

The laundry of consciences: History of laundry services in the sixties and seventies.

The art of hand washing.

Washing thoroughly and washing one's conscience—especially someone else's—are two things that can be done in the same place. For the former, it's necessary to block the sink drain with a rag and let the water accumulate. After that, separate from the pile of laundry those items whose collars and sleeves require pre-scrubbing with bar soap, especially underwear identified by a very particular stamp.

White clothes, jeans stiffened with Coca-Cola, and items bought at Milano department stores should be soaked separately to avoid cross-contamination from stains and dyes. Jeans stiffened with Coca-Cola, as was fashionable

in the seventies, were a symbol of rebellion. Washing them was almost a political act.

For all this work, it is ideal to use a soap made with tallow.

From here the difficult task begins: pouring the detergent onto the fibers and scrubbing them with warrior-like determination, pouring cups of the crystalline liquid over them.

Depending on the garment's volume, it will need to be rolled up and whipped mercilessly from a height greater than head height. This requires muscles better developed than those of any office worker in a gym.

The rubbing technique varies according to each family's custom. The best is the one learned from Grandma. To contradict this

axiom is an offense with serious consequences.

Depending on the situation, a porous stone will be used to remove the tassels, a wooden board to receive the lashes, or an old and irreplaceable brush to dislodge the stubborn stain.

The rinsing process requires a collection of buckets filled with water to push the clothes in with a rhythmic squeezing motion, which dislodges the detergent residue. Once the clothes have been wrung out to remove the last drop, it's time to hang them up to dry.

This equipment can vary. The most common one in the 1960s consisted of a young tree trunk with a channel that was tilted to tension

the rope. This rope was attached at its opposite end to a ring in the wall.

Rope was made from henequen, yucca, or maguey fibers, although cotton ropes appeared later. Henequen rope was more reliable than any modern extension cord. It could withstand clothing, secrets, and even marital arguments.

The drying technique consisted of spreading the garments out and whipping them against the open space, then securing them with rope strands. The sun and wind would finish the job.

Silvinita's sorrow and desire: Chronicle of a mother and a laundry room.

Handwashing doesn't just clean the fabric; it reveals the soul of the laundress. Each

garment receives the punishment or caress she doesn't dare to give. The fabrics understand disdain, tenderness, anger. That feeling is imprinted on the body's rhythm as the one doing the washing.

A dance synchronized to radio melodies is a sign of joy; a carving with military discipline reveals the tedium of routine; a swaying of hips is a sign of harmony; and a gentle glide, accompanied by the scent of fabric softener, is a symbol of marital happiness.

None of these applied to Silvinita. Her rhythm was one of indifference, like that of a worker cutting a thousand pieces of aluminum in front of a machine all day long. In her work, there was no dingy neck she couldn't tackle, no stain she wouldn't banish. This could only be the result of years of experience, and she had many.

Her already small body had shrunk even more. Her lustrous black braids were now a collection of white strands; her hands a loose, knotted fist. Every movement wrinkled her face, drawing it down into the drain.

Each clean garment represented twenty cents worth of life: hers and that of her beloved daughter. The one who was scorned by the man who carried her and by his mother. That little girl she carried down the mountain in her arms, for whom she walked two hundred thousand meters; the one whose face no one dared to touch or even offer a compliment.

Her daughter Zoraida, nicknamed "La Cuataneta" in the neighborhood, was the one from whom she learned the only song of her life: a lullaby. The same daughter who later spat out her bowl of soup, who discovered the

hiding place of the pennies, who broke the only mirror in their house—the same one Silvinita used to remember her youth. From then on, she only combed her hair with her memories.

Zoraida blamed all mothers for her misfortune, starting with nature itself. It so happened that, on one occasion, she overheard old women saying at the washhouses: 'There is no such thing as an ugly woman at fifteen.'

The night before her birthday, she saw in her fantasies her new face: just like the doll that had once appeared next to her pillow. With that white complexion, rosy cheeks, upturned nose, and those long eyelashes beside her honey-golden eyes. Nothing like her reflection: with bulging eyes, cratered cheeks, asymmetrical lips, and that sponge where her nose should be.

Without realizing it, she fell into a deep sleep, awaiting the mysterious vapor of a fairy that would enter through her open mouth. Upon waking, she rushed to the mirror, her heart pounding like a boat motor. But a couple of minutes later, a long wail was heard, followed by copious crying. The residents of the neighborhood closed their doors and windows, fearful of being invaded by a terrifying spirit.

Silvinita was easy to spot on the streets. Her body was invisible, but not the enormous bundle of dirty laundry she carried on her back, held in place by a knot tied around her forehead. If you had seen that bundle floating above the sidewalk, you would have thought it was magic.

She was so skilled at her profession that she could wash away her daughter's filth. Every

night she would cleanse her with a kiss placed from afar, to avoid being insulted; with a saint under the girl's bed, to ward off bad dreams. Her efforts were futile: the filth returned every day.

The loving mother had a sorrow and a wish. Her sorrow was accompanied by the fear of waking in eternal darkness. Her wish was simple, yet immense: to receive a kiss from La Cuataneta a second before that happened.

The first thing happened one ordinary afternoon, when the enormous bundle fell next to a centuries-old pepper tree. An unexpected dizziness blurred his vision. The few words that no one would have understood bounced around inside his skull without order or sense, while the fingers of his hand defied his will.

The second thing didn't happen a second before. Or after. Or ever .

Washing consciences is an entertaining act:
Women and secrets in the Mexican
neighborhood.

A neighborhood laundromat was more than that: it was a court of morality, where testimonies, trials, and sentences were handed down—though rarely evidence—for all sorts of rivalries, misunderstandings, and jealousies. Lawyers were scarce there, and every action—observed or fabricated—could be used against the accused, who, incidentally, was expected to be absent during the proceedings.

There were many crimes or offenses that were adjudicated there; I will mention some of the most common ones:

- It is reported that Fulana, Fulano's wife, receives free and inexplicable perks from the butcher, who makes her pass behind the freezer so that she can touch the best of the meat.
- Zutanita, Zutana's daughter, has been seen leaving the bakery with the marijuana user from the soccer fields.
- Pelangano gave Pelangana a beating, but she deserved it.
- Menganito, the son of Mengano, was born with the same face as the hardware store clerk.
- Zurangana was caught stealing underwear from clotheslines.

- Turangana is the one who puts cemetery dirt on Mengana's door.
- Turanganito gave lice to all the bald kids at school.
- The one who took the patrol car was Zutano's brother.
- The president of the republic is a son of a bitch!!!

Any accusation could be cause for a brawl, even a pitched battle, in which each female soldier chose her side for reasons of friendship, complicity, or just to settle the score in the last council meeting in front of the washhouse.

The heat of the skirmishes involved hair-pulling, forehead bumps, and a good deal of insults. And, of course, the cheers and cries of many little ones.

After tensions eased, it seemed likely that a friendly reconciliation would be agreed upon – in front of witnesses – until envy, ambition, or a new misunderstanding renewed the cries of war.

It is no coincidence that the behavior of our politicians is based on the battleground of the laundromats.

The judgments of the washhouse vanish with the water, but their echoes remain trapped in the concrete. Because before it was a court of law, the washhouse was an altar. And each splash of water, a prayer. Each garment, a confession.

Between gourds and silences: Mexican customs in the soul of the washhouse.

The traditional washbasin is made of reinforced concrete or cement. In Mexico, it is still handcrafted in communities like San Bartolomé Tlaltelulco (State of Mexico), El Salitre (Querétaro), and Tepatitlán (Jalisco). Fortunately, there is no evidence—yet—of washbasins manufactured in China, nor is there a way to order them through an app.

If anyone thinks this heavy contraption is only useful for cleaning clothes, they're sorely mistaken. This prehistoric, now almost extinct, tool has served for centuries to:

- Wash the dishes and rinse the fruit.
- Being a bathroom and wading pool for children - whose naked image can be disturbing, especially when it also serves as a urinal.

- Soaking brushes with thinner or turpentine explains his expressionist style.
- Remove scales from fish.
- To function as an aquarium for tropical fish, which sooner or later begin their escape beneath the city's subsoil.
- To cry or pray over a misfortune in solitude, accompanied by the sound of water falling from the tap.

It is a shame that this whole world has been banished by modern washing machines and dryers, which now have the audacity to disdain the heat of the sun and are not even good at providing the rhythm of a chaca-chaca, like those old ones that, with their rollers and handle, squeezed the clothes at will, leaving them as flat as bacon.

There was something whose beauty I cannot forget. The image of those women who, with the help of a gourd, washed their long black hair. Canvases of satin illuminated by a whisper of the moon. They squeezed pearls drop by drop with their hands, arranging them with a twist of their heads on their backs.

The washhouses at dawn are the resting place of lost souls. The whole neighborhood knows it. It's not advisable to look under the flagstones, because surely a pair of eyes will open from nowhere. If you must wash at those hours, you should ask God to light the moon. Otherwise, you shouldn't turn behind you or pay attention to any hand that touches your shoulder.

Soaps that marked an era: between foam, memory and resistance.

In the heart of the neighborhood washhouses, soaps were silent protagonists. Each bar had its own character, its own aroma, its own promise of cleansing and redemption. They were symbols of class, of magical efficiency, and of custom.

Fab , with its blue packaging and bold lettering, was the ally of mothers facing mountains of school clothes. It promised impeccable whiteness and a scent that lasted longer than recess.

Zote , the eternal pink, remains a favorite from great-grandmothers to great-granddaughters. Made with tallow and coconut scent, its power not only washes and perfumes, but also serves to: repel insects, wash dishes, repair gas leaks, heal wounds, and remove spells.

Rosa Venus , though better known as toilet soap, also had its place in the laundry room. Its floral fragrance and metallic wrapper were synonymous with accessible elegance. Some laundresses used it on delicate garments, as if the soap could restore their glamour.

Amole , a pre-Hispanic soap made from roots and plants like amolxóchitl, was used by indigenous peoples to wash their bodies and clothes. Its plant-based lather was gentle yet effective.

La Cima and Rincón , although less well known today, were part of the domestic ecosystem, where each product had its place and its ritual.

But when it comes to stain removal, all of us older folks know that *Ariel* , with its powerful

enzymes, can turn a bucket into an automatic washing machine and bring the beaches of Acapulco to any rooftop. This detergent, besides being economical, was the unexpected inhabitant of any cookie tin, where it would be safe from moisture.

On the other hand, if you want a detergent that will last you all week, and you don't want to have to take off your bathrobe to be seen in the laundry room, *Roma* is the one for you. It's not only good for floors, dishes, and bathrooms, but it's also an inexpensive remedy for dandruff. And don't forget, it lasts longer and costs less.

The lather is gone, the scent has faded, and the effort is trapped in the grooves of the concrete. Today, the soaps no longer sing. They only obey.

Laundry and comfort in the 21st century: A world where effort is in vain.

Be that as it may, it's good not to forget that dirty laundry should be washed at home.

Mexico is a specialist in that. We are a society accustomed to the filth of privileged leaders and corrupt politicians. To this day, we haven't been able to devise a formula for soap that repels rodents and cleans the drains.

We appreciate the convenience of the modern world, where there's always a machine cleaning or thinking for us. It won't be long before 2062, when we'll see Rosie the Robot give an order to the cleaning crew to wash, dry, iron, and replace the buttons on all our clothes in seconds. All while our obese humanity is fed directly into our mouths by a smart spoon.

That comfortable, cartoonish future, where the robotic maid will save us the trouble of issuing an instruction, is already on the horizon.

By the way, does anyone know where the partner of all our socks runs away to?

Today, at the dawn of the 21st century, effort has become a regressive morality. Production no longer merits fatigue, dedication, or virtue. There's not even the motivation to clean up our waste. It's curious that what's free and instant doesn't lengthen the workday: it only erases work and pride.

We would do well to refrain from destroying the washbasins or placing them under the protection of a museum. Comfort can lead to adversity. If this is the case, it is worth

remembering how to cleanse the filth of an easy world with our own hands.

In the washhouses, you can still hear the echo of the women who washed more than just clothes. They washed the soul of a country that no longer sees them. But... some memories can only be cleansed with your hands.