



BEHIND THE MASK

GENDER HYBRIDITY IN A ZAPOTEC COMMUNITY

ALFREDO MIRANDÉ

A vivid and compelling look at gender identity and acceptance in Mexico

| LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES |
| INDIGENOUS STUDIES |

March

272 pp.

6 x 9

7 b&w illustrations, 3 tables

Cloth

978-0-8165-3544-6 / \$55.00 S

Electronic edition available

The image of biologically male people dancing while dressed in traditional, colorful female Zapotec, Juchiteca attire stands in sharp contrast to the prevailing view of Mexico as the land of charros, machismo, and unbridled ranchero masculinity. These indigenous people are called Los Muxes, and they are neither man nor woman, but rather a hybrid third gender.

After seeing a video of a Muxe Vela, or festival, sociologist Alfredo Mirandé was intrigued by the contradiction between Mexico's patriarchal reputation and its warm acceptance of Los Muxes. Seeking to get past traditional Mexican masculinity, he presents us with *Behind the Mask*, which combines historical analysis, ethnographic field research, and interviews conducted with Los Muxes of Juchitán over a period of seven years. Mirandé observed community events, attended Muxe velas, and interviewed both Muxes and other Juchitán residents. Prefaced by an overview of the study methods and sample, the book challenges the ideology of a male-dominated Mexican society driven by the cult of machismo, featuring photos alongside four appendixes.

Delving into many aspects of their lives and culture, the author discusses how the Muxes are perceived by others, how the Muxes perceive themselves, and the acceptance of a third gender status among various North American indigenous groups. Mirandé compares traditional Mexicano/Latino conceptions of gender and sexuality to modern or Western object choice configurations. He concludes by proposing a new hybrid model for rethinking these seemingly contradictory and conflicting gender systems.

A native of Mexico City, ALFREDO MIRANDÉ is Distinguished Professor of sociology and ethnic studies at the University of California, Riverside. He is the author of many articles in academic journals and nine books, including *La Chicana: The Mexican-American Woman* (co-authored with Evangelina Enríquez), *Jalos, USA: Transnational Community and Identity*, *Rascuache Lawyer: Toward a Theory of Ordinary Litigation*, and *Hombres y Machos: Masculinity and Latino Culture*.

"A highly original work, featuring vivid and compelling descriptions of a unique gender identity and its acceptance in a twenty-first century Mexican setting, with the potential to broaden several current frameworks in the gender field."

—Maxine Baca Zinn, Michigan State University

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