The notion of poverty as it is used in the Social Sciences is difficult to define because the scarcity of the basic necessities for sustaining life is something inherent in real, contingent situations. The phenomena of inequality, injustice and deteriorating quality of life that affect the majority of the planet’s population are today crossing the frontiers to which they had been confined by the indicators of development theories, so those contexts now characterized as of “extreme poverty” are ones that long ago passed the point of no return.

The recently-issued document by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (2005) that analyzes the problem of poverty in the region and proposes objectives for its eradication, recognizes that inequality has increased and that the deterioration of access to employment, health services, education and housing extends to the younger generations, whose horizons now border on uncertainty. During the presentation of this document in Mexico, a comment by an official from CEPAL drew the public’s attention when, in reference to the role that migrant remittances play in complementing the survival economies of their families and communities, she stated: “… the poor are financing the poor”. In the Thematic Section of this issue of Relaciones, this quotation suggests the context of the articles in which our contributors examine, from the perspectives of ethnicity and gender, diverse ways of dealing with poverty, by re-signifying the social and cultural tissue of the actors involved.

María Eugenia D’Aubeterre describes how a group of migrants of nahua roots who live in the city of Los Angeles, California, recreate political and social links with their community of origin, located in the center of the state of Puebla, by re-organizing the ceremonial tasks related to their patron saint, St. Michael Archangel. This article takes up the focus of transnational studies from the 1990s that emphasized the role of the social and familial networks that migrants from certain commu-
nities in the United States organized as a way to continue participating in the political, cultural and economic life of their hometowns. Through her ethnographic description of scenes and images that link Los Angeles with San Miguel Acuxecomac, the author recovers the testimonies of survival of poor peasants who hold precarious jobs in the United States, and the willingness of younger generations of men and women to reinvent the meaning of their traditions. One particularly salient point of this process is the construction of symbolic capital goods that, following Pierre Bourdieu, valorize the relations of support, trust, favors and solidarity in order to open spaces for commitment, recognition and participation on the part of migrants in communitarian life. These, in turn, generate among residents new meanings of ‘citizenship in the town’ and ‘work’, due to their stark contrast with the ethnocentric notion of work that is oriented towards the law of interest and the maximization of monetary benefits.

In a second reading of the topic of symbolic goods, Francesco Zanotelli studies the conformation of ethnic identities in Zacoalco de Torres, Jalisco, by analyzing how money emerges as a symbolic element that differentiates antagonistic groups in the context of the celebration of the town’s patron saint festivities.

Zanotelli’s ethnographic research reveals that in Zacoalco the absence of traditions and historical indigenous referents is not the cause of identity differences between ‘Indians’ and ‘mestizos’. Rather, what is evidenced is an ideological process of the creation of ‘the other’ in terms of negativity, based on the imbalance between these two social groups with respect to material necessities and conditions. In this case, the word ‘Indian’ constitutes a means of referring to those who are external to the community; one which is interpreted as equating them with ‘poverty’. In the context of this problematic, the organization and functioning of the ‘Los Moros’ confraternity which coordinates the celebration of the local patron saint festival of St. Francis, presents a suitable scene for analyzing how it is that the circulation of money, inserted into local contexts of meaning, becomes a flexible symbol that represents specific social relationships and senses of belonging. The couples that participate in the confraternity and work during the cycle required for the realization of this fiesta, accept responsibilities and disciplines the
results of which will be shared with the community and evaluated by it. In this process, money is converted into an indicator of identity that defines a person’s value, not in terms of his/her wealth per se, but in reference to the quality of the monetary transactions in which they manage to become involved through receiving and returning. Zanotelli’s article demonstrates the salience of taking into account what people think and do with their economic categories and their concrete means of exchange, in terms of coming to understand the cultural values of a specific social group.

The remaining two articles in the Thematic Section adopt a gender perspective to analyze problems of poverty, unequal access to natural resources and the development of rural societies, with a clear focus on the marginal situation of women.

Denise Soares shares findings from her research carried out in a rural community in Valle de Vizcaino, Baja California Sur, that centered on problems related to the area’s socio-environmental dynamics. In the first part of the article, she offers a detailed analysis of the approaches that have dealt with problems of development and environment, while discussing the contributions of the feminist movement in terms of problematizing women’s participation in processes of sustainable development. In the framework of this ‘state of the question’, the second part presents an examination of the Benito Juárez ejido (municipality of Mulegé), which is located in one of Baja California Sur’s most important tourist areas: the site of the gray whale sanctuary. In natural conditions that are adverse to agriculture, ejidatarios from Benito Juárez make their living from the tourist trade in a section of the Ojo de Liebre lagoon where whales mate and reproduce. As if the lack of governmental policies and economic support needed to sustain the environmental protection of the sanctuary were not enough, there are additional problems within the community itself, such as unequal participation in the division of labor and in the distribution of the revenues that tourism generates. Soares denounces the manifestations of gender inequality in the ejido, which are propitiated by male control of assistance and administration activities for tourists and men’s disdain of women’s supporting role in the domestic sphere and of the possibility that they might share their experiences in order to participate in creating collective projects
and decision-making. Her recommendations for organizing training and promotional programs concerning gender and the environment go beyond the case study and place in perspective another side of the problem of inequality, one related to power relations and gender domination among social actors in poor communities.

Verónica Vázquez and María de Lourdes Godínez analyze the importance that hunting endangered species has gained in the survival of a *nahua* community located in the Sierra Santa Marta, in southeastern Veracruz. The authors describe the advancing environmental deterioration in the Ixtahuapan *ejido* caused by restrictions on access to land among younger generations, and the difficulties involved in financing corn cultivation and, more importantly, livestock-raising or commercial crops. In a natural environment that has formed part of the ‘Los Tuxtlas Biosphere’ since 1998, armadillo- and deer-hunting have emerged as activities that complement a domestic economy in which both the children of *ejidatarios*—who have no access to land—and the *ejidatarios* themselves, participate: the former for reasons of subsistence, the latter for sport. The article examines the process of social differentiation and the reinvention of the status of masculine power based on hunting activities, the material and symbolic referents of which include possessing firearms and other instruments, packs of fine dogs, and the distribution of hunted meat. Inherent in the context of these two models of hunting that pertain to two distinct masculine statuses is the reaffirmation of forms of subordinating women in the terrain of sexuality, and of assuring their marginalization from hunting activities and access to their products.

In the Documents Section, we present an article by Fernando González Dávila, who from methodological perspective reconstructs the social environment of actors and the dynamics of labor involved in the creation of the altar pieces at the Church of St. Cayetano in Mineral de Valencia, Guanajuato. The personages involved in this study are Manuel Andrés de la Riva, a master-builder, and Antonio de Cárdenas, a carpenter, sculptor and builder, who were entrusted with constructing and directing projects at the St. Cayetano church in the last quarter of the 18th century. As part of a project entitled “A Study of the Construction System and State of Preservation of the Altar Piece at St.
Cayetano, Mineral de Valencia, Guanajuato (Estudio del sistema constructivo y estado de conservación del retablo de San Cayetano, la Valenciana, Guanajuato, ENCRYM/INAH), González reproduces a singular document from the repository at the Archivo Histórico de Guanajuato that explains not only the instrumental technology used in manufacturing altar pieces, but also the level of prosperity that a competent master of a trade could achieve, and the size of the investment required to set up a workshop suitable for producing such fine works.

This issue of Relaciones closes with the General Section, which contains an article by Patricia Escandón on Tancitaro and the hot country under Franciscan administration in the second half of the 16th century and the first half of the 17th. The central topic of this contribution is the process of pioneer evangelization that was undertaken by Franciscans such as Juan de San Miguel, Friar Jacobo Daciano and Friar Martín de la Coruña, among others; all of whom labored in the inhospitable lands of the Tepalcatepec Basin from 1552 to 1636. The study examines the adverse circumstances that those missionaries faced as they struggled to retain the Indians on the path of the doctrine despite the effects of violent military incursions launched by the Spanish as they sought to subdue the Tarascans, and the internal intrigues of ecclesiastical institutions. The main contribution of this article is its detailed documentation of the modalities that gradually led to the conquest of Michoacán’s Hotlands.

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Traducción de Paul C. Kersey