in almost every case in which her name appears in cultural histories, it is as the wife of Victor Serge or Orfila Reynal. Despite her accomplishments, Séjourné's identity was and has posthumously been subsumed under that of her husbands. Despite her privileged position in Mexico as a person of European descent and part of a culturally influential milieu, Séjourné seemed to have faced what Hélène Charron has called "intellectual illegitimacy." [69] Like other female archaeologists in Mexico, Séjourné participated in the scientific community in a circumscribed way, constantly having to prove herself. [70] Instead of continuing to struggle for legitimacy within the professionalizing social sciences, she traveled in different circles that allowed her to express herself and her view of the significance of Mexico and its indigenous peoples, past and present.

After her Cuban period, Séjourné returned to the study of Mesoamerican culture, notably through the study of calendars. [71] She passed away in 2003, leaving behind an unpublished manuscript that would be published posthumously with the title "cosmogony of Mesoamerica." [72] Perhaps her most admirable feature was her humility. *Pensamiento y religión en el México antiguo*, her most important book, closes with the following: "We confess to feeling incapable of describing the vision of the Nahua world which we have glimpsed in the course of our work. We sincerely hope that others, more competent or more inspired, will one day be able to do greater justice." [73]

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[1] Séjourné, *Pensamiento y religión en el México antiguo* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1957).  
Séjourné, *Burning Water: Thought and Religion in Ancient Mexico* (1956; New York: Grove Press, 1960).

[2] Séjourné, *Un palacio en la ciudad de los dioses, Teotihuacán* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1959).

[3] Séjourné, *El universo de Quetzalcóatl* (1962; Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984), 169.

[4] Séjourné, *El universo de Quetzalcóatl*, 18.

[5] Leonardo López Luján, "Miguel León-Portilla and Archaeology," *Ancient Mesoamerica*, 31 (2020), 1–6.

[6] Hernández, F. V. "Octavio Paz y su visión de la cultura azteca," *Valenciana* 20 (2017), 239–262.  
<https://doi.org/10.15174/rv.voi20.307>

[7] Archivo Histórico del Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas-Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, Fondo Laurette Séjourné (henceforth Fondo Laurette Séjourné). I thank archivist Leslie Gabriela Olivera Becerra for having digitalized the documents cited herein and for her help in general.

[8] This information is collated from the following sources: Victor Serge and Laurette Séjourné: *Ecris-moi à Mexico (correspondence inédite 1941-1942)* (Paris: Signes et Balises, 2017), 234. Gustavo Sorá, *Editar desde la Izquierda en América Latina: La agitada historia del Fondo de Cultura Económica y de Siglo XXI* (Buenos Aires: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2017), 137–8. <https://mediateca.inah.gob.mx/repositorio/node/4726>

[9] Susan Weissman, *Victor Serge: A Political Biography* (New York: Verso, 2013), 239n.

[10] Weissman, 354.

[11] Press Package for the Exhibit, Henri Cartier-Bresson at the Centre Pompidou, January 28, 2014, p. 9. <https://www.e-skop.com/images/UserFiles/Documents/Editor/PRESS%20KIT%20HCB.pdf>

[12] Ciné-Archives, Fonds Audiovisuel du PCF Mouvement Ouvrier et Démocratique, <https://www.cinearchives.org/Films-447-54-0-0.html>

[13] Philippe de Vita, “Dans le décor d’une grande cocotte’: l’idéalisation de l’Italie dans la correspondance de Jean Renoir,” 6–7.

[https://www.academia.edu/19642750/\\_Dans\\_le\\_d%C3%A9cor\\_d\\_une\\_grande\\_cocotte\\_l\\_id%C3%A9alisation\\_de\\_l\\_Italie\\_dans\\_la\\_correspondance\\_de\\_Jean\\_Renoir](https://www.academia.edu/19642750/_Dans_le_d%C3%A9cor_d_une_grande_cocotte_l_id%C3%A9alisation_de_l_Italie_dans_la_correspondance_de_Jean_Renoir)

See also, Pascal Merigeau, *Jean Renoir: A Biography*, translated by Bruce Benderson (Philadelphia: RatPac Press, 2016), 397–8.

[14] IMDb, [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0150771/fullcredits/?ref=tt\\_cl\\_sm](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0150771/fullcredits/?ref=tt_cl_sm)

[15] IMDb, [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0140026/fullcredits/?ref=tt\\_cl\\_sm](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0140026/fullcredits/?ref=tt_cl_sm)

[16] Michel Graulich, ‘Le ‘couple’ Kibaltchitch et la civilisation mexicaine’, *Socialisme* (Actes du Colloque Victor Serge), Brussels, v. 226–227 (1991), 380–388. For more on exiles in Mexico, see, for example: Elena Díaz Silva, Aribert Reimann, and Randal Sheppard, eds. *Horizontes del exilio: nuevas aproximaciones a la experiencia de los exilios entre Europa y América Latina* (Madrid/Frankfurt: Iberoamericana/Vervuert, 2018).

[17] This is explored in their published correspondence. Serge and Séjourné. Jeannine considered Séjourné her second mother after her separation with her biological mother, Liuba Russakova. Jeannine Kibalchich Roussakova, “My father,” *Critique: Journal of Socialist Theory*, 28:1 (2000), 1.

[18] See, for example, Beatriz Urías Horcasitas, “Victor Serge en México, 1941-1947,” *Historia Mexicana*, 70, 4 (2021), 1765–1814. Victor Serge, ‘Mexican Notebooks: 1940-1947,’ translated by Ros Schwartz and Trista Selous, *New Left Review* 82 (2013): 30–62. As opposed to the spiritually superior peoples that preceded them, Séjourné referred to the “Aztecs” as “totalitarian,” their regime based upon a “reign of terror.” Séjourné *Burning Water*, 14, 30.

[19] See Clive Bush, “Escape from Marseille: An American Story? Writing Victor Serge’s, Laurette Séjourné’s, Dwight and Nancy Macdonald’s Balzacian Book,” *Prospects* 28 (2004): 311–40.

[20] Mary Jayne Gold, *Crossroads Marseille 1940. A Memoir* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1980), 254.

255, 357. Daniel Bénédict, *La Filière marseillaise : un chemin vers la liberté sous l'Occupation* (Paris : Clancier Guénaud, 1984).

[21] For more on this milieu prior to departure and in later New York in particular, see Emmanuelle Loyer, *Paris à New York: Intellectuels et artistes français en exil, 1940-1947* (Paris: Grasset, 2005), 130–132.

[22] Victor Brauner, *écrits et correspondances, 1938-1948*, edited by Camille Morando and Sylvie Patry (Paris: Editions du Centre Pompidou, 2005), 250–262. See also, Benjamin Péret to André Breton, Mexico, March 31, 1942, reprinted in André Breton and Benjamin Péret, *Correspondance: 1920-1959*, edited by Gérard Roche (Paris: Gallimard, 2017), 130.

[23] Laurette Séjourné to Victor Serge (via André Breton), Marseille, April 1, 1942, reproduced in Serge and Séjourné, *Écris-moi à Mexico*, 42.

[24] The relationship between surrealism and ethnography has been amply explored by scholars. For a pioneering article, see James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (1981): 539–64. For more on this theme, centered on the Musée d'ethnographie du Trocadéro, see André Delpuech, Christine Laurière, and Carine Peltier-Caroff, eds., *Les Années folles de l'ethnographie* (Paris: Publications Scientifiques du Muséum national d'Histoire naturelle, 2017).

[25] Séjourné to Victor Brauner, Mexico, May 26, 1945, reproduced in *Victor Brauner, écrits et correspondances*, 256–257.

[26] Fondo Laurette Séjourné, Transcript from the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Exp. 808.

[27] Séjourné to Victor Brauner, Mexico, 1946, reproduced in *Victor Brauner, écrits et correspondances*, 259.

[28] Weissman, 183.

[29] Laurette Séjourné. *Supervivencias de un mundo mágico: Imágenes de cuatro pueblos mexicanos* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1953)

[30] Ibid. 18, 88.

[31] Alfonso Caso and Ignacio Bernal, *Las urnas de Oaxaca* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 1952).

[32] For a useful introduction to these codices and an up-to-date review of Nahua sources more generally, see Camila Townsend, *Fifth Sun: A New History of the Aztecs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 209–231.

[33] Séjourné, *El universo de Quetzalcóatl* (1962; Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1984), 21.

[34] Laurette Séjourné, *Palenque, una ciudad maya* (Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1952. "Agua Quemada, La Visión de los Contrarios Laurette Séjourné," INAH TV, at 5'.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TeZrWdQp1hc>

[35] Laurette Séjourné, *Burning Water*, xiii.

[36] “Agua Quemada, La Visión de los Contrarios Laurette Séjourné,” INAH TV, at 7–10’.

[37] Many of what Séjourné called “palaces” are now recognized as “apartment compounds.” Esther Pasztory, *Teotihuacan: An Experiment in Living* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 46.

[38] Fondo Laurette Séjourné, Correspondencia, Exp. 42, Ignacio Bernal to Laurette Séjourné, December 13, 1956.

[39] “Agua Quemada, La Visión de los Contrarios Laurette Séjourné,” INAH TV, at 11:30–12:30

[40] Séjourné, “La responsabilidad de la arqueología en México,” *Estudios de cultura Náhuatl*, N. 3 (1962): 203–239.

[41] Séjourné, *Burning Water*, 130.

[42] Séjourné, *Burning Water*, 46.

[43] Séjourné, *Burning Water*, 6.

[44] Séjourné, *Burning Water*, 64.

[45] Séjourné, *Burning Water*, 131–179.

[46] Pasztory, 9.

[47] Pasztory, 10.

[48] Fondo Laurette Séjourné, Correspondencia, Exp. 262, León-Portilla to Séjourné, Mexico, May 30, 1958.

[49] Sorá, 140.

[50] Martí Soler “Nota Preliminar,” in *Cosmogonía de mesoamérica* (Mexico: Siglo XXI editores, 2004), 8.

[51] Margaret Randall, “Remembering El Corno Emplumado,”

<https://opendoor.northwestern.edu/archive/exhibits/show/el-corno-emplumado-hemispheric/remembering-el-corno-randall>

Séjourné’s contributions include, “En busca de la cultura perdida,” *El corno emplumado* 5 (1963): 8–26. I thank Harris Feinsod, co-director of the Open Door Archive, for bringing this to my attention.

[52] See, for example, David AJ Murrieta Flores, “Surrealist ‘Counter-Revolution’: S.NO.B and the Mexican

Revolution of 1962,” January 31, 2022 at

<https://ageofrevolutions.com/2022/01/31/surrealist-counter-revolution-s-nob-and-the-mexican-revolution-of-1962/>

[53] Laurette Séjourné, “Vigencia del pasado en México,” *Revista Casa de las Americas* (January-April, 1965), 91–98.

[54] For more on this, the subsequent founding of Siglo XXI editors, and the couple’s engagement with leftist circles, see, Sorá, Ch. 6.

[55] Margaret Randall, *Haydée Santamaría, Cuban Revolutionary* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2015), 130.

[56] Séjourné, *Teatro Escambray: una experiencia* (Havana: Ed. Ciencias Sociales, 1977).

[57] Séjourné, *Teatro Escambray*, 28. “mostrar al campesino una imagen contradictoria de sí mismo en cuanto a su conducta social en el marco revolucionario que... le plantea continuas y nuevas exigencias a su crecimiento ideológico.”

[58] Laurette Séjourné, *La mujer cubana en el quehacer de la historia* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1980).

[59] Asunción Lavrin, review of Séjourné, *La mujer cubana en el quehacer de la historia* in *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 61, no. 3 (1981): 543.

[60] Eduardo Matos Moctezuma, *Arqueología del México antiguo* (Mexico: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2010). I thank Martin Nesvig for this information.

[61] Pasztory, 9.

[62] Pasztory, 9.

[63] Séjourné, *Storia Universale Feltrinelli*, vol. 21: *America precolombiana* (Milan: Feltrinelli Editore, 1971). Fondo Laurette Séjourné, Transcript from the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Exp. 808.

[64] Miguel León-Portilla, *De Teotihuacán a los Aztecas: Antología de fuentes e interpretaciones históricas* (Mexico: UNAM, 1977), 236.

[65] Alfredo López Austin, *The Myth of Quetzalcoatl: Religion, Rulership, and History in the Nahua World*, translated by Russ Davidson and Guilhem Olivier (Boulder: The University Press of Colorado, 2015), 33–34.

[66] Miguel León-Portilla, *De Teotihuacán a los Aztecas*, 236.

[67] Séjourné, *La pensée des anciens Mexicains* (Paris : ed. François Maspero, 1969). Séjourné, *Teotihuacan: métropole de l'Amérique* (Paris : ed. François Maspero, 1969). Séjourné and Pineau Françoise, ‘Les Mayas d’aujourd’hui’ *Annales. Economies, sociétés, civilisations* 21, N. 1 (1966): 32–43. Claude Lévi-Strauss, ‘Religions

comparées des peuples sans écriture,' *École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses. Annuaire* 1967-1968, Vol. 75 (1966) : 61–63.

[68] Pasztory, 9.

[69] Hélène Charron, *Les formes de l'illégitimité intellectuelle : Les femmes dans les sciences sociales françaises, 1890-1940* (Paris : CNRS Editions, 2013).

[70] Paul Gillingham, for example, notes the “overwhelmingly patriarchal environment” in which Eulalia Guzmán forged her career. Gillingham, *Cuauhtémoc's Bones: Forging National Identity in Modern Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2011), 52.

[71] Séjourné, *El Pensamiento náhuatl cifrado en los calendarios* (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1981)

[72] Séjourné, *Cosmogonía de Mesoamérica* (Madrid: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 2004)

[73] Séjourné, *Burning Water*, 183.