

Anthropology
AND THE POLITICS OF
Representation

Edited by Gabriela Vargas-Cetina

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tween various scholars and various individuals in Fourth World social movements in ontological, epistemological, and methodological projects is, indeed, the condition for and the means to new representations of identity but will not determine those representations, each of which will be based, I would argue, upon new forms of contingency.

Notes

1. Patterson (2001) charts an interesting and detailed social history of anthropology in the United States that entails a significant sociology of anthropological knowledge as well.

2. Derrida (1974) historicized texts as cultural artifacts. Arguably, his work lets 1980s literary theory “off the hook,” to some extent at least, with respect to the argument I have made here. But I myself would not make such an argument. Deconstruction, as practiced by Derrida and others, is primarily about reading and does not treat history in the manner I would like to. I am interested in pursuing the analysis of events, ideologies, personalities, systems of production and consumption, social and cultural movements, and such, through chains of real, and not only discursive, causality.

3. In many important instances class was also a central parameter of identity engaged by influential and brilliant theorists, such as Eric Wolf, June Nash, Donald Dunham, William Roseberry, and Paul Willis. At the same time, I would guess that because of its analytic complexity and the demands of deploying the concept theoretically, as well as because class was not at the forefront of the identity movements that erupted in the 1960s, class was frequently *not* foregrounded among the routinized parameters of identity discourse in anthropology.

4. For example, see Field 1999b and Gould 1998 for the case of Nicaragua; see Sider 1993 and Moore 1987 for other North American cases.

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Strategic Essentialism, Scholarly Inflation, and Political Litmus Tests

The Moral Economy of Hying the Contemporary Mayas

David Stoll

Our subject is the collision between deconstructive anthropology and indigenous activism. James Clifford (1988) spotted it in the 1976 Mashpee trial—cultural anthropologists no longer believed in the reified definition of tribe and culture, which the Mashpees needed to prove their existence as a legally recognizable entity. Jean Jackson fine-tuned the question in 1989: How can we talk about the making of culture without making enemies? Jackson and Kay Warren (2002) have articulated the problem more recently: to defend land rights and other claims based on indigenous rights, indigenous leaders must define boundary and authenticity in ways that anthropologists have the knowledge to refute.

My own work illustrates the problem. In 1998 I published an investigation of the historical background of *I, Rigoberta Menchú* (Burgos-Debray 1984; Stoll 2008), the 1982 life story of the 1992 Nobel peace laureate. Like other Mayan youth orphaned by the counterinsurgency campaigns of the Guatemalan army, Rigoberta Menchú fled into the arms of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP). A year after she joined the EGP as a political cadre, the organization sent her to Europe with a daunting assignment: to tell the story of her people. And she did, more eloquently than anyone had expected. But the way she made a splash was by turning her family and village into representative Indians who suffer every conceivable form of oppression. It was quite a story—but not the same as her family’s and village’s. They had their own rather different stories, which I thought should also be heard.

So was I deconstructing an indigenous representation? Well, I deconstructed a particular one with a large and loyal audience. Many activists and

academics presumed that Menchú's story represented Guatemala's indigenous population. In its most elemental form, as a story of persecution, exile, and eventual triumph, it was indeed one with which many Guatemalans identified. But I did not deconstruct Menchú's story at this level; I corroborated it, and a decade later it is alive and well. What I deconstructed was her account of her family's situation before the war and how political violence started locally, because this is where her story diverged from that of neighbors and relatives.

Some Mayas were upset with me, including Menchú herself. Others were not. Some congratulated me for "telling the truth"—that is, publishing their side of the story. So I wasn't deconstructing *their* representations—I was contextualizing a version that grew out of a particular person's exile to Mexico, her affiliation with a guerrilla organization, and her appeal to international audiences. Reducing the conflict to an anthropologist versus native people dodges the question: Which native people? Like any human population, native people are not monolithic. They have diverging experiences, they have diverging interests, and they make contradictory claims. To assume that it is anti-Indian to question Menchú's version of events, or Zapatistas' claims to represent the people of Chiapas, or campaigns for Bureau of Indian Affairs recognition, or sovereignty/autonomy doctrine is to overestimate the representativity of your preferred bunch of indigenous people and ignore or discount others.

There is a simple reason to avoid idealizing indigenous people. When they don't live up to the imagery, the gap becomes yet another rationale for discounting them. The problem is not confined to tourists looking for barefoot philosophers in communion with nature. Yawning chasms between expectation and outcome are also generated by trendy imagery about native people defending their culture (Friedlander 1975; Feinberg 2003), gardening the Amazon rainforest (Conklin and Graham 1995), and defying globalization (Pitarch 2004). In the case of the Mayas with whom I work, the Ixils of Guatemala, they have been drafted into an array of roles, including men of maize rooted to their land, victory-or-death revolutionaries, victims of genocide, and accomplices to genocide because, on repeated occasions, a majority have voted for the former army dictator who committed genocide against them. Even the idea that Ixils are Mayas is fairly new to them—until reached by state education and Mayan activism, they thought Mayas were an earlier race who lived in caves and had six digits on each limb.

None of the roles that Ixils have played for outsiders is completely divorced from what they say, think, and do. There was a period in the late 1970s and early 1980s when a large number supported a revolutionary move-

ment, and a smaller number stayed with it until the 1996 peace accords between the Guatemalan state and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG). But as interpreted by the now-ubiquitous nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), idealizations of the Mayas have become an ever-renewable rationale for coaxing Ixils into agendas of diminishing appeal. For anthropologists who have framed their work in terms of NGOs, this is no small problem.

Now that many of us are inclined to dismiss social science as an oppressive Western construct, we have little choice but to derive our mandate from the people with whom we work. A community, a set of victims, an elderly healer who has blessed our activities, an oppressed nation—any of these can serve as a source of authority for our research. But what if this group of people authorizing our research is constituted by the projection of our own desires? Even a community with a countable number of households in a single location can consist chiefly of wishful thinking—worse, Mayas who don't realize they are Mayas and vote for a person accused of genocide. Broadly speaking, this was the problem I raised in *Rigoberta Menchú and the Story of All Poor Guatemalans* (Stoll [1999] 2008). Even after perfect storms of postmodern theory, Menchú's academic admirers were enshrining her guerrilla-friendly version of events, at a time when most of Guatemala's indigenous population wanted nothing more to do with the guerrillas. And so Menchú became a heroic surrogate for her people, admired with greater intensity abroad than in Guatemala. When I documented the discrepancies between her story and the stories of other survivors, the rejoinder was that I must be an apologist for the Guatemalan army.

In the interest of a more constructive discussion, I suggest that we look at how we derive moral authority from indigenous people, and how indigenous people work up their own idea of moral authority, in terms of competing moral economies. E. P. Thompson (1975) and James Scott (1976) used moral economy to describe how peasants view their way of life, and measure right and wrong, in opposition to political economy, that is, the bourgeois rationales of agro-capitalism. Yet bourgeois elites have their own sense of right and wrong, their own moral economy. So, presumably, does any social group with a distinct sense of morality, which it produces through ritual exchange of some kind. What ritual produces is solidarity, credibility, and, in a political context, political capital. So, if religious ritual is like an economy with characteristic forms of production and exchange, moral economy is how people produce moral authority through certain kinds of symbolic exchange.

Like an economy, ritual systems can inflate (become more intensive) or deflate. The inflation and deflation of new religious cults is an example. So

is the rise and fall of theoretical fashions in anthropology, in which we use theory as a competitive ritual. Theory as ritual determines who manages to claw upward on the shaky and crowded career ladder in our profession. Now that homage to the old high-god Science has lost its luster, offerings must instead be made to the revolution or popular struggle, to the Mayas, to resistance or counter-hegemony, or to the postcolonial critique. The lexicon shifts more rapidly than the structure of feeling behind it.

Gabriela Vargas-Cetina (2003) suggests that contemporary anthropology has divided our attention into two different streams of representation. We deconstruct essentialism while constructing new forms of advocacy that require us to re-essentialize native people and other subalterns. A useful way of capturing just how easy it is to move back and forth between deconstructing and essentializing is Gayatri Spivak's (1996, 214) term *strategic essentialism*. The strategy resides in shifting without acknowledgment, often behind a smokescreen of critical theory, and often without acknowledging the political objective that justifies the inconsistency. Consciously or unconsciously, the strategic essentialist builds theoretical defenses around preferred categories, pet concerns, and protégés while demonizing opponents and the unwelcome information they offer. Consciously or unconsciously, strategic essentialism amounts to a compact with one's allies or sponsors to exaggerate their numbers and representativity.

This is how political engagement and critical theory can encourage discourse about native people to inflate in self-serving ways. To illustrate, I will run through six issues facing anthropologists who work with the indigenous people of Guatemala and Mexico:

1. the representativity of the Guatemalan guerrillas;
2. the representativity of the Zapatista rebels in nearby Chiapas, Mexico;
3. the representativity of the Mayan movement;
4. whether Mayas are a majority of the Guatemalan population;
5. the death toll in the Guatemalan violence; and
6. whether the Guatemalan army's massacres of Mayas constituted genocide.

Each is *delicado* (politically sensitive) because discussion of the evidence can trigger accusations of being anti-indigenous from anthropologists who are not indigenous themselves. This is the giveaway that strategic essentialism is at work. Each issue has become a political litmus test, in the sense that skepticism is interpreted as a sign of betrayal. In political economy, inflation is a technique for passing the bill so that someone else will have to pay. If the parallel holds in the moral economy of politically engaged anthropology,

someone pays for inflation here too. Could this someone include the supposed beneficiaries of our theorizing, indigenous people?

Six Examples of Scholarly Inflation

Our first issue is whether the Guatemalan guerrilla movement was an indigenous uprising against a military dictatorship that left no alternative but armed resistance. This was the version of events put out by the Guerrilla Army of the Poor and other organizations in the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Union (URNG). It was accepted by the international human rights movement, and it is still being advanced by scholars (Grandin 2004; Manz 2004; Wilkinson 2002) who win back-cover endorsements from the likes of Aryeh Neier, Isabel Allende, Carlos Fuentes, Rigoberta Menchú, and Jon Lee Anderson. Judging from the high praise, this is the version of events that human rights luminaries prefer.

Politics often require exaggerating one's representativity. In this case, the EGP's success in inflating its popular support convinced the army that it should slaughter entire villages of presumed supporters. But political inflation did not have only negative consequences. In 1982, the same year that the army destroyed most of the EGP's support among peasants, a twenty-two-year-old schoolgirl named Rigoberta Menchú turned the EGP's rhetorical claims into a compelling life story. Her version of events gave the insurgency a fascinating afterlife on a very different stage, that of international solidarity with the army's victims. The international legitimacy generated by *I, Rigoberta Menchú* is part of the reason why, in the 1990s, URNG exiles were able to use international support to enter peace talks with the Guatemalan government and win certain concessions.

Posterity will judge whether the 1996 peace accords were an important step in democratizing Guatemala. Implementing the agreement requires organized pressure from the intended beneficiaries among Guatemala's poor. This pressure has been less than expected because, despite their grandiose claims, the former guerrillas and their allies have little connection with the majority of the indigenous population. Most indigenous voters failed to turn out for the Consulta Popular, a constitutional referendum to demilitarize the country and establish equality for Mayan culture (K. Warren 2002). In the populations hit hardest by the war—Quiché, Huehuetenango, and Baja Verapaz Departments—Mayas have voted heavily for a former dictator, the retired general Efraín Ríos Montt, whom the human rights movement would like to indict for committing genocide in the same areas. Even when the national electorate turned against Ríos Montt's party in the 2003 election, in-

indigenous voters in these same departments chose it to run most of their town halls. As for the ex-guerrilla coalition, it did so poorly that, having failed to win 5 percent of the vote, it has disappeared as a legally recognized party.

A similar investment in indigenous rebellion, resulting in another public relations bubble, occurred with the 1994 Zapatista insurgency in Chiapas, Mexico. Here media imagery of an indigenous Mayan uprising against the North American Free Trade Agreement elicited a wave of support from the Mexican and the international left. Many anthropologists were impressed by the contrast between the Zapatistas' military strength, which was minimal, and their remarkable symbolic resonance, and so they became known as the first cyber-guerrillas in history. Unfortunately, the Zapatistas also had more political strength in cyberspace than among the peasants they claimed to represent. Falling victim to their own propaganda, the Zapatistas voted down a favorable agreement they had just negotiated with the Mexican government. Then they boycotted a crucial national election and alienated most of their allies in the Mexican left.

The result was a rapid deflation of Zapatista political capital in Chiapas and the rest of Mexico, although not internationally, where interest remained high. Within a few years the Zapatistas were a faction surrounded not just by the Mexican military but by hostile peasants—the same peasants who they supposedly represented but who regarded them as authoritarian and disruptive (Hernández Castillo 2001; Legorreta Díaz 1999; Leyva Solano 2001; Moksnes 2004; Pitarch 2004; Van der Haar 2004, 104–5). As in Guatemala, a political movement that devised a successful ensemble of images for attracting international support did not fare well at home. Instead of achieving broader alliances, it shrank, leaving behind a reputation that some scholars (e.g., J. Nash 2001) continue to regard as the standard for evaluating work on the subject.

In Guatemala, meanwhile, another publicity bubble was inflating the Mayan movement. The movement was in gestation before NGOs came on the scene and its defense of indigenous rights deserves the support of anthropologists, but the very expression implies a representativity that is far from being achieved. One problem is that the people whom scholars and fund-raisers wish would identify themselves as Mayas often reject the label or prioritize other forms of identity. In Mexico, speakers of Yucatec Mayan usually reserve the Mayan label for their ancestors and prefer to identify themselves as mestizos (Hervik 2003). In Guatemala, indigenous people are starting to refer to themselves as Mayas, but many still prefer local forms of identity. The people most likely to invoke Mayan identity are urbanized, educated, and associated with NGOs (Adams and Bastos 2003, 282; Nelson 2004).

One of the anthropologists who did the most to promote the Mayan movement, Kay Warren (1998b, 188), argues that it should not be measured in terms of the number of people it can turn out for a protest. Street power is not the only measure of a movement—the upward percolation of Mayan professionals, businessmen, and politicians into previously closed spheres of Guatemalan society is also important. But if the Mayan movement represents the Mayas, why can't it ever demonstrate it? In view of how the Bolivian and Ecuadorian indigenous have mounted general strikes and toppled governments, the question is a fair one.

Now let's take the standard reference to Mayas as a substantial majority of the Guatemalan population—63 percent according to Jackson and Warren (2002, 36). Only if you count people whose connection is genetic, who rarely or never identify themselves as indigenous, can these claims be true. It is much safer to say that roughly half the Guatemalan population is indigenous.¹ Judging from the case studies analyzed by Richard Adams and Santiago Bastos (2003), the only safe approach is to never take indigenous identity for granted. According to Victor Montejo (2004, 237), who is writing specifically of his own Jakalteq Mayas but believes that all Mayan language groups face the same problem, "Ladinization happens mainly among youth who abandon their customs and traditions. Usually, they do not want to speak their Maya language, and they no longer consider themselves Maya, claiming a Ladino or Mestizo identity. They try to pass as Ladinos by denying their cultural heritage." Of the total Mayan population in Guatemala, "only 50–60 percent are actually speakers of the Mayan languages," according to Nora England (2003, 733), who is quoting the careful estimates of a team of Mayan linguists (Richards 2003, 44–88).

Next consider the death toll in Guatemalan political violence from 1962 to 1996. There have been three major efforts to collect all the available data. Building on earlier compilations by a human rights consortium (Ball, Kobrak, and Spiner 1999) and by the Catholic Church's Project for the Recuperation of Historical Memory (ODHAG 1998), the UN-sponsored Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) registered a total of 42,275 victims. Of these, 23,671 were victims of arbitrary executions, and another 6,159 were victims of forced disappearance and are presumed dead. Thus, the CEH compiled a total of 29,830 countable dead people. From these and other data, "the CEH estimates [my emphasis] that the number of persons killed or disappeared as a result of the fratricidal confrontation reached a total of over 200,000" (CEH 1999). The CEH's statistical consultant Patrick Ball justifies the multiplier of 6.7 in terms of sampling procedure. In view of all the information gathering that fed into the CEH, it is very pessimistic to assume that the CEH re-

ceived compiled testimony about fewer than one of every 6.7 killings or disappearances.² While the figure of 29,830 dead is obviously too low, the over 200,000 estimate is rather high. Yet in scholarship it is becoming the “documented” (Manz 2002, 294) death toll.

One reason the 200,000 figure is becoming canonical is that it substantiates another term that is becoming mandatory in discussions of Guatemala, the genocide (and increasingly, holocaust) of the Mayas. According to the CEH, the army “defined a concept of internal enemy that went beyond guerrilla sympathizers, combatants or militants to include civilians from specific ethnic groups” (CEH 1999). But because the army targeted villages that it suspected of supporting the guerrillas, much of the Mayan population did not experience massacres. Hence the CEH confined itself to indicting the army for genocide in four local populations between 1981 and 1983: the Ixil Mayas, the Q’anjob’al and Chuj Mayas, the K’iche’ Mayas of Joyabaj, Zuculpa, and Chiché, and the Achi Mayas.

Unfortunately, the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide excludes mass killing based on political criteria. Thus, if the army was targeting civilians for supporting a political movement, then its massacres would not be genocide. Instead, they would be crimes against humanity—a category that does not resonate the way genocide does. The CEH chose to go with a looser definition of genocide, preferred by most scholars and activists, which includes political killing (Hinton 2002). On the down side, the term racializes a history of political violence in which other dimensions were often more important. The Guatemalan civil war began in 1962 among the country’s non-indigenous Ladino population. For the first sixteen years, most of the victims were Ladinos. Even at the height of the killing, from 1980 though 1983, Ladino settlements could be massacred just like indigenous ones.³ But genocide is such a quick source of political capital that it has become the tag word for Guatemala that resonates around the world. It enables the country to be self-righteously invoked and safely pigeonholed in the same breath. As Guatemalans struggle with their past, is it really a good idea to persuade them that a class war with an ethnic component was actually a race war (cf. Nelson 2003, 123)?

In each of the above cases, what inflates scholarly discourse is more than a high number. Any of us have the right to argue that two-thirds of the Guatemalan population is indigenous and that more than 200,000 people died in the Guatemalan violence. What creates inflation is a moralistic attitude that protects high estimates from being debated by using rhetorical devices that preempt questions by discrediting the questioner. Protected from scrutiny, debatable propositions harden into political litmus tests. Political litmus tests

define the boundaries of morally permissible discussion, discourage the communication of unwelcome information, and become the basis for further inflation, creating further distance between our representations and the people whom we wish to support.

The Not-Truly-Indian Paradox and the NGO House of Mirrors

Let us now turn to the moral economy behind these practices. What is being offered by whom, to whom, and in exchange for what? The crucial offering is a preferred version of events that stresses the victimhood of indigenous people but also celebrates their revolutionary agency and naturalizes their earthy persistence. It preserves the vision of Guatemala as a moral opera, where the struggle between good and evil stands out in high relief and the critical theorist gets to sing the aria. It is preferred not just by a good number of Guatemala specialists but by other constituencies who are crucial to career advancement—university press editors, senior colleagues from the 1968 generation, funders of righteous causes, and graduate students looking for gurus and scapegoats. Even though these other audiences do not have much experience with Guatemala, they rely on it as a symbol of political evil—terror, genocide, holocaust, and such—about which they can shudder knowingly and against which they can validate themselves as people of conscience.

But it isn’t just wine-and-cheese liberals whom anthropologists need to impress. Anthropologists take pride in epistemological skepticism, to the point that some of us are eager to undermine our credibility as a social science. But if science is a dubious Western construct, on what do we base our professional license? For those of us who are fed up with the solipsism of high theory, support for indigenous people is a moral imperative. This is how we give ourselves a sense of direction, a moral narrative, and a place within it as moral actors. Yet our solidarity with indigenous people has to be translated into the meritocratic discourse that determines who survives and who doesn’t in our field. It has to be theorized, which is to say that it has to be ritualized in the odd ways that confer merit in higher learning. If we now recur to Roy Rappaport (1999) and his thinking about how rituals confer authority, the competitive academic rituals determining who wins career advancement require ultimate, sanctified propositions, that is, propositions that are impossible, difficult, or costly to question.

What operates as an ultimate, sanctified proposition in contemporary anthropology? Certainly not our identity as social scientists—most cultural anthropologists no longer have much invested in that claim. Instead, unquestionability resides in other locations. There is the occasional political saint,

such as Rigoberta Menchú, but such figures do not appear in most of our ritual productions. There is also the kind of theory that cannot be questioned because no one understands it—hence the popularity of our latest sages. Last but not least, unquestionability resides in certain terms that are loaded because, as deployed by theorists, they conflate what is with what theorists wish would occur. Thus “Maya” is an empirical referent that presumes how Guatemalans of indigenous descent should identify themselves. Genocide is one of several possible terms for mass killing that presumes that killing was racially motivated. Transnationalism refers both to exchanges that cross national boundaries and, as used by many scholars, the moral superiority of such exchanges over nationalism (Friedman 2003, 13–17).

The need for moral authority is just as evident in the realm of nongovernmental organizations. In recent decades, NGOs have proliferated as a vehicle for bypassing unresponsive governments and channeling resources to local groups. They have helped indigenous people break through institutional roadblocks and climb onto official agendas. As anthropologists look for ways to repay people who have provided us with hospitality and information, NGOs enable us to reciprocate by delivering tangible benefits. Without NGOs it is becoming harder to visualize a career in anthropology; they are increasingly the framework through which we relate to Guatemala. And yet, when NGOs substitute for the state, they produce state-like effects.

Adams and Bastos (2003) point out that the NGO moniker tends to lump together the efforts of foreign governments, international bodies, and private and religious organizations, as well as local groups that execute projects but depend heavily on foreign financing. The discourse of these networks is communitarian and localizing and often ethnic or even nationalist, but their international funding makes them inviting targets for nationalist backlashes (see Kampwirth [2003] for a Nicaraguan example). In a comparative analysis of the “transnational indigenous peoples’ movement” (TIPM) in El Salvador, Virginia Tilley summarizes the bad news:

Outside funding can have corrupting and fragmenting effects, and the TIPM’s transnational consultations and conferences tend to favor and promote more literate and therefore often less representative leaderships. . . . A third hazard . . . derives from the very activity that has made the TIPM so constructive a political force for many indigenous movements: that is, the TIPM’s success in codifying and promoting formal precepts about indigenous peoples’ characteristic qualities and needs. In doing so, the TIPM has conveyed unprecedented political juridical and rhetorical leverage to local groups. Yet when adopted as a master frame

by sympathetic outsiders (international funders, human rights groups, even other indigenous peoples), those same precepts tend to gel and reify as a new definition for indigeneity that can bring considerable pressure on those indigenous peoples whose “fit” in that master frame is less than exact. (2002, 528)

In El Salvador, where visible markers of indigenous identity are scarce, TIPM criteria have deepened what Tilley (2002, 541) calls the “not-truly-Indian” stigma. So have efforts to “Mayanize” Salvadoran Indians in imitation of the more successful Mayan movement in Guatemala. Yet the Mayas of Guatemala are hardly strangers to the “not-truly-Indian” paradox because of the contrast between what they prioritize and what foreign funders do.⁴

In the view of all but the most sophisticated funders, real Mayas still consult with traditional priests and shamans. They are still *costumbristas* and Catholics but not evangelicals. They supported the guerrillas but not the army, and they consider themselves victims of the army but not of the guerrillas. They support political parties identified with the left but not the right. In contrast, the many Mayas who have joined Pentecostal churches, who submitted to conscription into the Guatemalan army’s civil patrols, who distrust the guerrillas and have voted for the former dictator Ríos Montt—these Mayas are suspect. They have been hegemonized or “duped” in Diane Nelson’s (2004) perceptive comparison of politically committed anthropology with carnival-style hucksterism. Once you factor in all the requirements, most Mayas do not merit support. But of course you can find Mayas who do fit your criteria, more or less, and these become the Mayas who deserve support from abroad—antagonizing others who feel excluded.⁵

NGO subsidies have helped indigenous-led organizations proliferate, but at the cost of aggravating factionalism and also at the cost of encouraging what amounts to fund-raising language in scholarship. The mighty Wurlitzers I am criticizing—the Rigoberta Menchú and Zapatista cults, premature celebration of the Mayan movement, high-end estimates of Mayan population and war deaths, the use of genocide as a political litmus test (e.g., Sanford 2003)—are rhetorical devices to simplify and enlarge a particular slice of Mesoamerica as a fundable proposition. Most donors want high-legibility, low-complexity readings of situations that guarantee a certain kind of return on their dollars, pounds, or euros. Donors seek not the profits of a capitalist enterprise, but confidence that they have invested in a righteous cause. What they receive is reassurance that they are on the side of the angels.

In each situation—the URNG collapse in Guatemala, the Zapatista deflation in Chiapas, and the disappointment hanging over the Mayan move-

ment in Guatemala—what remains alive and well are transnational funding and scholarship. Why? Because a fundable definition of the problem has been achieved by discounting features that could upset donors. When foreign donors are lured by pleasing simplifications, they invest in situations without fully grasping that their interpretation originated as a carefully constructed projection designed to attract their money. As a result, they end up in a house of mirrors that they themselves financed. Anthropologists are not exclusively responsible for the house of mirrors, but some of us have helped build it by encouraging certain images of the Mayas to become icons or fetishes, symbols that conceal complexity in congenial wrappings.

NGOs and activists must always use language strategically because, in order to carry out a program, they must commit to one of many possible definitions of a situation. Exploration of different possibilities, the production of unsettling new evidence, the encouragement of debate—this is what we should expect from scholars and serious journalists. Yet the academic left and the NGOs that look to it for guidance have cultivated their own preferred and partial set of facts, similarly to how the religious right and other hard-shell US conservatives have. A very basic issue in social science is whether it is our job simply to describe society and diagnose social pathologies, or whether we also have a duty to become committed to solutions of one kind or another. Among anthropologists working with native people, the rhetoric of solidarity has become almost mandatory, which creates powerful incentives for dismissing information that does not fit. Once we as anthropologists enshrine certain personages and causes, we turn ourselves into a branch of theology.

Ritual Inflation, Ritual Collapse, and Who Pays the Bill—Everyone but the Successful Theorist

In this chapter I have argued that selecting certain kinds of indigenous people and idealizing them has become a way of deriving moral authority. Now that many cultural anthropologists have abandoned the claim to be social scientists, we need to find moral authority elsewhere. Political solidarity with the oppressed—or at least with carefully chosen representatives of the oppressed—is a tempting place to find it. This choice is even more tempting because nongovernmental organizations have become the framework for how many anthropologists do fieldwork, and NGOs require simple, clear messages to raise funds for their causes. In view of these needs, deconstruction and re-essentialization are not just an unfortunate paradox in contem-

porary anthropology. Instead, they complement each other, in a two-stroke engine of career advancement called strategic essentialism.

Looking at representations in terms of moral economy requires us to compare how anthropologists generate moral authority with how the people we study do. Analyzing representations in terms of hegemony might seem a more obvious approach. Certainly, many scholars prefer it. Yet the way we use hegemony tends to situate us safely outside the exchanges we analyze, leading to the imputation of false consciousness to our misguided subjects. Hegemony also implies a uniform field of conformity enforced from the top of a power structure. Accounting for pluralism leads to contortions such as “alternative hegemony” and “counter-hegemony.”

In contrast, moral economy in the pluralistic sense that I define it requires us to situate ourselves within symbolic exchanges, to specify how we establish our own sense of moral authority. In the case of Guatemala, former guerrillas and soldiers, Mayan activists, anthropologists, and NGOs engage in exchanges that invest different propositions and symbols with sanctity or unquestionability. By specifying these different moral economies, we can protect ourselves from enshrining Durkheimian projections of our own desires.

Just how different peasant moral economy can be is suggested by the characteristic expectations of folk Catholicism. In keeping with Eric Wolf's (1982, 79–88) tributary mode of production, subordinate groups render tribute, taxes, or rent to elites in exchange for predictability and security. Under the influence of the Catholic Church, God becomes the Big Patrón in the sky, as do the Catholic saints who serve as his intermediaries. Hence the many obligations of the civil-religious hierarchies or *cargo* (“burden”) systems serve as a form of ritual taxation. Yet this system of subordination also moralizes the obligations that tribute-takers owe to tribute-givers. Traditional expectations can become a basis for protest. While the rich have the right to a lot, the poor have the right to what they need to survive. If subsistence is threatened, the same saint that enforces subordination can authorize rebellion—a paradox that Paul Diener (1978) found among the Ch'orti' Mayas of eastern Guatemala in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

Like any system of exchange, moral economies can inflate and they can collapse. Authority-building rituals are usually expensive, increasing their frequency is more expensive, and people would not go to the trouble unless the rituals were helping them deal with some problem. So as a rule of thumb, the more ritual that occurs, the more tension and conflict there is to defuse and the more authority is perceived to be needed. Thus, rising tension leads to more ritual and expenditures to pay for it. In the case of folk Catholic cargo

systems, anthropologists have documented how cargo rituals became more and more elaborate in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But if the rituals do not resolve the underlying problems, the results are disillusion, ritual deflation, and collapse. In the indigenous Mesoamerica of the twentieth century, ritual deflation often took the form of conversion to Protestantism, which meant abandoning expensive obligations to folk Catholic saints. The insurgent Guatemala of the early 1980s was a case of rapid inflation, stimulated by the countervailing power of the guerrillas, and of rapid deflation, prompted by army massacres. For survivors, the rituals of joining the rebel movement were replaced by the rituals of demonstrating allegiance to the Guatemalan army.

It is at this point, in the continuities between the guerrilla and the army agendas for militarizing village life, that the most influential political figure in Guatemala since 1982, the "born-again butcher" General Efraín Ríos Montt, poses a challenge to which anthropologists have yet to rise. Ríos Montt plucked the strings of moral economy with amazing success—the 1990, 1995, and 1999 presidential elections were all won or nearly won by his surrogate candidates with strong support from indigenous voters. Only after Ríos Montt regained power from 2000 to 2003, and only after his party cronies set new records for corruption, did his reputation as a defender of law and order deflate. Yet his last bastion of electoral support consisted of Mayan peasants in the Quiché, Huehuetenango, and Baja Verapaz Departments. If Ríosmonttismo is the unexplained vacuum in the contemporary anthropology of Guatemala, then the scholarly inflation I am critiquing is a way of downplaying the bad news.

To put this another way, scholarly inflation results from the collision between the moral economy of anthropology and the moral economy of indigenous peasants. Inflation shuts out contradictory information by building strategically essentialized defenses around a preferred bunch of Indians. The contrast between inflated expectations, unwelcome new information, and disappointing outcomes becomes the impetus for more theorizing. As disappointment and theory spiral heavenward, like the smoke from an Old Testament burnt sacrifice, what maintains the illusion of grounding in ethnographic reality is the back-and-forth of deconstruction and re-essentialization, the demonization of unwelcome information, and the sacralization of what fits. What this kind of anthropology preserves is the reputation of the academics who presided over the inflation.

That the main beneficiaries of academic theorizing are certain academics is hardly news. But it raises an important question: Do high estimates and genocide rhetoric make any difference to Guatemalans and other Mesoamericans?

Isn't exaggeration an inevitable property of political discourse? Maybe high estimates are essential to attract the attention that Mayas and other Central Americans deserve. Yes, maybe, but I think we've gone down this road far enough. Once high estimates are accepted as fact, or just as the most defensible mid-range estimate, this sets the stage for further inflation, culminating in high optimism about what can be achieved politically by appealing to Mayan solidarity. If more than two hundred thousand people were killed in the violence, a larger slice of the population wants justice for dead relatives, and presumably will rally in favor of genocide prosecutions, than if one hundred thousand were killed. If almost two-thirds of the Guatemalan population defines itself as indigenous, finding a common denominator for the indigenous vote sounds like the way for the left to win a national election. On the other hand, if indigenous identity does not carry that much weight in the population, harping on it could produce more antagonism than sympathy. Blatant displays of favoritism toward selected Mayas and prognostications of how Mayas are destined to take over a country could be a recipe for political reaction. Anthropologists have seen so much political disappointment in Guatemala that it is time to ask how we contribute to it.

Notes

1. The 42.72 percent of the population identified as indigenous in the 1994 census is probably too low, for reasons discussed by Adams and Bastos (2003, 59–80). The 1921 census identified 64.84 percent of the Guatemalan population as indigenous, and the 1950 census showed 53.45 percent as indigenous. For 1964, the demographer John Early estimates the indigenous population as 50.37 percent, and for 1973 as 47.95 percent (Adams and Bastos 2003, 64, citing Early 1982). Two phenomena could explain the decrease: (1) individuals, families, and communities deciding to backstage their connections to indigeneity, and (2) improvements in public health benefiting ladinos earlier than *indígenas* and therefore diminishing infant mortality among ladinos more rapidly than among *indígenas*. Now that public health campaigns reach the indigenous population, higher indigenous fertility could make the indigenous population grow more rapidly. But if enough parents and children stop identifying themselves as indigenous, then the indigenous proportion of the population is not growing except in the mind of optimists.

2. Here are the main steps in Ball's (1999, 237–60) approach:

1. If CEH, CIDH, and REMHI compilations of victims do not overlap each other, they list a total of 54,643 dead from 1978 to 1996 (238).
2. Since a sample of 1,412 cases from the CEH database shows an overlap of only 11.3 percent with the other two databases, the three databases contain an estimated non-

duplicated total of 47,803 dead (239, where Ball concedes that this estimate of the overlap is probably too low. For example, dead people whose names have been lost cannot be checked for duplication).

3. Through sampling procedures, Ball estimates that another 84,468 assassinations were committed between 1978 and 1996 that never were reported to the CEH, REHMI, or CIDH (245). This is a multiplier of 2.77; in view of all the reporting by the Catholic Church, the guerrillas, refugees, international human rights groups, and the press at the height of the violence, and all the investigation that occurred in the 1990s, it could be too high.
4. To his estimated total of 132,000 killings between 1978 and 1996, Ball adds generous estimates of the number who were killed from 1960 to 1977 (22,000), of the number who were "disappeared" (kidnapped) from 1960 to 1996 (40,000), and of the number killed in regions not covered by the three databases (7,500) to arrive at a total of 201,500 killed and disappeared from 1960 to 1996 ("Mandato y procedimiento de trabajo," CEH 1999, 73).

To show what Ball's approach means at the local level, consider the Ixil case. For the Ixil area between 1978 and 1996, the three databases came up with relatively congruent totals of 4,609, 4,028, and 5,423 killings. On the basis of his sampling procedure, Ball (1999, 250) estimates a total of 16,655 victims in the Ixil area between 1981 and 1983. When I analyzed census shortfalls in the Ixil area (Stoll 1993, 232–33), I came up with a missing population of 15,000. One source of confusion is the term *asesinato* and whether it includes people who died of hunger and illness while hiding from army offensives. Judging from what Ixils told me, the number who died of hunger and illness paralleled the number who died in massacres. If *asesinatos* are defined strictly as extrajudicial executions, then Ball's methodology probably overshoot by a factor of two or three. But some of the difference would be made up by the deaths of refugees from malnutrition, exposure, and illness.

3. See the CEH's *Caso Ilustrativo* No. 31, "Masacre de las Dos Erres," in which the army murdered 178 defenseless and mainly Ladino villagers in December 1982. <http://shr.aaas.org/guatemala/ceh/mds/spanish/anexo1/vol1/no31.html> (accessed June 2, 2012).

4. For the Amazon, compare Ramos (1998) on hyperreal Indians and Jackson (2002, 119–20) on identity rent.

5. For an example of the dilemma, compare C. Taylor (1998) and Manz (2004) on Santa María Tzejá, an NGO hub in the Ixcán where rivalry has been aggravated by the army—guerrilla conflict, displacement to Mexico, and NGO favoritism.

3

Yucatecan Food and the Postcolonial Politics of Representation

Steffan Igor Ayora-Díaz

During the last two decades, Yucatecans, in general, and Meridians, in particular, have witnessed (and many have suffered) the growing immigration of individuals from different Mexican regions but, particularly, from the center of Mexico.¹ The relationship between Yucatan and Mexico has always been an uneasy one. Many immigrants from the central highlands are locally perceived as arrogant, triggering strong reactions against them in Yucatan as in other states, to the point that it is possible to find car stickers or graffiti with hate messages against central Mexicans, all around the country. Locally, inhabitants from regions such as Yucatan, Monterrey, and Guadalajara, for example, invoke the moral superiority of the locally born over central Mexicans.² In Yucatan, this feeling is sometimes extended even to individuals with Yucatecan ancestors born in central Mexico (sometimes derogatorily called *yucanaches*).³ In this struggle to represent oneself in a positive light and to portray the foreigner as evil, different cultural resources serve as vehicles for the affirmation of local identities and local values over foreign ones. For Yucatecans, hospitality is one of the practices seen as encapsulating the virtues of Yucatecan morality. In Mérida, the capital city of Yucatan, there are negotiations of meaning whereby local people attempt to defend their positive image while seeking to contain the perceived threat to local culture that foreigners represent. Along with this process, Yucatecans revise their understanding of hospitality and, when needed, the rules that govern its practice.

The contemporary world has been often described as one of cultural globalization and, in optimistic readings of the process, as one of blurring and making obsolete cultural and political boundaries (Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1997; Kaplan 1996). An enhanced will to travel, migration flows identified as exile, diaspora, political displacement, economic migration, and mass tourism have changed the face of contemporary societies. Ours are multi-

cultural societies. However, this coexistence of members of different cultures has seldom fostered a sense of multicultural solidarity or respect (M. Joseph 1999; Rosello 2001; Tully 2002). Cultures and nationalities in interaction are often marked by unequal positions in the international and state orders (Benhabib 2002; Juergensmeyer 2002). New forms of cultural colonialism and economic expansionism, as well as postcolonial transformations (such as the massive arrival of migrants from former colonies to the metropolises), complicate and confound social interaction at the local, regional, and translocal levels, in some cases triggering passionate defenses of the local (Bhabha 1994; Herzfeld 2002; R. Smith 2003). In this chapter I explore how in Mérida, the capital city of Yucatan, Mexico, food can work as a vehicle for local identity and for the affirmation of the superior value of the local over the “Mexican.” This relationship between locals and outsiders is marked by ambivalences in the moral realm that reveal tensions between the discourses and practices pertaining to hospitality and generate in many local people the certainty that foreigners, particularly those coming from central Mexico, are undeserving of locals’ trust and hospitality. The gastronomic field is transformed into one of the arenas in which the boundaries of the local are defended against outside aggression.⁴ In the process of constructing a strong sense of regional identity, Yucatecos have created a gastronomic field that exemplifies a form of cultural hybridity that combines the global and the (trans)local, creating a new cultural space. This specific form of hybridity allows the affirmation of a local/regional identity against the force of Central Mexican cultural colonialism, as the Yucatecan field welcomes global and cosmopolitan influences while resisting Mexican ones. However, I argue, this very sentiment of regionalism obscures the processes of hegemony construction among the different groups and social classes within the state of Yucatan itself.

Food, Cuisine, and Identity

There is an expanding field, anthropological, sociological, and historical, that explores and describes the ties between food, cuisine, and identity. Anthelme Brillat-Savarin’s aphorism, “Tell me what kind of food you eat, and I will tell you what kind of man you are” ([1826] 2004, 4), is often cited to stress the common perception that a people may be recognized, both by self and others, by their food preferences. The historical literature records, for example, cultural strategies deployed by Christians, Muslims, and Jews in Spain and by the British and French to mark their radical differences through food (Montanari 1999; Mennell 1996). In contemporary societies, cultural pluralism and flexible capitalism have fostered the expression of a group’s ties to

a place through food, particularly to those localities that individuals recognize as their ancestors’ place of origin. Thus, Asians, Italians, French, Mexicans and other Latin Americans, and Caribbean islanders re-create in the United States, Canada, and other places the food they affirm as their own cultural and national creation (e.g., D. Bell and Valentine 1997; Gabaccia 1998).

Contrary to widespread images abroad, Mexican cuisine, far from being monolithic and homogeneous, is regionally diverse. Yucatecan cuisine today is a distinct culinary field that emerged over the twentieth century as a hybrid blend of different cultural influences, becoming firmly established during the second half of the twentieth century. Although the ties of Yucatecan food to other Caribbean cuisines can be traced, increasingly, Yucatecan food is defined as a “regional” version of a national culinary tradition (Long-Solis and Vargas 2005). In response, locally, we now witness an emphasis on the “locality” of Yucatecan cuisine while stressing its global ties.

Since the 1970s, Meridans took advantage of the expansion and fragmentation of the local foodscape, broadening their food experience. In those same years, Yucatecan food carried by Yucatecan migrants to other Mexican regions was adapted to local taste in each particular region. The 1990s Yucatecan economic boom attracted waves of immigrants, primarily into Mérida. Migrants have added to the complexity and diversity of the local foodscape. Foodstuffs and meals previously unavailable, or at least available in limited supply, are now regularly found in new restaurants and homes. At the same time, those who grew acquainted with their own local versions of Yucatecan food, after moving into the state of Yucatan, expected to find their favorite renditions of Yucatecan food in Mérida. Consequently, in present-day Mérida restaurateurs must negotiate between the rules of the gastronomic field and outsiders’ food preferences: there are now restaurants specializing in other Mexican regional cuisines (and ones that organize food festivals on a regular basis, e.g., the week of Oaxaca food) and, in some touristic restaurants, some regional dishes have been adapted to fit the tastes of immigrants and tourists.

The Politics of Representation

A sector of the anthropological community has undertaken a profound reflection and carried out a rigorous critique of the discipline’s representational practices (e.g., Clifford 1988; Geertz 1990; Marcus and Cushman 1982; Marcus and Fisher 1986). Undermined by postmodern philosophy (e.g., Derrida 1980; Lyotard 1984; Rorty 1982), we have seen crumble, one by one, the foundational certainties that warranted our belief in the universality, objec-

tivity, and truth, of “our” scientific representations (e.g., J. Anderson 1995; Brown 1995; Denzin 1995). While some anthropologists may regret this lack of irrefutable foundations, others are rising to the challenge and attempting to continue in our quest for understanding our own society’s and other societies’ cultural practices and ways of life as rather complex forms of social articulation: beyond the local and the global, we have to consider multicentric and decentered globalities and translocalities (M. Fischer 2003; Tsing 2004).

Also, we have come to terms, in anthropology and other social sciences, with the principle that there is no single truthful account of events and actions. Although there may exist, in any society, a homo/hegemonic narration of events and history, other accounts exist that offer alternative plausible interpretations. Every group and, by extension, any society is divided into different groups with unequal access to power; some produce hegemonic stories, and others produce subaltern, alternative stories (Dube 2001; Guha 1988). In the midst of this multiplicity of voices, stories, histories, and reports of facts, anthropologists are faced with the responsibility to “represent” subjects’ everyday struggles, maneuvers, strategies, and tactics of both domination and resistance.

In this effort, anthropologists always run the risk of overrepresenting one view or another. The interaction between anthropologists and local subjects weaves competing, contesting, and complementary interpretations that ultimately congeal into a single narration: the ethnographic monograph. The problem we face, in postcolonial society, is that, since we cannot hold to one single account of the truth, our accounts can be (and are) contested by other colleagues who disagree with our accounts, as well as by local people who belong to heterogeneous groups (hegemonic or subaltern); one or more of these groups are bound to perceive that they are not fairly represented in anthropological texts and other ethnographically based formats. It is precisely those who see disciplinary accounts as monolithic, universally valid, objective, and true who demand the truth, *their truth*, about themselves to be voiced. Thus, our recognition that identities (ethnic, national) are constructed relativizes political claims and destabilizes the power positions that individuals and groups hold in society at large.

Of particular concern, in this chapter, is the affirmation of a regional identity that has been constructed by regional elites. This account of a Yucatecan identity, against the hegemonic and homogenizing force of central Mexico, can favor a monolithic representation of local culture that obscures the diversity of cultural forms and voices within the Yucatecan territory. While here I concern myself with the reactions to Mexican cultural colonialism, I also

recognize the different groups that have collectively generated both Yucatecan identity and the regional gastronomic field.

Finally, I should recognize the ambiguous position in which I find myself: some local colleagues have corrected my self-definition as an anthropologist. I have been told that I am a Yucatecan *who is* an anthropologist, but I am not a Yucatecan anthropologist. I grew up in Yucatan, where I studied and practiced medicine, but I studied anthropology in Canada and belong to anthropological associations in Canada and the United States. Because of this some of my colleagues have suggested that I represent the cultural, colonizing force of Anglo-Saxon anthropology in the region. More often, this accusation has come from Mexican anthropologists (or other anthropologists trained in Mexico City) working in Chiapas and Yucatan who consider Mexican anthropology under colonial aggression, while refusing to recognize that there is not a single “Mexican anthropology.” Throughout the twentieth century, like food, regional anthropological traditions informed the regional interaction of local anthropologists with anthropology and anthropologists in the international arena. However, the force of central Mexican institutions that claim to be the “national” schools of the discipline often silences regional diversity. It is in this context that I face the task of describing the society in which I was born.

Yucatan is a complex society that encompasses class and ethnic differences defining one’s position and gives every Yucatecan group a different view of their own participation in the regional political field. Thus, representation turns into a contentious issue: Can I represent all Yucatecan identities and cultural forms? I believe that we can aspire to show that societies are not monolithic, that multiple voices and positions exist, and thus relativize our own accounts. On the other hand, we as anthropologists always aspire to grasp the “native’s point of view.” While I can claim, as Yucatecan, to partake of the native point of view, I cannot profess to represent *the* Yucatecans.⁵ I engage in a description of Yucatecan identity politics partly as an inquisitive outsider (an anthropologist) but also, and partly, as an interested member of the complex society I describe. I can only hope that my efforts to provide a balanced account will be fair to the complexity of the issues and will contribute to a better understanding of the conformation of a postcolonial and neocolonial structure of power between central Mexico and its regions.

State policies endorsing the Mexican imagined community have silenced regional and local cultural expressions in the public sphere and triggered local identity politics seeking to affirm the local against the homo/hegemonic “Mexican” voice. In the following section I will discuss the context that al-

lowed Yucatan to grow and establish a gastronomic field distinct from the national, Mexican cuisine. The emergence of a local culinary tradition is charged with power inequalities that have contributed to construct a gastronomic field where different groups vie to place their own cultural expressions in a more favorable position. Politics of many types and levels inscribe insiders' and outsiders' positions in a neocolonial order. Regionalist politics are part of that larger configuration. Regional cuisine, I argue, is tied to the historical and moral construction of an identity separate and distinct from the Mexican. Immigrants from other Mexican regions often reactivate this local sense of identity when their practices and discourses challenge the integrity and legitimacy of local practices, values, and worldviews.

Yucatecan Regionalism

In the late 1990s I used to spend my holidays in Yucatan. In different trips, I found myself uneasy at the broadcast of radio and TV spots that asked those moving into Yucatan to respect the local values and integrate into the local way of life. These spots continued into the year 2000, when I moved back to Mérida to establish my residence. I felt them to be aggressive, running against the hospitality Yucatecans are always proud to affirm as a sign of superior local values. These spots triggered my interest in the historical, structural, and cultural bases of this regionalist feeling and identity. To my surprise, I was unable to find references to the independence movement that existed in Yucatan during the nineteenth century. It seemed as if the secessionist movement was taboo.

Michael Herzfeld (1997) has developed the concept of "cultural intimacy" to refer to the local responses to the revelation of actions or discourses that are known to exist, and even feel rightful, but shame the group when they are made public. As Melchor Campos García (2002) suggests, during the construction of the modern nation-state, regional movements seeking autonomy or special rights were disqualified as infantile, archaic, (politically) less developed, and chauvinistic in scope. The strong secessionist movement that existed in Yucatan through most of the nineteenth century has been largely disqualified and silenced in the academic literature but for a few sources.

Campos García (2002) describes the historical process whereby Mexico and Yucatan grew separate throughout the colonial and postindependence periods. During colonial times Yucatan was in an uncertain administrative position. After independence from Spain, Yucatan joined Mexico on the condition that the region would keep its own autonomous government and the new national government would have a federalist agenda. However, Mexican

governments sought to impose a centralist political and economic structure, triggering three different attempts to separate from Mexico (Campos García 2002). The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth was a period when local Yucatecan elites grew stronger and established preferential commercial ties with the United States, Cuba, and other Caribbean islands. Commerce with England prevailed through Belize. The henequen boom allowed the regional elites to gain power and to establish the basis for their legitimacy and the advancement of their worldview and ethos as the source of regional identity (Aliski 1980; Hansen 1980; G. Joseph 1980; Terry 1980).

Although the secessionist movement ended during the nineteenth century, Yucatecans have preserved a strong sense of regional identity that sets them apart from Mexico and other regions. Food, music, and other cultural products are often used to mark local identities as distinct from the Mexican (Ayora-Díaz and Vargas-Cetina 2005b). As has been the case in other imagined communities (B. Anderson 1983), the dominant elites of Yucatan have controlled the printed media in the region from the nineteenth century on. However, the construction of local identities may also be understood as an undesired (from the nation-state's perspective) by-product of the different ideological programs that legitimated the modern nation-states in Europe (P. Sahlins 2004), subordinating regional identities to the broader program of ideologically constructing a homogeneous nation (Weber 1979). This subordination, in turn, inspired the development of local strategies to affirm the local against the national (Gerson 2003). In this vein, postindependence Mexican governments adopted a blueprint of a nation-state that could be filled in only by the imaginary of a unified Mexico. Despite constant efforts to keep the nation together, in Yucatan there was a strong sense of difference, setting people apart from central Mexican cultural values and mores (Cortés Campos 2004; Rosado Avilés 2004; Suarez Molina 1996).

Historically, it was the Mexican army that ensured Yucatan's permanence in the Mexican Republic. However, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that Yucatan and Mexico were joined by land, with fully operational roads built only after the 1960s. Previously, most travel to Mexico had to be done by boat through the Gulf of Mexico (G. Joseph 1980). Yucatan had developed its own industries and services and directed its market to the Caribbean, the United States (Texas and Louisiana), and Europe. A regional culture developed under the cultural influence of the latter regions, steering Yucatan away from the Mexican cultural blueprint. Against this regionalism, in Mexico, the nation, promoted by the state and enforced by the army, was inscribed in the public sphere by different means that relied on the grow-

ing power of the media. The *Mexico* invented and inscribed in nineteenth-century maps was promoted during the first half of the twentieth century in radio and cinema (Craib 2004; Dever 2003; Hayes 2000).

However, this imagined Mexico has found obstacles to keeping its hold on the nation at large. Regional groups continue affirming and defending what they understand as their own cultural values, practices, and way of life against perceived new forms of Mexican encroachment. In the different states of Mexico one can find small businesses displaced by national ones. For example, large beer corporations have taken over regional breweries and forced them to produce goods that fit their quality standards but depart from local taste. Local businesses must fulfill the corporation's goals or they are penalized. For example, in 2003 in Yucatan, the Modelo national firm closed the local brewery and moved the production of Yucatecan beer to the state of Oaxaca. Today, "Yucatecan" beer is not produced any longer in Yucatan. (Though the legendary "Yucatecan beer" has been removed, it continues to be tied to the imagination of Yucatecan culture.) Also, chain department stores are moving into medium and large cities, displacing local businesses; and, what many Yucatecans complain about, they bring along even their own floor salespeople from central Mexico, instead of giving employment to local women and men. These well-paid employees are frequently blamed for the rising real estate prices in Mérida.

It is the history of these difficult relations between the region and the nation, throughout the last two hundred years, that marks the relationship between locals and outsiders. Jacques Derrida (2000) reminds us that hospitality may encompass entangled forms of violence running against each other: On the one hand, the violence of language, for example, the imposition of a cultural code on the guest. On the other, the violence of making a hostage of the host—that is, of making the hosts accountable to a law that is not their own. Meridans and other Yucatecans often define the newcomers as "invaders" who violate the local codes and seek to impose their practices and morality and their tastes and worldview on the local people. For these Yucatecans, "Mexicans" do not fit their definition of guests (who would accommodate to the local ways and respect them) but are seen as individuals who actively and aggressively seek to impose a way of life that is alien to the local. In contrast to a "good guest," central Mexicans are the bearers of an imperial certitude: they come from the metropolis onto the province. They have the right to govern local social interaction and to impose their way on the local culture. As Yucatecans have never fully accepted Mexican colonial rule, the tensions between locals and outsiders inform the negotiations that take place in different cultural arenas. In the following section I focus on how, in this con-

text, the culinary field and the local foodscape in the city of Mérida have been transformed into one such arena for cultural struggle.

Food, Power, and Local Identities

The Yucatecan gastronomic field gives shape to the contemporary urban foodscape. When other culinary traditions are incorporated into the urban foodscape, they may or may not inspire changes within the local culinary field; but, in the taste of local people, they remain subordinated to regional cuisine. However, changes are often implemented in the domestic sphere that seldom make it into the public domain. The market of international cuisines has allowed for the local claim to Yucatecan food as being on par with other culinary traditions. One consequence is that out of the great diversity of Yucatecan recipes, a limited number have constituted the regional gastronomic canon. Recipes common at home are denied entry, for different reasons, into both recipe books and upscale restaurants.

Nonetheless, the Yucatecan gastronomic field is, as most fields are, unstable over time. As Pierre Bourdieu suggests (1993), a field is a space where different forces face each other, attempting to improve their position in relation to the others. The structure of the Yucatecan gastronomic field lies in the relationships among different culinary traditions that make up what today is known as "traditional" Yucatecan food. These traditions are the Creole, European (mainly Spanish, French, and Italian), the Mayan, and, since the turn of the twentieth century, the Middle Eastern (Syrian and Lebanese) cuisines. At the time of independence from Spain, one of the cooking guides printed for domestic use was based mainly on the local adaptation of dishes of Spanish, Italian, and French origin (Aguirre [1832] 1980). By the end of the nineteenth century, cookbooks such as Manuela Navarrete Arce's attempted to integrate a more balanced fusion of high European cuisines and local dishes, giving an official (i.e., printed and public) recognition to a few dishes attributed to Mayan culture, to Creole inventions, and to local dishes that gave ascendancy to local cosmopolitanism and sophistication (Navarrete Arce 1889).⁶ Successive waves of migrants from Lebanon and Syria, coming into Yucatan at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries, contributed to the expansion of the regional culinary field. For example, some Lebanese dishes were adapted to the availability of local ingredients and the scarcity of original ingredients, and some even took a Mayan name (e.g., *x'nipek*, "dog's nose" in Mayan, is a sauce said to be inspired in the Lebanese tabbouleh salad [see Infante Vargas and Hernández Fuentes 2000]).

The ingenuity of regional cooks in blending and amalgamating culinary

traditions made possible the creation of a number of dishes that, with local ingredients, attempted to display the sophistication of European haute cuisines. In consequence, many regional dishes have adopted and adapted sauces that instead of the original ingredients use tomato or use corn flour to thicken broths. The paradigmatic dishes of Yucatecan cuisine are based on pork and poultry (turkey or chicken). For example, chicken or turkey in *escabeche* is a stew that uses the same condiments used to pickle vegetables, thus *escabeche* (pickled); although *cochinilla pibil* uses some local condiments (ground *achiote* seeds), it is made with pork marinated in Seville oranges, onion, oregano, and black pepper, and wrapped in banana leaves, all products originally imported from the Old World; stuffed cheese (*queso relleno*) is made out of the shell of a Dutch edam cheese, stuffed with ground pork, ground almonds, capers, olives, and onion. To serve, the slices of cheese are covered with a white sauce, reminiscent of béchamel but based on corn flour and chicken broth, that receives the Mayan name of *k'ol*.

The regional culinary field contains a code that asserts the equal, creative necessity and importance of the participation of the indigenous, the local Creole, and the foreign cuisines for its own existence. The Yucatecan gastronomic field is a blend of different world cuisines rather than an encompassing listing of old, Mayan, and "modern," European recipes and ingredients. In general, this field reproduces the local rhetoric that silences ethnic or cultural differences and gives a high value to integration. In the Yucatecan gastronomic field, the imported and the Mayan are all subsumed into the "local." It is the local, the Yucatecan, that speaks and silences all the other voices. The Mayas, the Lebanese, the French, and the Italians must speak in a code that is not their own but that of the hegemonic classes of Yucatan. I have found, speaking to restaurant managers, that when some dishes are clearly identified as belonging to other traditions, they are excluded from Yucatecan regional restaurants and secluded in the "ethnic" or "international." For example, whether they are "truly" Mayan recipes, or whether they are a Creole invention, cooks attribute to all local tamales a Mayan lineage; and some foods, such as *mondongo* (tripe), are defined as "more indigenous" and "low class" and thus deemed as "uncouth," lesser dishes relegated to cantinas, eateries, and domestic spaces but excluded from upscale restaurants' menus.

Similarly, during the first half of the twentieth century, the Lebanese-Syrian population reached both economic prominence and numbers large enough to grant the existence of a Lebanese club, a Lebanese association, Lebanese carnivals, a Lebanese business association, and Lebanese Catholic Churches, allowing Lebanese food in recent years to become a separate local category. Although Yucatecan families have their own recipes of kib-

beh, hummus, baba ghanoush, and tahini in the domestic menu, and some dishes (e.g., hummus, baba ghanoush, and *kibbeh*) have been locally adopted as *botanas* in some cantinas, they are also excluded from the gastronomic field.

The expansion of the Yucatecan foodscape in the 1970s was limited. It incorporated Italian pizzas, Chinese chop suey and chow mein, and Mexican pozole, tacos, and carnitas as part of an incipient market for exotic foods. This expansion helped Meridians who did not travel to get acquainted with the foods eaten in other parts of Mexico and the world and to assert their cosmopolitan disposition: local people were open to the outside world. This limited intrusion of the Other was not seen as a threat to local ways. Local people could see themselves in control of what went on in and outside their homes and (individual and social) bodies. The foreign bodies were few and introduced simply as something "different." Yucatecan cuisine had grown, after all, from the incorporation of the alien into the local.

However, during the 1980s, first after the Great Earthquake of Mexico City in 1985, then with the boom of the service sector, triggered by the creation of Cancun, plus the federal policies aiming at the decentralization of the Mexican government (offering prizes to those moving to the "provinces") and the regional economic boom of the 1990s, triggered by the expansion of the service sector and the impulse given to the maquiladora industry, Yucatan and Yucatecans saw how large numbers of Mexicans began to migrate into Yucatan. Now the immigrants are perceived as having turned the host into a hostage. In large numbers, central Mexicans, supported by a history of colonial domination of the "provinces," moved into Yucatan with full confidence that they could impose their own customs elsewhere. Many Meridians find that Mexicans dominate some neighborhoods and have become segregated from local people. Some of my friends complain that they are now unable to find their favorite local dishes in their neighborhoods because the street and small vendor market is now dominated by Mexican-style tamales or by dishes from other Mexican culinary traditions. Supermarkets, restaurants, and businesses of a different nature are now locally perceived as addressing mainly either locals' or foreigners' needs.

Since about 1999, celebrations have been turned into an arena for the confrontation between local and foreign foods. In an instance reminiscent of the "ugly American" [*sic*] who demanded hamburgers everywhere he went, a woman from Mexico City told me that she has a hard time finding pozole in local restaurants. She was often told that it is a September food (for the celebration of Independence Day). *Chiles en nogada*, seen as the symbol of Mexican nationalistic cuisine, is also available in Mérida at a limited number of restaurants only during that same month. The festivities for the Day of

the Dead and All Saints, on November 1 and 2, have been also turned into an occasion to affirm the local. In newspapers and in everyday conversations, local people reject the transformation of a "traditional" Yucatecan chicken tamale (*muchil pollo*) that has had its traditional stuffing replaced or supplemented with ham and cheese. Some complain that this is a "perversion" introduced by Mexicans, who add cheese onto and into everything. A female friend told me that she and other girlfriends visited a nightclub, and during the night preceding the days of the dead one of the male dancers took the microphone and bitterly complained that the Mexicans were changing local traditions, asking them to leave the state of Yucatan and go back to where they came from, to eat whatever they want at their own homes elsewhere. Similarly, Christmas, Easter week, and other celebrations are becoming occasions for the affirmation of local identities.

However, global society is growing multicultural. It is now impossible, if it ever was possible, to maintain the inviolability of national and local boundaries. If anything, globalization has contributed to relativizing the value of all cultures (Appadurai 1996). In the next section I will discuss the negotiations that must be established to guarantee coexistence and respectful interaction among different cultural groups. Nonetheless, it is important to recognize the difficulties that derive from a history of structural domination between different societies. In this sense, it may be necessary, in the future, to reshape the interactions between members of a colonial culture (even if it is internal colonialism) and members of a historically colonized group, including the local elites.

Locals and Outsiders: Communities and Their Others

Anthropologists and sociologists alike have long been attentive to the forms of interaction between local people and outsiders. If, in general terms, classical anthropologists were concerned, chiefly, with the mechanisms that ensured the reproduction of social structures and cultures *within* communities, researchers working in so-called modern(izing) settings were forced to look at the arrival of newcomers. Hence, sociologists working in modern cities and anthropologists of the Mediterranean have looked at the interaction between hosts and guests since the late 1950s (see Ayora-Diaz 2000). Although studies about hosts and guests are widespread in anthropological studies, the figure of the *stranger*, often forgotten, is important for our understanding of the different strategies deployed by local groups to neutralize the threat imposed by newcomers (e.g., Z. Bauman 2001; Elias and Scotson 1994).

Strangers, as Derrida (2000) suggests, pose "the question" on the locals.

There is, he says, an absolute hospitality whose rules of disinterested generosity prevent the host even from asking the stranger's name. The absolutism of this rule overrules the local rules and practices of hospitality. In this instance, the guest takes the host as hostage and demands a welcoming without questioning, while challenging local practices and rules regarding hospitality. Although it has been argued elsewhere (Ayora-Diaz 2000) that hospitality does not necessarily entail aggression, we must recognize that the presence of unequal structural relations of power, where they exist, re-signify the displacements of people and their integration (or lack thereof) in host societies. Mirelle Rosello (2001) has argued that, in France, *hospitality* is the term of choice to describe the reception of immigrants from the former colonies. However, she demonstrates, this practice is now conditioned, and the status of the "guests" is subject to new legal definitions and policing actions. One pressing problem is to define how to host, for long periods, guests that were not invited. This blind alley shows the limits of using "hospitality" as a trope to describe practices involving the reception into a territory of scores of migrants. The interactions between migrants and receiving societies are only metaphorically analogous to the practices described as hospitality that occur between householders and their visitors at the domestic level.

There is no absolute rule. For example, although many Lebanese arrived in Yucatan as poor, itinerant merchants and then progressively became wealthy, in general terms they are accepted as full members of Catholic, mainstream Yucatecan society. In fact, they have seldom been defined as "invaders," and they are seen as having adopted and being adopted by Yucatecans. In contrast, central Mexicans are seen to represent the power of the Mexican highlands, and they know it. Hence, instead of adapting to local conditions, Mexicans are perceived as seeking to impose their views and tastes on local people.

Also, from the political use of language in the media, Yucatecans get cues about the ways in which members of a colonial force perceive them. In 1945, José Díaz Bolio (1998) complained that the Mexican media overrepresented Yucatecans as criminals in the crime sections of the newspapers of Mexico City. He repeatedly complained about the negative influence of Mexico on the Yucatecan economy and society. During the 1950s Mexican cinema introduced some Yucatecan characters, stereotyping them as naive dopes. In TV and radio programs broadcasted from Mexico City, Mexicans often referred to Yucatan as the "sister republic"; also, the states of United States of Mexico are called provinces, disregarding the fact that, for many people in the states, to be called provinces reminds them of the colonial and imperial power of a strong central government; and, adding insult to injury, Yucatecans are often the target of Mexican jokes that represent them as dumb and simple.

In contemporary Yucatan some of these roles have been reversed; but, also, some Mexicans continue to think of Yucatecans as slow-minded. For example, local media and people in daily conversations are quick to point the finger at "Mexicans" as responsible for the rise in crime, violence against women, and the aggressive traffic on the streets. National and regional newspapers are filled with stories of frauds, rapes, and robberies in which the criminals are from central Mexico.

Taking this context into account, during 2004 I was eating with three Yucatecans aged between sixty and seventy. I told them, "You know, I find something interesting: we Yucatecans are proud of our ways and believe that hospitality is one of our highest values." They wholeheartedly approved my statement. Then I added, "But why when we look at the Chilangos we don't usually feel that hospitable?" And they said, "Of course! How can we? Since they arrived women are not safe on the streets, crime is high, and they offend people everywhere."

In sum, Mexicans are seen as strangers undeserving of Yucatecan hospitality; that is, there are local rules of interaction that Mexicans constantly break. One is that Yucatecans expect respect for local practices and values. Those who adopt and respect them are granted respect and a place in Yucatecan society; those who don't, those who want to assert their origin, are not granted hospitality. Local people are inclined to accept the affirmation of cultural practices by Germans, US citizens, French, and other foreigners who reside in Mérida; they hold cultural preferences and values worth preserving as they enrich urban life (they open German charcuteries, manufacture Belgian chocolates, open Italian restaurants, or renovate and give new life to old buildings). After all, Yucatan has an old history of commerce with the United States and Europe. But the cultural practices of Mexicans are perceived and defined as intrusive, disrespectful of local ways, and disruptive of local morality.

This difficult and tense interaction between Yucatecans and Mexicans permeates different cultural realms. Although there is a process of negotiation between representatives of both "cultures," this negotiation is already marked by structural inequalities. Thus, neither Yucatecans nor Mexicans define the results as neutral. It is in this context that Meridians appeal to the "community" of local, Yucatecan people, against the strangers who seek to impose themselves upon local society. As Zygmunt Bauman (2001) reminds us, these communities are re-created to counter the threat of the different. Communities seek to enforce homogeneity and sameness over all their members and do not allow deviation from the norm (see Ayora-Diaz 2003).

The gastronomic field is thus turned into a battlefield where the locals de-

fend the integrity of the culinary tradition as a token for the integrity of the community. From the local point of view, strangers not only invade the social body, but also seek to introduce customs and tastes that are strange to the regional culinary field and, consequently, threaten to transform it in ways not controlled by the community. It is at times like the present when cooks, domestic and commercial, seek to preserve the authenticity and tradition of local culinary recipes. Innovators are not to be trusted as they introduce the alien, the stranger, into the local in uncontrollable ways.

Vendors of Yucatecan food may at times harden the "purity" of their recipes. For example, at a regional food restaurant, one of the waiters explained to me, when I asked whether the recipe for a dish had been changed, that outsiders (i.e., non-Yucatecans) often ask for toppings or for adjustments in the recipes that degrade the dish. In their restaurant, he said, they sell the food as it must be eaten and no longer make allowances for such requests. In other restaurants, managed by more market-oriented individuals, they are not afraid to sell dishes with the names of traditional Yucatecan dishes that hardly resemble the original recipe. Some Yucatecans like these innovations and describe these dishes as *nouvelle Yucatecan cuisine*, but others dislike them and complain that they give people the wrong message about local food.

Discussion: Food and Postcolonial Representations

During the unfolding of global processes, throughout the history of colonial relations between Mexico and Yucatan, Yucatecans have engaged in creative articulations of the local and the global. Yucatan is not a closed society, but one that has resisted the imposition of the Mexican cultural blueprint with varied degrees of success at different times in history. Through radio, cinema, newspapers, religion, and economic expansionism, Mexican culture has become the homo/hegemonic representation that veils abroad the diversity of Mexican regions. Mariachi music; the mescal-, pulque-, or tequila-drinking, chili-eating, sombrero-carrying macho *charro* (cowboy), and Guadalupano (cultist of the Virgin of Guadalupe) Mexicans of movies and novels have been turned into stereotypical icons of national culture. During the twentieth century some Yucatecan Catholics have abandoned their parish saints to devote themselves to the Virgin of Guadalupe (Fernández Repetto and Negroe Sierra 2002), others have created and joined *charro* associations, the national media corporations have sought to homogenize musical tastes, imposing *ranchero* and *grupero* music (Pedelty 2004), and national restaurant chains have homogenized regional cuisines into some generic assortment of dishes they offer to their customers. However, resistance, defiance, and sometimes

rejection of the national cultural imagination counter this homogenizing tendency.

If, during the creation of the Mexican imagined community, books about Mexican cooking and the history of Mexican food privileged central Mexican cooking, silencing the regions, regional cuisine exponents are now responding with a proliferation of regional cookbooks. The gastronomic field has been turned into a contested site for the articulation of global, cosmopolitan trends and local tastes and preferences. It is local people who, thus far, control what belongs or does not in that field in Yucatan and who protect it from Mexican interference.

Mexican gastronomic practices are often perceived as rather aggressive: Yucatecan food is spicy but not spicy-hot. Mexican food, in contrast, is perceived as imposing chili pepper on everybody. This is, from the Yucatecan point of view, a transposition of the colonial disposition to other cultural realms. All must accept spicy-hot food as Mexican culture. Yucatecan gastronomy, in contrast, uses chili peppers for aroma and flavor but serves peppers as side dishes to add to one's own food according to individual preferences and taste. Although habanero pepper, reputedly one of the hottest peppers in the world, is grown in Yucatan and enjoyed by many, it is always offered as a token of Yucatecan gentility and hospitality at the table, but never imposed on the guests. In the culinary field this non-imposing practice metaphorically represents the Yucatecan value of hospitality in contrast to the imposing dominance of Mexican culture.

In Yucatan the Mexican is the perceived stranger: a menacing body whose presence threatens local values and traditions. In the postcolonial world the metropolises must confront the fact of massive migration from their former colonies and deal with the historical guilt of impoverishing their nations (Rosello 2001). Forced to migrate, the guests feel regret and nostalgia for their places of origin that, they may perceive, they were forced to abandon (M. Joseph 1999). In Mexico, in contrast, where a central cultural power has colonized the regions, the many natural disasters, criminality, insecurity, and unemployment that characterize central Mexico launch central Mexicans to the different states in search of safety and employment. These migrants, outside central Mexico, feel nostalgia for the big city and see their former lives as giving them the right to embody imperial power. Many who arrive in Yucatan are perceived as despising Yucatecan culture and Yucatecans and as seeking to impose their tastes, values, and cultural forms over the local ones. As a response to this perceived threat, some Yucatecan groups have tended to close their affective doors and refuse to be hospitable to these strangers who seek to impose their own rules in foreign ground. It is from this struggle

to assert Mexican and Yucatecan rules that the hybridity of Yucatecan gastronomy often appears as closed to Mexican influences, while to local people it has been for centuries the open door to global and cosmopolitan dialogue.

Notes

1. Mérida is the capital city of the state of Yucatan. Its inhabitants (close to one million) are called Meridanos and Meridanas (male and female, respectively). To avoid a gender-biased use, I call them all Meridans. Over 50 percent of the population of the state lives in Mérida. From the 1980s to date, the population of Mérida has expanded greatly due to immigration from other Yucatecan cities, towns, and villages, from other regions of Mexico outside Yucatan, and from other countries. Throughout this chapter I sometimes use "Yucatecans" when the events, perceptions, and stories are shared by Meridans with other Yucatecans. I use "Meridans" when the description is restricted to the inhabitants of Mérida.

2. There are similar reactions elsewhere expressed in many forms; for example, the Alaskan bumper sticker asking, "If it's tourist season, why can't we shoot them?" (Canestrini 2004, 39); or the strong feeling against Swedes in Copenhagen, exemplified by slogans that ask Danes to keep the country clean and accompany Swedes to the border (Löfgren 2002a).

3. *Chilango* has a morally ambivalent meaning: while many residents of Mexico City that I know call themselves that (*soy chilango*), and even the *Ortografía de la lengua española* gives this word as the patronymic (Real Academia Española 1999, 126), some central Mexicans feel the word to be derogatory. *Huach*, in turn, is a Yucatecan word used derogatorily to refer to non-Yucatecans. However, some outsiders with Yucatecan origin have appropriated the term and use it to name themselves and their equals as *Yucahuach*.

4. Elsewhere (Ayora-Díaz 2007), I have defined my understanding of the gastronomic field as a normative, exclusivist field constituted by recipes, ingredients, techniques, technologies, cooking procedures, and the etiquette for eating that has been instituted as particular to the regional culture of Yucatan. I am also arguing that this field is constituted and instituted under the authority of restaurants and cookbooks that authorize the food preference of regional elites.

5. Derrida (1997) suggests that in belonging to a culture where one homo/hegemonic language silences the other ones, it is questionable to presume that any individual perspective can represent all others.

6. In contrast to the rigid, institutionalized gastronomic field, I call the culinary field to the collection of recipes, ingredients, techniques, and cooking technologies that characterize domestic cooking. It is what Yucatecans eat at home and it is, hence, open, inclusive, ludic, and experimental.