

# AMBAR VARELA MATTUTE

Ph.D. in Social Sciences | Cultural Sociologist & Anthropologist of Material Culture

Visiting Fellow, Center for Cultural Sociology Yale University

va\_matute@yahoo.com.mx | Mexico City, Mexico

## RESEARCH PROFILE

Ambar Varela Mattute is a Mexican cultural sociologist and anthropologist of material culture whose work sits at the intersection of the Strong Program of Cultural Sociology, indigenous studies, and the anthropology of objects and memory. Her research — developed across fieldwork in Chiapas, an academic residence at Yale University, and extensive archival and visual analysis — examines how Zapatista and other indigenous communities of Abya Yala objectify collective suffering, construct iconic meanings, and forge alternative civil spheres through textiles, craft objects, and performative practices. Her forthcoming book, *Tattooed Histories: Zapatista Iconography and the Material Memory of Resistance*, traces how craft objects produced by Zapatista women function as sites of iconic consciousness, cultural trauma processing, and symbolic reparation — proposing a new framework for understanding material culture as political and mnemonic archive. She is a recognized member of Mexico's National System of Researchers (SNI, Candidate Level, 2026–2029).

### Primary Research Lines

Cultural Sociology & Social Performance: Application of the Strong Program (cultural trauma and iconic consciousness) to political subjectivities

Gender Studies, Textile Memories & Territorial Violence: Memory agencies in forced disappearance contexts in Mexico

Material Culture Anthropology & Indigenous Resistance in Abya Yala: Craft, iconography, and alternative civil spheres

## EDUCATION

### Ph.D. in Social Science Research (Sociology)

**Institution:** Facultad Latinoamericana de Ciencias Sociales (FLACSO Mexico)

**Dissertation:** "The Zapatista Movement Told Through Its Objects." Analysis of the social construction of meanings around zapatismo condensed in crafts sold in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas

**Completed:** 2020 | Awarded with Honorable Mention (Mención Honorífica)

### M.A. in Urban Studies

**Institution:** El Colegio de México

**Thesis:** "Magic in Modernity: Real del Monte, Pueblo Mágico." Review of the Pueblos Mágicos Program outcomes regarding local cultural heritage preservation

**Completed:** 2012

### B.A. in Political Science and Public Administration

**Institution:** El Colegio de México

**Thesis:** "A Dream of Africa." Analysis of structural adjustment policies in Sub-Saharan Africa

**Completed:** 2010

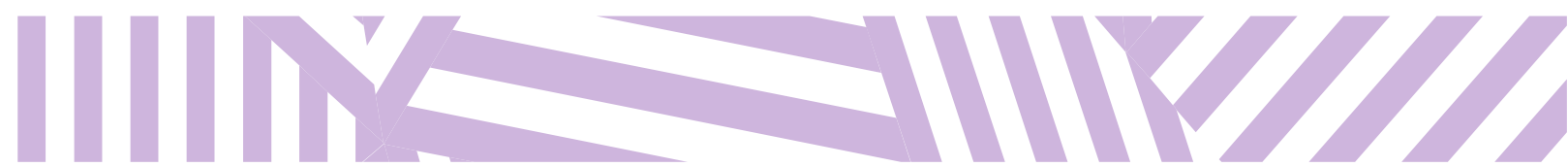
## CURRENT POSITION

### Postdoctoral Researcher

**Institution:** Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana – Iztapalapa (UAM-I), Department of Anthropology

**Project:** "The Suffering That Unites Us and the Struggle That Moves Us": Cultural trauma as a theoretical-methodological framework for studying crises linked to indigenous resistance

**Funding:** Postdoctoral Fellowship, Secretaría de Ciencia, Humanidades, Tecnología e Innovación (2022–2027)



## VISITOR FELLOWSHIP — YALE UNIVERSITY

Center for Cultural Sociology (CCS), Yale University | Visitor Fellow

**Period:** September 1 – November 30, 2025 · New Haven, CT, USA

As a Visitor Fellow at Yale's Center for Cultural Sociology, Ambar Varela submitted her postdoctoral research on Zapatista iconography to the scrutiny of the Strong Program in Cultural Sociology. Working within the intellectual environment of the Yale School, she developed a robust theorization of iconic consciousness and the role of craft and textiles in collective sense-making and the elaboration of historical trauma. The fellowship deepened her analysis of how indigenous women objectify collective suffering and propose, through their textile productions, iconographies of resistance as mechanisms of symbolic reparation.

---

## BOOK IN PROGRESS

*Tattooed Histories: Zapatista Iconography and the Material Memory of Resistance*

**Under proposal:** Anthem Press (Latin American Studies / Cultural Sociology)

This book examines how the craft objects produced by Zapatista women — dolls, textiles, embroideries, painted gourds — function as iconic archives of collective suffering and political memory. Drawing on the Strong Program of Cultural Sociology (Alexander, Smith), ethnographic fieldwork in Chiapas, and a research fellowship at Yale's Center for Cultural Sociology, the study proposes the concept of iconic consciousness as a framework for understanding how material objects condense, transmit, and transform cultural trauma into collective resistance. *Tattooed Histories* argues that Zapatista iconography is not merely decorative but constitutes a mnemonic and political grammar through which indigenous women narrate thirty years of struggle, negotiate public identity, and project alternative visions of civil life. The manuscript builds on peer-reviewed publications in the *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, and *Chungara*, as well as on the author's doctoral dissertation (FLACSO Mexico, 2020, Honorable Mention) and her postdoctoral project at UAM-Iztapalapa (2022–2027).

---

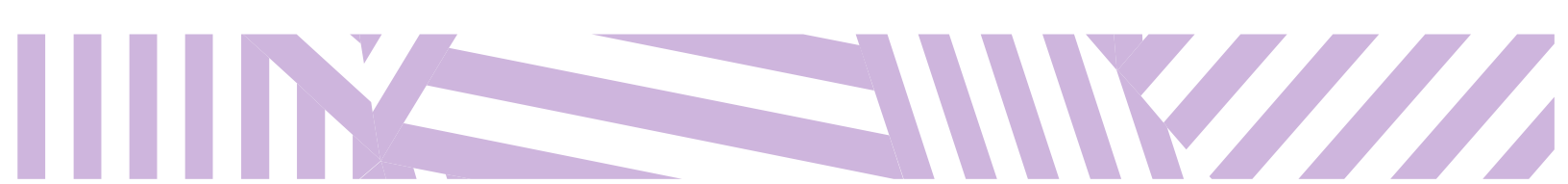
## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### Books

- **Co-coordination:** Treinta años 'sembrando rebeldía'. Reflexiones desde Chiapas sobre 'otros mundos posibles'. UAM – Editorial Bonilla Artigas, Mexico, 2026. ISBN 9789689728726
- **Co-authorship:** Diferenciación, Racionalización y Conflicto. Una lectura desde la Sociología Cultural. Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas, Spain, 2027 [Forthcoming, peer-reviewed]

### Peer-Reviewed Journal Articles

- Varela Mattute, A. (2026). 'Cuando el dolor se mira: el documental como producto cultural del sufrimiento social.' *El Ojo que piensa. Revista de cine Iberoamericano*, 17(32), 67–92.
- Varela Mattute, A. (2025). 'Inestabilidad y violencia política en Chiapas: entre desigualdad, etnia y género.' *Ra Ximhai*, 21(2), 183–202.
- Varela Mattute, A. & co-author (2025). 'Weaving at the pandemic to make the virus less scary: A performative approach to the making of handcrafts.' *American Journal of Cultural Sociology*, 3(3), 542–574. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41290-025-00252-0>
- Varela Mattute, A. & co-author (2023). 'Identidades tejidas y elaboradas en la vestimenta indígena: La nagua Chamula y el chumbe inga como artefactos culturales.' *Chúngara. Revista de Antropología Chilena*, 55(4), 751–772.
- Varela Mattute, A. (2021). 'La muñequita zapatista: significación social de un objeto icónico artesanal.' *Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic Studies*, 18(1), 350–370. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17442222.2021.1877871>
- Varela Mattute, A. (2019). '¡Asesinan al alcalde de Chamula! Apuntes para su lectura como acto performativo.' *Revista RELACSO*, 8(15). <https://doi.org/10.18504/rl1508-004-2019>



- Varela Mattute, A. (2026). Del luchando por un mundo nuevo al otro mundo es posible: objetos que alivian el trauma de la guerrilla. In Treinta años sembrando rebeldía (pp. 461-488). UAM - Bonilla Artigas.
- Varela Mattute, A. (2025). 'La estrella roja: Un símbolo de identidad zapatista que ilumina luchas alrededor del mundo.' In Resistencias Indígenas en el Abya Yala (pp. 147-177). Abya Yala, Quito. ISBN 9789942461066
- Varela Mattute, A. & co-author (2025). 'La apertura como variable de la «Buena gobernanza».' In Más allá del diseño: Consejos consultivos y participación ciudadana en México (pp. 171-200). Tirant Lo Blanch. ISBN 9788410958210

---

## TEACHING

- **Seminar on Anthropology of Experience** – Graduate Program in Anthropology, CIMSUR (2026)
- **Social Theory III: The Cultural Turn** – M.A. in Social Sciences, FLACSO Mexico (2025)
- **Sociology I: Civil Sphere Theory** – Ph.D. Program in Social Sciences, FLACSO Mexico (2025–2026)

---

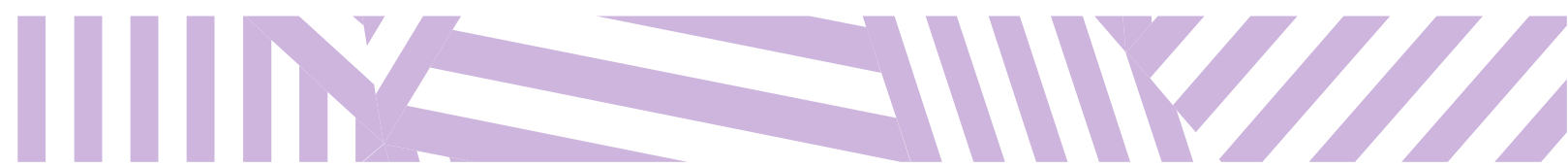
## AWARDS & FELLOWSHIPS

- **SNI Candidate Level (2026–2029)** – Mexico's National System of Researchers, SECIHTI
- **Visitor Fellowship, Center for Cultural Sociology, Yale University** (2025)
- **Postdoctoral Research Fellowship, SECIHTI** (2022–2027)
- **Best Paper Award, Latin American and Caribbean Ethnic & Race Studies** – 6th ERIPP Conference, Gonzaga University (2019)
- **Emerging Researchers Grant, Universidad de Curaçao** (2021)
- **National Doctoral Fellowship, CONACYT** (2016–2019)
- **National Master's Fellowship, CONACYT** (2009–2011)

---

## SELECTED INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

- LASA 2025 (Latin American Studies Association): 'Entre artesanas, artesanías y políticas gubernamentales interculturales' – Hybrid, May 2025
  - 67th Annual WSSA Conference: 'Afromexicanidad and the Iconic Character of Race'; 'Tejiendo la pandemia: COVID-19 and Tsotsil Women' – Presential, April 2025
  - 66th Annual WSSA Conference: 'Between Documentaries, Resistance and Trauma: Indigenous Resistance in Latin America' – Presential, April 2024
  - LASA 2023 (Canada): 'Indigenous Women Facing the Pandemic from Autonomy and Solidarity' – Online, May 2023
  - XXXIII ALAS Sociology Congress: 'Women in Resistance, Women Who Weave Textiles to Inspire the World' – Hybrid, August 2022
  - LASA 2022: 'Chamula Female Identity Woven into a Skirt' – Online, May 2022
  - Native American Studies Symposium, UC Davis (by invitation): 'If El Marcos Wore a Huipil: Chiapas Handcrafts as Cultural Meanings of Indigenous Resistance' – Online, April 2021
  - 6th ERIPP Conference, Gonzaga University: 'La muñequita zapatista and the Struggle of Dignified and Rebel Women' – Presential, September 2019 [Award-winning paper]
  - 3rd Congress of Indigenous Peoples of Latin America, University of Brasília – Presential, July 2019
- 



## RESEARCH NETWORK & ACADEMIC SERVICE

### Co-founder & Strategic Coordinator

Red de Estudios sobre Resistencias Indígenas (RERI) — International Academic Network on Indigenous Resistance Studies (2022–present). Responsible for ethics protocols, institutional liaison, and leadership of Research Axis 3: Emotions, Subjectivities, and Epistemic Resistances.

### Peer Review

- Latin American Research Review (USA)
- Editorial Abya Yala (Ecuador)
- Lexington Books (UK)
- Revista Pueblos y Fronteras Digital, CIMSUR
- SECIHTI – Community Science Dissemination Call 2025 (45 projects reviewed)

### Curatorial Work

- Researcher & Curator, 'La muñequita zapatista y la lucha de las mujeres dignas y rebeldes' — Galería Kikimundo (San Cristóbal, 2026), UAM Centro Cultural Casa del Tiempo (Mexico City, 2024), Museo Jtatik Samuel (San Cristóbal, 2023–2024)

---

## PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

- Latin American Studies Association (LASA)
- Asociación Latinoamericana de Sociología (ALAS)
- World Social Science Association (WSSA)
- Red de Estudios sobre Resistencias Indígenas (RESI)
- Cultural Sociology Program, FLACSO Mexico — Co-Coordinator

---

## LANGUAGES

- **Spanish:** Native
  - **English:** Advanced (C1, El Colegio de México); scholarly publications and international conference presentations in English
- 

Mexico City, July 2026

