

Alma

*Alma recalls the communal farming practices of her pueblo, Huaycali in Guerrero, Mexico. “The combate is not paid, they already know. When they say the word combate they know they are going to work and they only expect a good meal, and maybe a good tequila.” She was thirty-seven years old at the time of this interview.*

ML: You know what I didn’t ask you—about your family and the work in the fields? A woman told me the other day that sometimes when it was harvest time, their family called on other neighbors to help them and then they went and helped in other people’s fields in return. Did your grandparents do that too?

A: Yes, it is done like this because many times it is a short season, around a month, that you have to harvest everything and if it’s a lot, it depends . . . many times you need to sow the land and some families, like my grandparents, were just two people. There were some families that had the couple and three big children, so they had more help, but instead, my grandparents were alone. So they called it *combate*.

ML: *Combate*.

A: *Combate*.

ML: Like fighting? Is it the same name?

A: Same name. When they were going to harvest, let’s say, corn, my grandparents said, “Well, I’m going to invite my compadres, the neighbors. The crop is ready and I have to pick it soon because one neighbor has already released his cows, which means that they are going to roam free and eat everything.” So, he invited them.

What happened then was that my grandmother and I prepared the food, a lot of food, and then we had to make it. My grandfather bought alcohol and then they all went as a group to go pick the crop. The ladies came to help us cook. We killed chickens, a pig, whatever, and the men went to work in the field. We fed them and then they left. It was very nice.

ML: So the celebration is as part of the compensation?

A: Yes.

ML: It is a job that is done without pay?

A: No, they do not pay. The *combate* is not paid, they already know. When they say the word “*combate*” they know they are going to work and they only expect a good meal, and maybe a good tequila.

ML: Is there a celebration dance afterward or is it just getting together to eat?

A: No, we just get together to eat. Well, as you know, in Mexico most people are Catholic. In my ranch, let’s say that there are about thirty-five houses, there were only two, maybe three, that I remembered attending another church, a Christian or Evangelical church, but all the others were

Catholics. So it is a tradition when the crop is maturing, when it is not ready for harvesting yet but you can see the corn, a mass is celebrated. The priest is brought in and people make many tiny houses along the whole street. Each one is made of corn and the priest walks and blesses all the houses, giving thanks for the harvest, because the harvest has borne fruit, and then there is also a party and a dance.

ML: And is that typical of Guerrero? Is it typical of Mexico, of your town?

A: Look—Mexico is so many things. I have known that they celebrate the harvest in different places, but there are so many things in Mexico, so I can tell you that it is typical of my area and those places around me. What I can also tell you is about another very beautiful celebration that I remember from my childhood. It was during the Holy Week, and just today I was remembering it, that on the Holy Week, they fed everyone, and it was so beautiful. I remember when we came from school, they invited us all over and the moms had already cooked tamales, made of only *masita*, beans, we did not eat meat, then it was only beans; sauce, pickled chilies, cheese, bread, and *atole*.

It was so beautiful because everyone came over and prayed. They made rosaries and every hour they would say the rosary, but when we arrived from school, they treated us with special attention: they would serve all the children and old men first. We sat at the table to pray and eat because it was the Holy Week, and after we ate we went back to school and then the adults ate as well. But at this meal children were always served first, it was very special.

Alma, Interview by Marina López, March 23, 2016