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Between Two Worlds

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Between two worlds




Ticas file:

At Linfield since 2001

B.A. California State University, Northridge

Ph.D. University of California, Berkeley

Co-translator of Eunice Odio's *The Fire's Journey: Part I* with Keith Ekiss, and Mauricio Espinoza; Tavern Books, 2013

 Watch video: youtube.com/linfieldcollege/videos

Warning: pens may fly in Sonia Ticas' classroom.

A passionate and animated teacher who talks with her hands, Ticas occasionally loses grasp of a pen; but rarely the attention of her students.

Ticas, associate professor of Spanish and Latin American Studies coordinator, is known for her energy, accessibility and high academic expectations.

"She's very expressive with her hands and words," said Alan Venegas '15, an athletic training major who calls Ticas a mentor. "She has shown me that a college language course can be just as hard as any science course I've taken. She is patient, and she encourages us to take our time, find the word and complete the sentence in Spanish as best we can."

In addition to teaching and mentoring Linfield students, Ticas is pursuing groundbreaking research in El Salvador and translating Central American poetry.

Ticas' research on the history of feminism and women's suffrage in El Salvador is cutting edge – and close to her heart. Born

in El Salvador, she came to the United States in 1980, at age 12, shortly after the start of the Salvadoran Civil War.

"We were refugees," she said of her family, which includes 12 siblings. "It was a very difficult time for Salvadorans leaving the country, and we were a very large family so separations were common."

Ticas ultimately immigrated to Los Angeles with her mother and seven siblings. As a Ph.D. student in 1998, she returned to El Salvador while researching women poets in Central America. She found a very different country than she remembered from her childhood.

"It was very personal for me," she said of that first visit. "The country has been ravaged by war and the legacies of war, rampant violence, and out-of-place youth from broken families trying to find a niche in society. Many have grown up without parents or have been deported from the U.S. and joined different gangs. Violence is a huge problem."

That initial research visit proved pivotal for Ticas. There in the 1920s poetry of El Salvadoran women, she stumbled upon debates on feminism – an area of research that had never been done. Ticas said the fieldwork has been challenging since resource materials are scarce, and in some cases, no longer exist. Still, Ticas has returned numerous times since that first visit and has completed a book manuscript based on her research.

"Every time I go back I feel somewhat at home, seeking to belong and longing to belong, yet not fully a part of that society," she said. "I am Salvadoran but I live between two worlds."

Ticas arrived at Linfield in 2001, drawn to the college's focus on teaching and international programs. Since then, she's accompanied students to Oaxaca, Mexico, and most recently Spain and Morocco, looking at the history of the region along with contemporary issues of cross-cultural problems.

"Morocco is the gateway to Europe for many Africans," said Ticas. "It's a very multicultural society so for me it has a lot of commonalities with my teaching of Spanish and looking at Latino communities in the U.S. or issues of immigration."

The experience gave Linfield students the chance to interact with local peers and residents.

"Our students had wonderful opportunities to see other young people like them share aspirations and really break down a lot of the cultural barriers and stereotypes."

Ticas' student, Venegas, took part in the class to Spain and Morocco, and partly as a result, hopes to join the Peace Corps after graduation.

"Both countries provided eye-opening experiences," said Venegas, who recalled a memorable visit to a mosque in the medina, the ancient part of the city of Fes. Due to restricted access, only he and Ticas were allowed to enter.

"Outside was chaotic and loud, but inside the mosque it was peaceful and quiet, a place of prayer. It's difficult to describe,

Sonia Ticas, associate professor of Spanish, is a native of El Salvador and her heritage directly impacts her research – the first of its kind on the roots of feminism in El Salvador. She recently completed a manuscript on the Salvadoran women's suffrage movement.

but during those moments we shared a mutual appreciation and gratitude for the country of Morocco. I will never forget that."

Ticas views her work with students – both inside and outside the classroom – as planting seeds for future growth.

"I don't think students really see the fruits of the experience until later," she said. "Perhaps they're out in the workplace and confronted with difference. At that moment, they might remember their experience from Morocco when we were able to find commonalities beyond physical appearance and stereotypes."

– Laura Davis



Poetic translations

Ticas strengthens her Central American ties translating the poetry of Costa Rican writer Eunice Odio. Tavern Books published the first translated volume in a series of four of *El Tránsito de Fuego (The Fire's Journey)*, 2013), and the second one is scheduled for release this July. The project includes two other translators and draws on the unique skills of each.

"The poetry structure is very grammatically complex, so collaboration is the best way to go about it," Ticas said. "You're always recreating as you're translating. Not reinventing but coming up with different words that will conjure up a set of images. I need another Spanish speaker in the group to run words by, 'how does this sound to you?'"

As she translates, Ticas grapples with diction, word choice, historical context and cultural components. All the while, she is careful to remain faithful to the original text.

"You want to get a feel for tone, using the same level of language – in this case it's highly erudite poetry," she said. "It's very difficult to make it accessible to an English-speaking audience when already in Spanish it's quite complex."