

## **Strategic Identities and Subversive Narratives: On Being Maya in a Globalized World**

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Literary and cultural studies have greatly enriched cultural anthropology over the last twenty years. Ethnographers have become more sensitive to the poetics and politics of narrative construction and the limits of social scientific objectivity. (And this has not been a one-way street: literary studies has become much more concerned with culture and multivocality, concepts that we anthropologists harbor a proprietorial sense toward.) A focus on representations has been invigorating for the discipline of anthropology, for it gets to the heart of what we do: re-presenting a partial, biased view of conceptual worlds of which we are only allowed a glimpse; as Clifford Geertz (1973:452) notes, “the culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulder of those to whom they properly belong.”

As appealing and invigorating as the turn toward representation has been, there are clear limits to the usefulness of philosophical and literary deconstructivist positions for anthropology. This is not to say, as some of my colleagues argue, that anthropology should shy away from social philosophy; speaking broadly to the human condition is what we should strive for. But, as anthropologists, we do this through the study of the particulars of other cultures, the sensual minutia of everyday life. In extrapolating out from such a great diversity of lived experience, we must always keep in mind that our subjects (an inadequate word—better than “informants” but still failing to capture the sense of dialogue and collaboration) are real people living real lives whose concerns (making a living, feeding their families, working out a future for themselves in circumstances not entirely of their own making) are much more immediate and significant than our ivory tower preoccupations.

In this paper I examine Maya efforts in Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico to revalue their cultural heritage and created a new space for themselves in regional, national, and global systems of political economy. What I describe is largely a war of representations and control over representations, but one with real world consequences that bring to the fore inherent contradictions of literary deconstruction as applied to ethnographic representation.

Epistemological critiques have carved a multivocalic space that allows previously marginalized voices to be heard (if only those that appear to

westerners, and not the speakers' compatriots, as most authentic), and yet the move to "eschew singularities" (Guha 1997) works against the unifying politics of indigenous activism. Certainly, it is liberating to show how the Guatemalan and Mexican states have appropriated elements of indigenous culture and worked them into invented traditions and imagined communities to pursue hegemonic goals. But what about analyses that show how native resistance to state hegemony or to overt repression is likewise constructed and thus epistemologically baseless? What about when natives talk back in ways that do not fit with our cosmopolitan, ecumenical sensibilities?

### **Separating Cold Cream from Hot Coffee**

Reflecting his trademark penchant for binary oppositions, Claude Lévi-Strauss famously divided societies into two types, "hot" and "cold" in his 1966 work *The Savage Mind*. "Hot" societies are those such as ours that emphasize "progress" and linear conceptions of time, which in turn are associated with rapid cultural and technological change. In contrast, "cold" societies (the natives) exist "outside of history," with conceptions of the past informed by their own mytho-logics that are closer to an impugned "pensée sauvage."

Today such a division appears ethnocentric and demeaning to native peoples—akin to the evolutionary ranking of societies long ago eschewed. And yet, I suggest, even in our most multivocalic, culturally sensitive moments, we still harbor such distinctions now disguised as the divisions between "western" and "native," "developed" and "less-developed," "modern" and "traditional."

Ostensibly, the division between hot and cold societies is rapidly diminishing in importance: surely in this post-modern, post-industrial age we have moved beyond such dichotomies. Cold societies are rapidly heating up, telecommunications technologies and neoliberal reforms having turned up the flames in recent years. At the same time, if we accept Francis Fukuyama's (1992) thesis, hot societies have witnessed "the end of history."

Hybridity is the byword of the day, having replaced syncretism to describe the phenomenon of the blending of cultural traditions. And, in contrast to syncretism, hybridity implies greater agency on the part of creative cultural agents as well an ongoing process (not just punctuated equilibrium). Yet, too often our notion of hybridity is just a code for an old fashioned view of dynamic western society and static native society that has held onto values we have now lost.

Take the American Indian College Fund's market image as seen in those misty, sepia toned print ads that appear in *The Atlantic*, *Harper's*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and other such outlets (see Figures 1-3). These images overtly play to our romanticized and wistful views of noble savages (whom we call Native Americans to highlight their stoic authenticity and our multicultural sensitivity); in various states of traditional dress, or undress. They fit our

notions about what modern Indians should be like. But the story does not end there. These young Native Americans want to go to college, to better themselves, to live out their own vernaculars of the American Dream. But through such representation we discipline their desires—categorize them I do not have figures on how much money these ads brought in, but they are wonderfully effective at playing to complex emotional ties of a liberal American readership.



*Jecki Magnan / Ft. Peck Comm. College / Major Business Admin.  
Goal: Raise buffalo / Immediate goal: Raise money*



*American Indian College Fund  
Educating the mind and spirit*

*Please call 1-800-776-FUND or visit [www.collegefund.org](http://www.collegefund.org).*

*Special thanks to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation for underwriting production costs for this advertisement.*



*Sunny Walker / Sitting Bull College  
Shawl dancer, Student Senate President / Goal: Scholarship*



*American Indian College Fund  
Educating the mind and spirit*

*Please call 1-800-776-FUND or visit [www.collegefund.org](http://www.collegefund.org).*

*Special thanks to The J.C. Wells Foundation for underwriting production costs for this advertisement.*



*Beau Mitchell / Stone Child College / SPQ: 3/11  
Major: Environmental Sci. / Social Scholarship, Give something back*



*American Indian College Fund  
Educating the mind and spirit*

*Please call 1-800-776-FUND or visit [www.collegefund.org](http://www.collegefund.org).*

*Special thanks to the U.S. Trust Foundation for underwriting production costs for this advertisement.*

FIGURES 1-3: Selection from a 1998 series of ads by the American Indian College Fund; courtesy of the American Indian College Fund.

Likewise, take Latin American novels of magical realism that cook up the cold offerings of native culture to our hot western tastes. Miguel Angel Asturias, a favorite son of Guatemala, is a perfect example: borrowing from his views of Maya culture (studied from the comfortable distance of Paris) and melding that into a sort of hybridity westerners can easily wrap their minds around: the static, timeless, mythic world of native peoples made dynamic and palatable by fusing it with inflections of the western form of narrative structure. This is a manageable sort of Otherness that plays to our insidious preconceptions of primitives with potential—an understandable, manipulable sort of hybridity that subverts the very progressive intentions of the concept.

Westerners borrow an essentialized view of indigenous to help satisfy our insatiable appetite for authenticity in this age of reproductions and simulacra. At the same time, symbolic elements of a global popular culture have become commonplace in even the most remote corners of the world. In Tecpán Guatemala, the Kaqchikel Maya town where I have conducted most of my fieldwork, one finds not only the ubiquitous symbols of multinational conglomerates—Coke’s suggestively curvaceous bottles, bold red and white packs of Marlboro cigarettes—but also houses connected to an improvised cable system that broadcasts the Cartoon Chanel, HBOlé, and other foreign fare; adolescents infatuated with international pop stars such as Ricky Martin and Los Backstreet Boys; and young children engrossed in the remote worlds of Japanese animated characters. But to say that such elements of an aspiring global hegemony are imposed upon local cultures glosses over important aspects of individual agency, neglecting the seductive polyvalence of such symbols (and the material relations they imply) and the ways they are deployed toward culturally and individually defined ends.

We see creativity—and not irony—when western traditions coopt elements of native traditions, but when native traditions borrow from the West it often comes off to western eyes as ironic: think of images of Mayas working on computers, maintaining webs sites, operating video cameras. But the irony is ours not theirs.

Hybridities speak to current theoretical concerns, but it is often a contentious dialogue. Native constructions are often not the familiar sort of hybridities that we can take comfort in and pat ourselves on the back for being good, sensitive multiculturalists in consuming them. We feel compelled to name and classify them (e.g., “magical realism”) making them easier to digest—and to manipulate and parody. But certainly cold traditions are not as cold as we once imagined. So we must acknowledge the agency of native peoples, not just submerged in a tidal wave of westernization, but active, intentional agents building their futures in a world not entirely of their own making.

These are not the petty debates of the ivory tower, but real lives, real misery, real world impacts. It is a luxury for us to argue over the theoretical

aspects, the poetics and politics of representation from the comfortable surroundings in which we find ourselves. It is quite another thing altogether to live this reality, to be political actors — a luxury the Maya don't enjoy for the most part. The stakes are much higher. It is well and good to extol the virtues of giving marginalized peoples (women, natives, whomever) a voice, but when the natives actually talk back it is often disconcerting, for they do not share the views that we as scholars imagine they should hold.

### **Constructing Identities: Maya Resurgence in Guatemala**

Guatemala is perhaps best known for the period of violence which racked the country in the late 1970s and early 1980s in which tens of thousands were killed. In 1986 nominal civil rule was reestablished in Guatemala and in 1996 the government signed a Peace Accord with rebel forces formally ending the conflict.

Phoenix-like, an ambitious ethnic revitalization movement has arisen out of the ashes of the Guatemalan holocaust. Pan-Mayanism is an ethnic revival movement based on a philosophy of Indian pride and self-determination. For security as well as ideological reasons, it is a nebulous, decentralized network of Mayan individuals, formal organizations and informal groups who share a broadly similar philosophy. The movement is being led by a young and active group of Maya intellectuals — the first generation of Maya Mayanists — who are relatively well-educated and affluent.

Pan-Mayanist leaders stress that they are primarily working to preserve Mayan languages and culture. Because of this strategic emphasis on cultural issues, their demands fall outside of the historical political confrontations between the Guatemalan left and right, and they are not inherently antagonistic to either side. Segments of the elite sector are ready and willing to grant demands for cultural and linguistic rights, which allows them to demonstrate their progressiveness to the rest of the world in this period of increasing concern over indigenous rights. Such concessions are also timely, given that foreign assistance is being tied closely to Guatemala's human rights record.

Playing on the recent global valuation of all things indigenous, the recognition of indigenous rights as a subset of fundamental human rights, and the ideological commitment of many academics to support the empowerment of marginalized peoples, pan-Mayanists have been very successful at gaining material support for the movement from international organizations (including the United Nations, the European Union, the U.S. Agency for International Development, and numerous private foundations); see Figure 4.



FIGURE 4: Cholsamaj map of Guatemala with UNICEF symbol;  
courtesy of Editorial Cholsamaj

Beauty pageants are important political events in Maya communities (Fischer 2001, Fischer and Hendrickson 2002). In Tecpán, as elsewhere, there are two competitions, one of the Indian queen and one for the non-Indian (ladina) queen. In the 1994 competition, Tecpán's military base nominated "Wilma I" for Indian queen, and employed a precolumbian theme in their float design. Queen Wilma, draped in a cloak made of the distinctive rich brown fabric of Tecpán ceremonial clothing, was seated atop a miniature white-washed pyramid and was flanked by two girls and two boys wearing local traditional dress. From her vantage point atop the pyramid, Queen Wilma looked out over a scene of ritual human sacrifice. Wrapped in a full-length blood red cape, a young army recruit played the role of the Maya priest/executioner who chopped at the neck of the young woman tightly wrapped in bright white sheets.

That the notorious local military base, responsible for the death of hundreds of local residents just over a decade earlier, choose to portray a scene of precolumbian human sacrifice on its Indian queen float is a disturbing sign of their entrenched power. In this scheme Indians represent the animal



ignorance and brutality that threatens modernizing development, and an explicit link is developed between Maya cultural values and savagery. The military base's float makes this link explicit, and traces its origins back to an image of a hedonistically pagan and blood-thirsty Classic Maya civilization. It takes a heavy hand, the float's iconography seems to imply, to control a people capable of human sacrifice.

Along these same lines, Tecpán's town priest, Padre Carlos, once told me that local Maya priests, as part of this general cultural revitalization, were bringing back human sacrifice. As support he told me a second-hand tale of a recent sacrifice of baby in the hills outside of Tecpán; "what's your opinion of Maya religion now?" he asks, followed by a suggestive, "do you have children of your own?"

In contrast, Maya scholars and activists offer revisionist histories of their past: ones that stress cultural plurality and ecological symbiosis — often directly contradicting contemporary archaeological evidence. Further, they do not offer these representations as postmodern pastiche nor as one voice among many; rather they claim a thoroughly essentialist moral authority based on their ethnic heritage that plays to our postmodern, anti-essentialist sensibilities.

Most Maya revitalization efforts to date have been linguistic. Such efforts have the advantage of appearing folkloristic and non-threatening to the powers that be, although their goal to deconstruct the history of contact espoused within the Western tradition. One famous passage from the 16th century Kaqchikel text the *Anales de los Kaqchikeles* is translated by a number of scholars into both Spanish and English as: "Truly [the Spaniards] inspired fear when they arrived, we did not know their faces, and the lords took them for gods." Sam Colop (1996) argues, however, that the Kaqchikel word *kab'owil*, translated above as "gods", is more accurately translated as "idol" or "image," belying the claim that the Maya worship the Spaniards or were duped into believing that they were gods.

Similarly, Maya scholars and activists have been working to update vocabularies of Mayan languages, making them more viable in the modern context. Until a few years ago, most speakers of Kaqchikel Mayan used a single word (*ch'ich*) to denote all metal objects. Today, there are rich metaphorical vocabularies to talk more specifically about all sorts of technologies. Take, for example, the following metaphorical paradigm for computers:

*kematz'ib*—“computer,” literally “weaver-[of]-writing”  
*q'inotz'ib*—“computer program,” literally “the warp of writing”  
*kemomtz'ib*—“computer file,” literally “woven writing”

There has also been a move to reappropriate ancient Maya writing—hieroglyphs—from western scholars. For Maya activists, hieroglyphs act as powerful symbols of the splendor and literacy of that culture. For several years, the epigrapher Linda Schele offered hieroglyphic workshops for Maya groups, and the materials she produced are widely circulated among Maya activists who use them to learn Classic Maya numeration, the calendrical system, and the basic Maya glyphic syllabary.

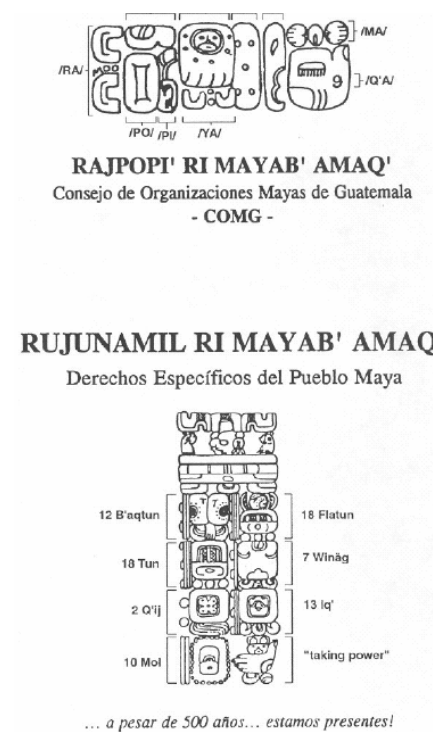


FIGURE 5: COMG cover art

The layout of the book cover in Figure 5 subtly reinforces COMG's valuation of Maya culture and the political agenda outlined in this pamphlet. Like many pan-Mayanist writings, the text is in Spanish to allow maximum accessibility across language groups. But note that the hieroglyphic representation of the group's name is placed proximately at the top of the cover page, followed by a smaller bold-face transcription into modern (Latin-based) orthography, and finally (in still smaller type) in Spanish translation; the

Kaqchikel title of the book is likewise highlighted over the Spanish translation. This layout makes clear the authors' valuation of Mayan languages, their intended audience, and their own native language proficiency. The publication date of the book, which follows the title on the cover, is represented in the style of a Classic Maya hieroglyphic collocation using the Long Count and Calendar Round. Reading the bar (=5) and dot (=1) notations in the image from left to right and top to bottom, we arrive at a Long Count date of 12.18.18.7.2 and a Calendar Round date of 13 Iq' 10 Mol, which translates to 7 September 1991 in the Gregorian calendar. Following this date, the collocation concludes with a glyph that may be glossed as "taking power" (composed of a hand holding a lordly ahua face), reinforcing the view that publishing Maya scholarship is a form of empowerment.

In transcribing the name of their group into hieroglyphs, the authors modified the glyphic symbol for /ya/, adding a wavy line to indicate that it should be read as /ra/ (the historically related, highland equivalent of /ya/); and a snail-like element was added to the glyphic syllable /k'a/ to make it /q'a/ (also the sound to which it is historically related); although no changes were made to the glyph for /hi/ it is read in this context as /ji/, and once again these sounds are historically related. Thus, one who knows the system may read the Kaqchikel name of the group in hieroglyphs: RA-J-PO-PI' [ri] MA-YA-B' A-MA-Q'.

The most recent Maya scholarship has turned toward more overt political analyses. These works call for, among other things, the establishment of semi-autonomous Maya provinces in Guatemala and the use of affirmative action preferences to enfranchise Maya people in the political process.

Such political goals, be they explicit or implicit, are built upon modernist ideologies —positive assertions grounded in some sense of accepted authority. These Maya scholar/activists do not want to be one voice in a cacophonous chorus of equally valid truths. Rather they are seeking to make real world change by asserting authority, not just contesting it.

Thus, they produce essentializing analyses to promote a radical modernist political agenda that has flourished in a postmodern global ecumene. They are using cultural capital validated by postmodernist discourses to gain economic and political clout.

Pan-Mayanism is as much an academic as a political movement, something that many North American academics find disconcerting. In seeking a model for the future, Mayan scholars tend to idealize pre-contact Mayan culture, describing it as unified, pluralistic and largely peaceful. The movement is very much concerned with the issues of representation that the humanities and social sciences have been struggling with for decades, but in a different sort of way. By contrasting their view of the past with present conditions, these historical reinterpretations are meant to be relevant: the pluralism of the ancient Maya is

a vision of a future Guatemala. In some ways it is a textbook case of cultural construction. But it is essentializing, constructive not postmodern deconstruction, it is partisan not an ecumenical, heteroglossic alternative. Activists self-consciously and explicitly privilege their position based on essentialized ethnic traits (i.e. being Maya) in a way that plays into our desires to consume the native's perspective. It is a wonderfully subversive appropriation of modernist science in the context of a postmodern social movement.

### **The Zapatistas of Chiapas, Mexico**

Let us turn to the most spectacular Latin American movement against globalization, that of the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) of Chiapas, Mexico. The Zapatistas, in what has become a tired but fitting phrase, burst onto the world scene on 1 January 1994, their debut set to coincide with the initial implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), linking Mexico, the United States, and Canada. The Zapatistas are unique in a world filled with social movements, having neatly combined concerns with indigenous rights, the inequities of globalized capitalism, and a media savvy that is the envy of Mexico's Madison Avenue counterparts.

The Zapatistas have exploited the disintermediation in global communications networks to pursue their own ends. They have several Web sites that post news, official communiqués, and other items of interest. See:

[www.fzln.org.mx](http://www.fzln.org.mx)  
[www.ezln.org](http://www.ezln.org)  
[www.ezlnaldf.org](http://www.ezlnaldf.org)

By making available to the national and international press their own news bulletins and communiques the Zapatistas are not dependent on biased local or regional press coverage that might (or might not) get picked up by other media outlets. Even more, they have been very skillful at reaching out directly to individuals and groups in other parts of the world. And in effectively mobilizing international interest and support, the Zapatistas have been able to apply pressure on Mexico both from within and without. It is conceivable that the Zapatistas could have been quickly stamped out by the Mexican military; and recent history shows us that such a solution is not out of the question (just look at Guatemala, Congo, Indonesia, Kosovo — the list goes on and on). But the Zapatistas presented their demands to the world at the same time as to the Mexican state, and they were able to create a broad base of national and international sympathy and awareness that made it difficult for the Mexican government to pursue a military solution. It is amazing the ways in which the Zapatistas have cowered the Mexican state. In February and March 2001, the

EZLN led what the press dubbed the “Zapatur,” a two week caravan of armed and masked Zapatista rebels accompanied by hundreds of observers, press, and groupies from Chiapas to Mexico City, with a triumphant entrance into the Zocalo. Not only did the Mexican government not prevent this rally from taking over the center of the capital, federal troops provided protection for the whole of the Zapatur journey.

The EZLN website has a password protected email system through which *compañeros* can communicate (with whom exactly I do not know, but presumably within Chiapas, other states of Mexico, and throughout the world). Their web sites also provide details for interested supporters, including bank transfer details to allow international contributions to be sent directly to their bank account. On the fourth of February 1998 the Zapatistas hacked into the website of the Mexican Treasury Department, replacing the pages with communiques from Subcomandante Marcos under the banner of Exploit! The Treasury Department only regained control of the site after hours of scrambling.

The Zapatistas have benefitted from a diminution of traditional state power in Mexico. Gary Gossen (n.d.) argues that they were instrumental in bringing down the Partido Revolucionario Institucional RI controlled government that had run the country for most of the 20th century until the July 2000 election of Vicente Fox, of the right-moderate PAN party. At the same time, the Zapatista stance cannot be reduced to mere reflexive opposition to the Mexican state. Even their namesake—Emiliano Zapata, the hero of the Mexican revolution — is a self-conscious assertion that they are true patriots, upholding the ideals of the Mexican constitution. Indeed, their message goes, the Zapatistas are more patriotic than those who purport to represent the state as politicians and functionaries. The charismatic and enigmatic leader of the Zapatistas is Subcomandante Marcos. Frequently delivering his communiques in poetry, stylized stories, or imagined dialogues, Marcos uses such “factions” to reveal the contradictory nature of Mexican identities. Take, for example, the following, an imagined interrogation of Marcos by agents of Mexico’s national police:

El de la voz [Marcos] confiesa que, en compañía de otros mexicanos, indios mayas en su inmensa mayoría, decidieron hacer valer un papel que, dice él de la voz, que le enseñaron en la escuela, señala los derechos de los ciudadanos mexicanos y que lleva por nombre “Constitución Política de los Estados Unidos Mexicanos.” Él de la voz señala que, en el artículo 39 de ese papel, se dice que el pueblo tiene derecho de cambiar el gobierno. Llegados a este punto, la P.D. [el agente investigador], celosa de su deber, mandó confiscar papel tan subversivo, ordenó quemarlo sin

miramiento alguno y, hecho lo cual, prosiguió tomando la declaración del individuo de la obvia nariz y la contaminante pipa. Él de la voz confesó que, no pudiendo ejercer ese derecho por vías pacíficas y legales, decidió, junto a sus cómplices (a los que él de la voz llama “hermanos”), alzarse en armas en contra del supremo gobierno y gritar “YA BASTA!” a la mentira que, dice él de la voz, rige nuestros destinos. La P.D. no pudo menos que mostrarse aterrorizada ante descomunal blasfemia y se estremeció por la sola idea de quedarse sin “hueso.” (Marcos 1995)

Here we clearly see that Zapatismo is not a rejection of the idea of a Mexican state, as many politicians fear, but just of the current form of that state (Higgins 2000). The EZLN philosophy is actually very nationalistic, but utopian at the same time. As an example, permit me to present one other selection of Subcomandante Marco’s large corpus of writings, a poem titled “Problemas”:

Esto de la Patria  
 es algo difícil de explicar.  
 Pero más difícil es comprender  
 eso del amor a la patria.  
 Por ejemplo,  
 nos enseñaron que el amor a la patria es,  
 por ejemplo,  
 saludar a la bandera,  
 ponerse de pie al escuchar el Himno Nacional.  
 Emborracharse a discreción cuando  
 Pierde la selección de fútbol.  
 A discreción emborracharse cuando  
 gana la selección de fútbol.  
 Algunos etcéteras que poco cambian  
 de sexenio en sexenio...

Y por ejemplo,  
 no nos enseñaron que amor a la patria  
 puede ser,  
 por ejemplo,  
 silbar como quien se va alejando,  
 pero,  
 tras de aquella colina también hay  
 patria y nadie nos ve,

y nos franqueamos  
(porque uno siempre se franquea  
cuando nadie nos ve)  
y le decimos  
(a la patria).  
por ejemplo,  
todo lo que la odiamos  
y todo lo que la amamos  
y esto siempre es mejor decirlo,  
por ejemplo,  
a balazos y sonriendo.

Y, por ejemplo,  
nos enseñaron que amor a la patria es,  
por ejemplo,  
usar sombrero de charro,  
saber los nombres de los niños héroes,  
gritar “¡Viva-arriba México!”  
aunque México esté abajo-muerto.  
Otros etcéteras que poco cambian  
de sexenio en sexenio.

Y, por ejemplo,  
no nos enseñaron que  
amor a la patria  
puede ser,  
por ejemplo,  
callar como quien se muere,  
pero no,  
bajo esta tierra también hay patria  
y nadie nos oye  
y nos franqueamos  
(porque uno siempre se franquea  
cuando nadie nos oye)  
y le contamos  
(a la patria)  
la pequeña y dura historia  
de los que se fueron muriendo para amarla  
y que ya no están aquí para darme la razón,  
pero me la dan no estando,  
los que nos enseñaron  
que a la patria se le ama,

por ejemplo,  
a balazos y sonriendo. (Marcos 1994)

Like the pan-Maya movement in Guatemala, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation advocates a multicultural future for Mexico but through more militant calls for political, economic, and social reform. Both Guatemalan pan-Mayanists and the Mexican Zapatistas see some form of political autonomy as key to their demands. At the same time, the innovative ways in which they articulate Maya identity to validate their claims prompt those concerned with state sovereignty and security—and non-Indian privilege—to dismiss this new Mayanness as nothing more than the political opportunism of an already-assimilated Maya elite or the product of outside agitation. Witness the attacks on the legitimacy and authenticity of the Zapatista's Subcomandante Marcos: disparaged for not being Indian and accused of being gay, Marcos deftly resists such tidy categories by stating that he is: “gay in San Francisco, a black in South Africa, Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Isidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, an indigenous person in the streets of San Cristóbal . . . In other words, Marcos is a human being in this world. Marcos is every untolerated, oppressed, exploited minority that is resisting and saying ‘Enough!’” Here Marcos, in his own poetic way, effectively captures a widespread sentiment among Maya activists who steadfastly refuse to be pigeonholed by dehumanizing essentialisms and categories of social containment.

### **Subversive Hybridities**

Who has the right or the moral authority to speak for a group? We have, out of necessity perhaps, adopted a “take me to your leader” approach in our contact with native peoples, imposing a hierarchical authority structure that often does not mesh with local conceptions, a view of native voice that negates diversity within native communities. Who may speak for the Maya? Are we to privilege those who have mastered western discourse? Or do we look for a more “authentic” voice? And what is authenticity?

Too often we anthropologist view all culture change as a loss, similar to ecological extinction. I too am guilty. But this is a fundamentally paternalistic point of view. Culture change is not inherently negative — indeed it is the one great constant of culture. Change, introduction, adoption, hybridization all often act to enrich local cultural traditions in some ways. Victoria Bricker (n.d.) has recently pointed out that linguistic change itself need not imply loss; she gives an example from Yucatec Maya where *trabàahoh* (from the Spanish *trabajo*, used in the Mayan context to mean specifically “wage labor”) has been added to the vocabulary to complement *ha\_meyah* (“real work”), thus enriching (and not diminishing) the linguistic and semantic domain.



Again the Zapatistas provide us with a clear example: enriching the discourse through cultural fusion. Refusing to give up what makes them them (as least to themselves at a given moment), they also borrow freely from the many ideational, ideological, cultural, and political available to them these days, thus creating dynamic new hybrid forms that Gary Gossen (1999) identifies as the a “postmodern social movement.”

What we commonly term “globalization” is the convergence of these forces acting on our lives in very different ways, depending on our life histories, our positions in grander schemes, and the resources we have available to us. There are potential economic benefits, but these can be fleeting and may lead to a mere transmogrification of previous patterns of exploitation. It is my opinion that nontraditional agriculture, for example, is a way; also new sorts of entrepreneurship facilitated by the nation and its dependents. The Guatemalan state and its communities are all trying to gain the same things. The new set of rules presented by the new global set of rules imposed by the new economy are allowing for new sorts of economic activity as well as political activity. Yet, people from all over the world can now imagine all sorts of different futures for themselves: the toolkit of cultural resources has vastly expanded, and this process may be liberating for some (or many, depending on how it is played out).

Inequality has not been addressed adequately, either by technocrats, academics, or indigenous peoples. We do not have to fall back into the dated, polarizing debated between capitalism and communism, or even left and right, but the language of identity politics cannot completely replace a concern with inequality; it enriches it, makes it more palatable and humane.

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