

# Policing Illegalities and Sentimental Ownership in UNESCO World Heritage: Of Mules, Cooking, and Kangaroos

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“Que le hiciste, Quetzil? Por qué no te deja entrar? Por qué no te quiere?” [“What did you do to her, Quetzil? Why doesn’t she let you enter? Why doesn’t she like you?”] Personal communication, 2008.

“Por qué creas que ella no quiere que estas allá haciendo investigación, Quetzil? Es sencillo. Mira, es que no quiere que sepas que hace. Tienen miedo de que vas a enterar de lo que hacen!” [Why do you think that she does not want you there doing investigations, Quetzil? Look, it’s that she does not want you to know what they do. They are afraid that you will find out what they do.”] Personal communication, 2009.

The dominant paradigm of heritage studies prioritizes problems of management and conflicting forms of ownership as claimed through identity in contexts of legal pluralism (Merry 1988; Griffiths 1986; Griffith 2002). By pushing identity, management, and plural forms of legal ownership to the side, heritage can be investigated in terms of policing and illegalities which opens up new questions of heritage and governmentality. This article asks about illegalities at a UNESCO World Heritage site: How do illegalities come to be known, how are they talked about, and thus how does this everyday talk about alleged illicit activities articulate policing? Illegalities and policing of heritage are explored through rumor, public secrets, and disinformation that circulate in and around a particular place, Chichén Itzá, as mediated through ethnography. There is no denying that ethnographic knowledge is based on the ethnographer’s own person — i.e., how ethnographers are able to access, or are disabled from accessing, information through their personal character, contacts and connections. What are the possible roles and meanings of ethnography in contexts of illegalities and their policing? What happens when ethnographers are enlisted in policing of everyday life?

When we reiterate the now well established mantra in anthropology that ethnography is a story composed partial truths, we recognize that the information we receive, analyze and then represent in our narratives is not only incomplete, but also that our sources of information and our knowledge is motivated by alliances, biases, prejudices, interests, political objectives, and fears. Partial truths by being incomplete and politically motivated are also therefore literally half-truths or “white lies” that is, deception, deceit, disinformation, fabrication, trickery, and ruse. Although all this is well known, it is relevant to reiterate especially if discussing ethnography as espionage, intelligence work, policing, or surveillance placed, knowingly or not, in the service of locals as a mode of policing. Ethnography generally, and this ethnography particularly, is not just a narrative of partial

truths, but a narrative web of *partial lies, deception, and misinformation that passes as truthful, plausible, realistic and prejudicial truths that pass as implausible, deceptive disinformation.*

### “What did you do to her?”

In preparation for my dissertation fieldwork I had requested permission from the INAH to enter the archaeological site of Chichén. I was granted permission to do ethnographic interviewing, participant observation, and conduct surveys with all types of workers and persons involved in this destination. In subsequent years I neglected to request permission as I had become known by the relevant authorities and the anthropological community of Yucatán. More importantly I had also become accepted by the Chichén community. People would say that I had drunk water from a *cenote*, that I spoke Maya “perfectly,” that I knew more about Maya culture and Chichén than they did, that I had participated in some major social and political events in the history of Pisté, that I had become a “Yucateco” and a “Maya.” It is this type of flattering white lies stated freely without sarcasm or facetiousness to anthropologists who immerse themselves in communities that has made many of us fall in love with “the Maya” and continue to work here. Whether I had “gone native” or not, they certainly “nationalized” me as local. Even this past election, some persons were surprised that I could not vote! The point is that as a local by birth or socialization into Maya communities, one is granted the privilege of access to and visitation of the nearby ruins.

I started to request permissions again for the field school students that I brought to Yucatán. These include the exemption from the purchase of tickets in order to have an educational visit to the ruins, and for students to conduct independent ethnography on heritage issues there (if anyone were to so choose). The requests are submitted to the heads of the state government of Yucatán tourism agency, called CULTUR the Patronato de las Unidades de Servicios Culturales y Turísticos del Estado de Yucatán (which is a state run business and administrative agency providing touristic services at archaeological, cultural and ecological tourism sites) and of Yucatán regional office of the federal National Institute of Anthropology and History INAH (federal). Unlike research involving archaeological, historical or other *material*, tangible patrimony, which abides by strict federal laws and intensive evaluation, there is virtually no oversight of ethnographic research in México. Thus, there has never been any problem, especially given my connections, with these permissions. Rather, the most arduous part of the request has always been getting to a fax machine, making repeated telephone calls to ensure the requests were being processed, and then driving to the Mérida offices to pick up the permission letter.

Then in 2010 it happened. As per routine, I received the permissions and we took the group to visit Chichén. With CULTUR, there has never been any problems, but to my surprise, the INAH chief of the Chichén office stated that the permission granted by her superior in the authority structure of the INAH was in fact worthless. “El no manda aquí.” (“What?” I thought!) He does not have authority here. She is the one that commands. She is the one that rules Chichén. She refused to allow us entrance under the permission granted for educational purposes by her superior. I was not a little perturbed and shocked. Swallowing pride, we paid INAH tickets for the students to visit the site on a day long tour.

Later, when I discussed this with friends, some initially asked, “well, Quetzil, what *did you do* to her that she does not like you?” Right. Since I had had no other contact with this woman except in this capacity of asking permission, some people suggested that I try to

schmooze her, make friends with her, or otherwise play her politics of appealing to her grandiose conceits and sentiments of being the *dueña de Chichén* (owner of Chichén Itzá). How many told me that if she wants to be the ruler, the queen, of Chichén, then go to her and (essentially) beg. Kissing up to power is not one of my strengths. In any case, I had tried that once, the first time I met her two years previously. Further, those who suggested that I “talk” with her because she is “muy sensible, muy tratable” (very understanding, very easy to get along with) were persons that were implicated in her alleged illegalities. It became clear that as the issue of negated permissions continued, that something else was going on. *Tienen miedo de que vas a enterar de lo que hacen!* They are afraid you will find out what they are doing.

Find out?

Find out what?

What are they doing — and, well, who *are* they?

### Middle Voice Imperative: Ethnography, Policing, Espionage

“They are afraid that you will find out” is spoken like a hortative command that hides its own imperative demand: (~~You have to~~) “Find out” (~~what they are doing!~~). The speech act, from semantics to the paralinguistics of the event, is a kind of middle voice imperative that refuses to define the subject, agent, and the direct object of the verbal action, which thereby remains prioritized and privileged: Find out. In the course of three years of talking with friends about my situation with the permissions, everyone was astounded and essentially responded with the same thing: an imperative middle voice. Find out without being the agent of finding out: Find out without looking or appearing as if you are trying to find out. Get informed. Look for it, inquire, investigate, study these are all intransitive actions when there is no direct, specific or known object. When directed toward a known object, such as a research object of study these are transitive actions. “Find out” about some unknown object that is there but which remains hidden, invisible, unstated, displaced, concealed becomes a middle voice action. Keep an eye out for “it.” What? Who knows? They know but aren’t telling you. It’s there, a public secret kept mute, invisible that you must listen for, look for, find out without listening, looking and finding.

The middle voice in Maya is made by changing the morphology and tone of the verb root and adding certain suffixes. In anthropology the middle voice is there already. It is fieldwork. Finding out information is easiest in contexts of sustained immersion — call it traditional fieldwork! — when one is not struggling with the overt task of elicitation, explicit questioning, scheduling formal interviews, etc. Information when connected and networked just happens. The ethnographer discovers crucial information, creates key knowledge along the plodding way of asking about something else. Ethnographic fieldwork, like a process of intelligence gathering, is done along the way in secret even without one knowing that one is collecting critical information that must then be processed and transformed into data or “intel.”

My friends, through insinuation, command me to look for it. They enlist me into the policing of a secret about which there is no talk, no chisme, no gossip. Everyone knows it is happening but there is no mention of what it is. Not a hint about what “it” is for a whole summer. It took two years for friends to finally tell me straight up after going through again another round of blunted and negated permissions. Finally, I was told they are involved in irregular activities. *Irregularidades* is a nuanced word used to reference a spectrum of

possibilities: It asserts flagrant and illegal transgressions through an insinuation that is able to maintain limited, casual, almost unknowing knowledge or to make mild claims of minor errors. Irregularities: “They” — yes, they — are scamming tickets, illegally selling tours, conducting tours at illegal hours, taking bribes, using influence, breaking normative work rules; in short, they are breaking the law.

After the initial debacle, one friend offered to help me get the Chichén permissions. He enlisted me and the irregularity of respecting the permissions into the policing of something, still undefined, uncorroborated, because “it” in its concrete specificity continued to escape the quotidian surveillance of those who were policing it. He was compiling a list of irregularities, illicit activities, wrong-doings, noncompliance with normative work routines and process. My situation with the permissions would be another document in the portfolio. That first summer, he swore that he would get that woman out of Chichén. The following year, he promised it would happen soon. “They” know about the situation in México, they know about her treatment of you, Quetzil. The portfolio is getting bigger and bigger and more and more important persons in México City are reading it and becoming aware. Soon, soon, the judgment will come down on her. The third year, he said again, it will happen. It will happen, I was promised. Meanwhile she *ruled* Chichén

## Sentimental Ownership

The anthropological fascination with ownership goes to the origin of the field, and social sciences generally. Multiple types of cultural and legal ownership imply contexts of legal pluralism and political conflicts over governance, whether created through colonial encounters or the proliferation of international governmental organizations (IGOs), international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), and international legal organizations (ILO). The emergence of heritage as a late 20<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon coincides with the emergence of the struggles to legitimate plural modes of legalities (e.g., indigenous and cultural rights, customary law, cultural traditions) associated with subnational identity groups (or stakeholders, indigenous peoples, descendent cultures, etc.). In this age of heritage, heritage scholars, stewards, policy-makers and developers once again prioritize ownership in contexts of conflicting legal pluralism in order to create solutions to management problems.

However, there is a whole series of non-legal forms of ownership grounded in sentiments of identification that are significant in the study and management of heritage. I call these unofficial, a-legal ownerships that cross cut legally established or disputed modes, “sentimental ownership.” These sentimental ownerships can be tangential and inconsequential; that is, idle feelings of ownership based in nothing more than identity, experience, feelings, group belonging. They also may either be the actual grounding mechanisms or the dangerous subversions of other legal ownerships and management practices based in rights and laws established by (or for) nation-states, identity groups, communities, and, international organizations.

Sentimental ownership can be based on different combinations of sentiments, status, work, experience, seniority, group belongings, identity, and privilege. As an ideal type we could differentiate between those that are grounded in objective criteria of privilege, power, and access, on the one hand, and those that are based on subjectively felt or imaginary (“ideological”) connections without correlation to a sociologically legitimated “real” connection. Generally, however, sentimental ownership is based on privileged access,

legally defined authority, and work hierarchies both across employment and between job positions within types of employment. The specific materiality of these factors create distinct modes of group identification infused with feelings of superiority, privilege, status, and belonging relative to other groups. These identifications cut across the big identities of sociological theory (e.g., gender, class, ethnicity, nation, community, kinship) to form strident factionalism in which subgroups within the encompassing collectivity develop closed corporate boundaries, charismatic leadership, and internal authoritative structures of power as a means to assert dominance or position over competing subgroups composed of persons with essentially the same sociological characteristics and who may or may not be organized by a typically charismatic leader in a loosely authoritative structure of the status subgroup.

Thus, the heritage workers of Chichén Itzá can be divided into status groups differentiated by work, such as tour guides and the employees of the state government of Yucatán tourism agency, which is named CULTUR, the Patronato de las Unidades de Servicios Culturales y Turísticos del Estado de Yucatán (see Castañeda 1996, 2009). Employment in either work does not lend to sentiments of ownership based in privilege, although it might in other contexts. However there is another group of heritage workers who are empowered with sentimental ownership. This the site wardens or rangers, called *custodios*, employed by the Mexican National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). The INAH is a massive bureaucratic structure within the Secretaria of Public Education (SEP) that is mandated with the research and stewardship of national patrimony. It consists of state regional offices, museums, academic-research cadres, archaeological and historical site management teams, restoration, community outreach, and more. At the national level the majority of INAH employees participate in one associated with the SEP. At the local level of Chichén, the majority are members of a union that is more restricted in power at both the state and national levels. These two groups manifest divergent sentiments of ownership, both of which have absolutely no basis or connection to laws of any type (see Castañeda 2009; Breglia 2006).

One *custodio* complained to me that there is one cohort of *custodios* who he acknowledges are perpetrators of negative situations about which tourists have filed numerous complaints, irregular work habits, and illicit activities. Because of their success in maintaining these questionable and illegal activities, these *custodios* feel like they are the owners of Chichén. This one *custodio*, in discussing his documentation of their activities in an effort to put a stop to them, explained that these *custodios* (of the opposing majority union group) do not have an identity; that is, they have an identity crisis or problem. These are persons who do not have institutional loyalty, cultural commitment (to the nation or culture), or identity (as e.g., INAH worker, Yucateco, Mexican, Maya) the presence of which would motives them to be honest and work with integrity. Instead, their crisis of identity leads to greed or, the reverse, their avarice creates an identity crisis. Regardless, they are motivated purely by greed.<sup>1</sup> Thus, they have sought out employment at Chichén as the means through which to scam money from the millions of dollars flowing through this international heritage tourism site. This leads, my friend the INAH warden says, to a perverted identification with Chichén as simply a source of raw wealth to be exploited. Note that this group is locally recognized as a kind of mafia, both for their solidarity around a corrupt “boss” and their illicit activities. There is a local, if limited, use of this word to

describe the group. In turn, Breglia (2005:388) has even heard INAH archaeologists based in Mérida use it, i.e., “mafia,” to label this one group involved with illicit scams.<sup>2</sup>

Continued success provides the group a sense of being untouchable and ultimately as “owners” as they are clearly able to do as they wish beyond the legal norms of their official work capacity. Further, they have converted charisma-based leadership into a structure of state legitimate authority: The members of this group belong to one of the two labor unions in which INAH workers are allowed to participate. Although this union group is locally more numerous and therefore locally more powerful it is not the more numerous or powerful of the two unions at the state and federal level. Further, not all the members of this union participate in the smaller subgroup involved in the illicit exploitation of Chichén. In any case, the sentimental ownership — the identification of Chichén as “theirs” — is based on privilege, status, and power of a smaller group within a faction that competes with another such faction over the precise activities of and benefits from heritage management work of stewardship.

This dominant group is primarily composed of individuals who gained their employment in the mid-1990s as the result of an open job search based on competition. The locally less dominant group, in contrast, is composed of persons who primarily received their position in the INAH based on inheritance. Initially, INAH *custodios* throughout México were recruited throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century based on close residence to the archaeological site (among other criteria). In some of the smaller and more rural sites, *custodios* might actually have lived on land prior to its vestiges becoming national patrimony.<sup>3</sup> At Chichén Itzá, the *custodios* were invited to build homes just off the southwest corner of the main platform, where they lived from 1923 to 1982 (Castañeda 1996, 2009). It was thought that these persons would have a vested, personal and community interest in the preservation and protection of nearby ruins. Thus, *custodio* positions were granted to sons or relatives when a senior *custodio* retired. The retiring worker was actually granted the privilege of designating an heir, which greatly contributes to the idea of Chichén as Maya cultural and national heritage being kept “in the family” as discussed by Breglia (2005). Among the second generation of *custodios* who were designated heirs there was only one woman (in the 1980s and 1990s) as noted by Breglia (205:389-390); she worked in accounting and ticket sales at the main Parador entrance, as do the other women that have since been hired. To further point out the *patrilineage* of this INAH patrimony, it is noteworthy that this woman in fact married the son of another first generation INAH worker; although he is not a *custodio*, nor are any of their children, a majority of his brothers are *custodios*.

It is often said that illegal activities did not occur under the tenure of the first two *encargados*, Arcadio Salazar and his son Felix. These were two men of an older cultural tradition who led by powerful charisma, personal integrity, and loyalty to the institution that employed them. They were proud of the culture that was their heritage (in a number of different ways) and proud to be charged with protecting it.<sup>4</sup> This practice of inheriting the INAH job of *custodio* not only established the basis of a local middle class in many communities, such as Pisté (Castañeda 1996, 2003, 2009), but fomented the sentimental identification among *custodios* that they are the owner-stewards of the ruins. When Breglia (2005, 2006) identified this sentimental ownership of Chichén among the older generation of *custodios* in the period from the late 1990s to early 2002, it was precisely at the moment that this generation and their newly appointed heirs were in the midst of negotiating a newly

employed cohort who did not have this type of sentimental connection: Chichén was not part of their family heritage. The original *custodios*, a group of twelve, had lived in Chichén and the second generation, their children, grew up in the ruins; some had even gone to a small kindergarten school that had been established there. Although the second generation is not strictly speaking among the *antiguos* that Breglia identifies, they do share a sentimental sense of ownership of Chichén as heritage. Although these are the ones who want to keep “heritage in the family” (Breglia 2005:388-390) in the late 1990s-2000, one among this group told me that at that time, he and his cohort were actually actively soliciting the opening up of the *custodio* work to new blood. History changes every day with every retelling, while memory remains in the present.

The new cohort of *custodios* became employed based on an open competition in the 1990s that involved taking exams and judged evaluations. Although certainly Chichén represented for a number of these new INAH workers a profoundly important cultural heritage belonging to Pisté, to the Maya, to Yucatán, and to México, a few had a different sentiment. For some among this cohort, the ruins were instead something like a “golden egg” to be exploited as Ed Kurjack once referred to this UNESCO World Heritage site (Kurjack 1989).

## Midnight at the Castillo

I was eventually told that specific *custodios*, the leaders of the “mafia” group, told the *encargada* “everything” about me. I was told that these persons black-balled me and warned her that I should not be allowed to do hang out at Chichén. I was viewed, clearly, as a threat. This was a bit hard to accept. I have always disliked the ‘anthropologist as hero’ mythology, which includes the idea that the anthropologist by mere contact with a “pristine” cultural community will instigate the loss of tradition-virginity against the onslaught of modernization. I view the moralism of the mandate of engaged/activist anthropologist as a continuation, if also 21<sup>st</sup> century transformation and globalization upgrade, of this disciplinary morality and mythos. I certainly felt that I was being accredited way too much power and importance than I could ever give myself. Yet, my student permissions to enter Chichén were being denied.

In the course of the summer, merely by talking with friends, I was told little by little about the way things were. Routine chisme, as more than one of my anthropology professors have said (e.g., Gary Gossen), is the real production of ethnographic knowledge. It is the staple of ethnographic intelligence work. At first, I was told that some unspecified guides are in cahoots with unspecified *custodios* in selling \$100 or \$150 per person tours to Chichén after the Light and Sound Show (seasonally variable). A midnight tour of Chichén was possible for the right price. Other *custodios* were illegally working as guides. Traditionally the site closed at 5pm, but now the gate was closed at 4:30 which allowed some *custodios* to provide private tours during their normal working hours even though they do not have legal credentials as guides. Slowly but surely from 2010 to 2012, the who and the what they were doing was revealed.

“Quieres saber cómo se hace el bistec?”

“You want to know how to make the *bistec* (steak)?”

A friend came to visit one night early in the season. I was a bit surprised, since during the prior year he had hardly come by even to say hello, nor had I, as in previous years, gone visit him frequently. When he suddenly appeared saying hello at the side window, I invited him in. After starting a new pot of coffee, I rolled him a cigarette as is routine with certain friends. After settling in, he asked the usual questions for the beginning of the summer: How many students? When are they arriving? Who are your assistants this year? Have you gone to Chichén? *Como lo ves? Ha cambiado mucho?* How do you see it? Has it changed much? Have you made the request yet for the *permisos*? It was late afternoon and students were coming in and out, going here and there for meetings and group activities, and then suddenly he began the business for which he had come. I was caught off guard.

“Do you want to know how they do it?”

“¿Como?” “What?”

He continued, “do you want to know how they do it, how they scam the ticket sales?” I asked him if I could get a tape recorder. It was a routine question to which he would chuckle, say no and tell me to just take my notes. Then he started in on it. A week and half later, I was explaining what he had said to Christine, assistant director of OSEA field school, but I was getting some details mixed up. Curiously, a day or two later, my friend returned unexpectedly to the house around 7pm. After getting him his coffee, I said ok explain it to Christine. He laughed.

“*Aaah, quieres saber cómo se hace el bistec?*”

“Ok,” he said as he grabbed three *chinas* (the sour oranges whose juice is a special ingredient for Yucatec cuisine) from the pyramid of sour oranges stacked in a bowl on the kitchen table. “This is how it goes.” Then he said with a sly smile, “si quieres, grábalo esta vez.” This time, if you want, tape record it! “Ma'alob [Good, ok]. Espérame. Voy a buscar la grabadora. Ok! Wait for me. Let me get my tape recorder.” We laughed. After putting the *chinas* in a row in front of him, he stopped, looked up and asked, “ready?” “Beyo', ba'ale',” I said in Maya, “Like that, but, the thing is, this time I am going to take a picture of how you make bistec!” See illustration #1. And so he explained how to make “el bistec.”

Everybody knows *in general* how it happens: Entrance tickets to Chichén are sold twice. Since the 1990s it has been public and common-sense knowledge that certain, identifiable persons are involved. It has always been assumed, as a public knowledge, all but verified truth, that specific persons have been involving in skimming entrance fees through the resale of tickets. But the specifics have always been elusive, even though the inexplicable wealth of certain persons points to participation in the scam. The purchase of new cars, the building of large homes, the financing of small businesses, these are all signs of illicit income. Of course, if the consumption clearly involves very large amounts of money and business investments such as new stores, then the explanation is drug trafficking or money laundering; if the consumption is more personal and on a lesser scale, it is more likely that the person is simply a politician and just left political office. In any case, exactly how does *bistec* happen at Chichén?

It seems simple: Tickets are collected at the entrance turnstile, some of which are slightly torn on the corners to indicate that they have been used. Others are not torn and

then are re-circulated and sold again as new tickets. The income from the second sale of the ticket is redistributed among all those involved. Significantly, the con does not target tourists as the victim: They get what they pay for at the legal rate. Rather, this is an example of what DeCerteau (1984:24-41) called the “wig” or a tactic of making do consisting of stealing from the employer, which in this case are the two governmental institutions authorized to sell tickets: the state CULTUR and the federal INAH. Ever since the 1985 creation of CULTUR, Patronato de las Unidades de Servicios Culturales y Turísticos del Estado de Yucatán, the two agencies sold tickets side by side at the main Parador entrance (northwest) and at the Mayaland entrance (southeast; see illustration #2).<sup>5</sup>

The latter seems, by all estimates, to be the place where this illegality mostly occurred, as the this entrance was a secondary entrance primarily for charter groups using the Mayaland restaurant for lunch, as well as for the libres (non-charter tourists) residing at one of the three hotels on this back road (Hotel Mayaland, Hacienda Chichén Itzá, and Villas Arqueológicas).<sup>6</sup> This entrance consists of a gate without a turnstile and a small building that was operated by the INAH but used by both CULTUR and INAH as a ticket booth and office. This building, in contrast to the main ticket booth at the Parador entrance, offered the required privacy or lack of supervision to recycle tickets, an opportunity that was not available to those selling tickets at the main entrance. The selling and the collecting of torn *or not torn* tickets occurred in essentially the same place by the same persons. In the Parador entrance, in contrast, ticket selling and ticket collection are separated by a large lobby that is usually filled with tourists, tour guides, janitors, CULTUR workers, other INAH *custodios*, and other persons employed in approximately eight different businesses housed within the Parador.<sup>7</sup>

The INAH labor regime contributes to enabling the scam. The *custodios* are divided into two major types of work personnel, those who do surveillance and site upkeep and those who do administrative work, including ticket sales and accounting. These are then divided into shifts of ten days of work followed by four days of rest. If one of these work shifts is populated by a group of like-minded *custodios* who view Chichén as an economic resource to exploit, then it is just a question of putting a secure system into play that can maintain itself completely under the radar. Thus, not every INAH *custodio* or CULTUR employee was involved in scamming during previous years, and not all of the majority of the locally predominant INAH union group participates in the con game.

In fact in April, an important incident occurred involving a major irregular work procedure with tickets. At the equinox a number of *custodios* from the minority group and from the local majority along with numerous other non-INAH employees, such as artisans, CULTUR workers, and tourists, witnessed hundreds of tourists enter through a secondary entrance being collected from tourists without being torn and then taken to the Parador office, reputedly for resale. Every tourist has the right to keep their torn ticket in their possession as their receipt. The *custodios* of the dominant local union had no choice but to file an official report declaring what they witnessed, which is not exactly denouncing that the tickets were resold, but only improperly processed.

## Way K’ot: Of Mules and Kangaroos

Despite everyone knowing that it is happening, it seems that no one except those who participate in the game, know how it actually is done in its exact details. The question

is still, therefore, how is it done? How is the *bistec* cooked? Christine and I looked at my friend in anticipation for *the recipe*.

My friend moved one of the *chinas* in front of me. He placed another one to the side of the table, away from all of us. It is simple. The night before they bring the tickets to Chichén, she separates out any number of folios, each folio having who knows, X number of tickets. Notice, he says, “da te cuenta que son mil por folio” — Assume that there are a thousand per folio. Then he says that the guides and *custodios* that are involved go to her house — “they say” — after midnight in order to do all the accounting of that day and prepare for the next day, that is they also. And as well they get the tickets for the *next* day’s scam. When he said that “they” say that that’s what they do “at midnight,” I could not help but think that this is the Maya *way k’ot* turned inside out “by” neoliberal globalization: the *way k’ot* is the Maya figure of the merchant-witch who uses their power of changing shape into an eagle at midnight to fly to the city to steal commodities in order to stock their stores where they sell to campesinos at high prices.<sup>8</sup> I say he says they all but said that she is a *way k’ot*. Anthropological interpretation of the implicit unsaid within hearsay told third hand to the ethnographer. However, in this non-traditional Maya morality story and explication of wealth, the way k’ot stays at home at midnight where she gathers her underlings who steal not from the local folks, but from the government in the far-away metropolises of capitalism. Maybe she is not a way k’ot, but certainly at least the *dueña* or maybe *duende* of Chichén.<sup>9</sup>

Instead of being brought to Chichén and registered in the books, the tickets in the designated folios with specific serial numbers are set aside to be sold illegally. After midnight, the guides that are in the game, or mules, pick up their allotment of tickets and sell these to other tour guides who or not in on it but who nonetheless play their role. They buy the illegal tickets and bring them to the INAH at the turnstile where they are then collected. The *custodio* looks at the ticket: What’s the serial number? Oh, this one is in play, thus he does not tear it but sets it aside where they are collected. Once a certain number or visible bulk of tickets are set aside, then someone else comes by and takes them to the ticket booth where they are registered in the accounting system for the first time. The second time they are sold is the legal time.

The mules sit anxiously at the entrance to the Parador with their bulging “kangaroos.” They sit there on the steps waiting for tourists with hundreds of tickets and, as they sell these, the tickets are replaced with ten, twenty, thirty thousand pesos stuffed in their kangaroo pouch-purse attached to a belt. When a guide comes with a charter group, he is asked, do you need tickets? How many? Do you need a *factura* or a *nota*? If they need a *factura*, which is a federally stamped, computerized receipt with traceable registration number systematized in the federal tax accounting system, then “no hay juego” there is no game. If the guide only needs a *nota*, which is only a hand written receipt, then *si hay juego*. There is game. The charter group guide comes from Cancun or Mérida with up to 40 tourists per bus and up to three or four buses. Whether the group is small, up to forty, or large, forty to a hundred, it is totally convenient to buy all the tickets on the sly as the guide is walking up the stairs to the Parador entrance (see illustration/image #3).

Why would the charter guide participate? Whether the charter guides realizes or suspects that the mule is scamming or not, they get a huge manifest and material benefit. They completely avoid the ticket line. Imagine a ticket line in which there are an average of 4000 people on a slow day or 8,000 in high season, the majority of which are coming through between 10 and 2pm. But, again, there is only *bistec* if the guide is not required by

her or his employer, the travel agency, to get a *factura* and is allowed to bring only a *nota* type of receipt. It is this tool that allows businesses throughout Mexico to claim less income than they actually earn, in contrast to the *factura* which is a federal system of receipts created to prevent this type of tax fraud.<sup>10</sup> Given this fact, one might even wonder if one or more of the travel agencies that work with *notas* are also already participating in the ticket bistec through a higher level arrangement with the *dueña* of Chichén.

## How many Cooks do you need to make Bistec?

When Ivonne Ortega Pacheco campaigned for governor on July 7, 2007, on the day of final voting for the New Seven Wonders of the World she promised to resolve the problems at Chichén. When she became governor of Yucatán (August 2007 to fall 2012) it was clear that she had a vision of what to do. In the first place she orchestrated purchase of Chichén by the state government of Yucatán and then initiated of an ambitious and long term strategy of tourism development that included multiple projects. While some of these were announced in the press, such as a new museum and entrance for Chichén, others were surreptitiously programmed with nearly no public information available, specifically the development of a new tourist hotel zone with eleven all inclusive hotels, artificial lakes and beaches, golf course, and aquarium among other attractions (see Proceso 2010; SIFIDEY 2009; [www.chicheninvestment.com](http://www.chicheninvestment.com) ). With everyone's eyes on those issues for the last few years, she mandated that the Hacienda Estatal de Yucatán (state tax office) take over the entire process of the administration and accounting of CULTUR ticket sales in the spring of 2011. A likely reason that was mentioned to me a few weeks after the change was the an emergent conflict that was being insinuated by the press between the governor and Jorge Esma Bazán, the governor appointed director of CULTUR.

The most interesting thing about CULTUR is that it was created through an agreement between the State Government, the federal SEP, and the INAH to be directly under the control of the governor with apparently no other oversight. Although appointed by the governor, Bazán has created a trenchant power base as director of CULTUR that has allowed him to maintain his position through three previous governorships. It is this independence that seemed to be what Ortega Pacheco was seeking to undercut, first, by restructuring CULTUR under the authority of a newly created state Secretaria de la Cultura y las Artes and, second, by taking the ticket sales of Chichén (and all other Yucatán archeological sites such as Uxmal) from the otherwise unsupervised hands of CULTUR.<sup>11</sup> This was the reasoning that circulated in the Parador as many at Chichén (from *custodios*, guides, artisans, restaurateurs, etc.) feel that that there has been no accountability of the income generated from the controversial and exorbitantly priced concerts Bazan has orchestrated at Chichén Itzá, among which include: Pavarotti (1997), Placido Domingo (2008), Sara Brightman (2009), and Elton John (2010) as well as John McCartney for the “end of the world” of the “Mayan” calendar on December 21, 2012 (Santana 2012).<sup>12</sup> However, given that CULTUR and Bazan are only overseen by the governor, this alleged conflict does not seem like the best reason for the governor to give Hacienda Estatal total administrative and fiscal control ticket sales.<sup>13</sup> Rather, all this could be an element of Ortega Pacheco's broad strategy of modernizing and institutionalizing tourism within the state government.

In any case, there are always more complications and cons going on than one can keep track of. Once the shift happened, it seemed rather obvious that the governor was

using Hacienda to clamp down on the local skimming of tickets. This was to be accomplished by introducing a computerized accounting system with print-out tickets. Indeed, within five months, several were caught tampering with the computer and fired for scamming tickets (September 2011). Significantly these were not the previously employed CULTUR workers who had been in charge of ticket sales; rather, they were two or three of the ticket administrators hired by Hacienda. Furthermore, since they were simply fired and not taken to criminal court, they continue to work at one thing or another at the CULTUR Parador entrance of Chichén. Interestingly, one of these persons expressly told me in May 2011 that he had been assigned this job as part of the mission to police those persons that had been scamming ticket sales. A perfect ethnographic truth, partial half-truth and half lie fully motivated by personal interests concealed by institutional objectives.

As for the Chichén INAH director, she responded by converting administrative office space close to the turnstile into a new INAH ticket booth that was now completely isolated from the oversight of anyone but INAH personnel. The reason for this change that circulated in public talk was that they were being forced to relocate while CULTUR put its house in order. Another explanation told me by INAH personnel is that the INAH was not kicked out of the ticket booth by CULTUR, but that the INAH choose to relocate ticket sales and accounting in order to avoid surveillance by agents of the state tax office. For those involved in reselling tickets, it was a golden opportunity to now conduct their own scam without any external oversight or policing. This relocation clearly implicates the INAH Chichén director. Not coincidentally, this is the woman who would not allow me or my ethnography field school students to enter Chichén to do research, even though I had been granted a permission to do so by her immediate superior, the Delegado of the Yucatán INAH office.

### “So, you want to know how to make the *bistec*?”

My friend continued his explanation: There are about six or seven thousand tourists entering Chichén on an average day. Forget about all the free entrances, whether they are legitimate or not. Let's say of the daily tickets you set aside one thousand, maybe two thousand tickets. Each ticket costs \$58 pesos (mxn) for national or foreign tourists. Do the math, Quetzil, says my friend. Make it simple, say \$58 pesos times 1,000 tickets a day. It cannot be too many daily, but a number of tickets that can be concealed. They are sold at the ticket booth and then collected at the gate. The *custodio* at the gate collects tickets and instead of tearing it, he puts it to the side. Then the stashed tickets are periodically collected by one of the other *custodios* who comes by and takes them to the ticket booth again to be resold. The second sale is entirely off the books.

But how exactly are they collected without everyone seeing it happen? Or, is everyone involved, including the CULTUR ticket takers?

No, remember this only happens when the one group is working its shift. When the other group is working, everyone knows that there is no *bistec*. The game is not on. That's why you calculate the \$58,000 pesos a day but not every day of the year. How often is that? Do the math, Quetzil. Ok, ten days on, four days off every fifteen days, or twenty out of every two *quinceño* or two thirds of the year, so calculate roughly 240 days of the year in which anywhere from 1 to 3,000 tickets are being resold. This gives a low annual estimate of 240,000 tickets resold at \$58 each for a total of \$13,920,000 pesos or US\$1,000,000 to \$1.1 million for the year (based on 13 to 12.5 exchange rates).

## “Who Owns Heritage?” Real Owners and Really Real Ownership

The big news for July 2012 was that CULTUR increased the volume of income roughly \$30 million mxn from the previous year. This astounding 37.5% increase however is clearly not due to the 5% increase in the number of number of visitors from the previous year! The number of overall tourists to Chichén has stabilized at roughly 700,000 for the first half of the year, or approximately a total of 1.4 million visitors in 2011 and 2012; this is still low from a 2008 high of 1.6 million (Noticias de Yucatán 2011b, 2011c, 2012; Diario de Yucatán 2012b). Thus, the projected earnings based on the same number of visitors from this period in 2011 was \$56 million mxn but the amount for 2012 based on the electronic-computerized tickets was \$83 million pesos. In other words, the new system prevented the loss of a up to an estimated \$30 million pesos on the CULTUR ticket sales, or so proudly announced Juan Gabriel Ricalde Ramírez, the Secretary of the State Tax Office to the news (El Arsenal.net 2012; Noticias de Yucatán 2012; Diario de Yucatán 2012a; Sipse 2012).<sup>14</sup>

The INAH sold or should have sold essentially the exact same number of tickets. To calculate INAH income, one must separate the Mexican-national from the foreign-priced tickets. Roughly estimated at a ratio ranging from 55% to 65% domestic to 45% to 35% international tickets, the CULTUR amount correlates from \$16,500,000 mxn to \$13,500,000 mxn.<sup>15</sup> These amounts must then be divided by price, \$68 mxn versus \$120 mxn, to estimate the number of tourists: 198,000 national and 137,000 foreign tickets *scammed in the first half of the year of 2011*. On the assumption the surmised illicit activity by the INAH group is on par with this volume, then this amounts to 240,000 tickets (rounding up) out of estimated 700,000 visitors from January to June 2012 that are being resold at a price of \$58 mxn. This estimate yields a total of \$13,920,000 mxn being skimmed by the local INAH *custodios*.

This amount is precisely what my friend calculated conservatively for the full year based on an average daily of 1000 resold tickets. Interestingly, this number corresponds to what was reported to be the average daily number of registered visitors that were granted free entrance or courtesy tickets (Diario de Yucatán 2011).

Estimation of the scale of ticket fraud might range from 16% to 32% of all ticket sales for a given year with a lowball value of US\$1 to 14 million for the INAH and up to US\$30 million for CULTUR. If indeed this kind of fraud is happening, the money *is not circulating locally*. These are amounts that would transform the local landscape of Pisté and nearby communities. On the assumption that the INAH Chichén director must be involved for the scam to occur; she must be taking a major percentage, say 70 to 90%, the remainder being divided among the lower level players, including *custodios* on the take and the two or three guides that are essential to the scam.

These amounts are truly astounding however the actual amount, if any in actuality, is literally incalculable and unknowable without direct knowledge based in participation in the scam. It is not even clear from the newspaper reports if the amount referenced refers specifically to Chichén or to all the archeological sites of state of Yucatán. Nonetheless, these scandalously high figures are at once reasonable based on this calculation yet improbable due to the very magnitude of this projection. All estimations are thus complete speculations — and necessarily partial not only in the truth/false sense but also in the sense of being motivated by the particular interests of the person/s asserting or reporting any illegality of any scale.

Nonetheless, it would seem that illegalities of this and related types must be prevalent throughout the world at major heritage tourism destinations. It would seem that the larger the volume of tourism at a given site, such as at *any* UNESCO World Heritage or New Seven Wonders site, the easier it would be to create cons that do not necessarily use the tourist as the target or victim but that nonetheless extract cash profit that circulates in the informal economy.

## Ethnography / Espionage

In any case, this ethnography is just based on gossip, itself based on partial truths and partial lies, motivated by a diversity of personal and professional interests. It is not even the case that the correct and truthful part of the story was that part which was left out of it. That which was held back from being written in this report, and held back in what was told to me, is just as partial, just as deceptive, as what was stated. I certainly cannot vouch for the truth of any of it. I dare not even call them facts.

As for me, I had been enlisted to participate and learn about the illegalities. My own troubles with the INAH Chichén *directora* became part of the dossier of complaints and documentation of corruption and irregularities. Late in July I was told that the woman, tenderly referred to by a number of CULTUR workers as *la bruja esa*, (“that witch there”) had been fired. I learned about this a week or so *after the fact* — of course, after the fact, I *am* an ethnographer after all, despite having been “enlisted” into the policing of heritage. That night I went to talk with the leader of the local opposition union that had been trying for three years to get “the witch” fired.

What happened? Why didn’t you tell me earlier? In short, two things happened. First, union *custodios* as mentioned above who do not participate in the bistec were nonetheless witness to a flagrant mishandling of a large number of tickets during the dates of the equinox. These persons could do nothing but file witness statements or risk being charged with fraud against the federal government. The union’s solidarity began to crumble and its mafia leadership put into question. Second, the newspaper revelations of up to perhaps 30 million pesos of ticket fraud discussed above were of such significance that the higher levels of INAH authorities could do nothing but have this woman terminated. In other words, it took the state tourism agency to publicly announce that it resolved its own internal scamming of 30 million pesos for the evidence of *custodio* irregularities and illegalities accumulated over three years by another group of *custodios* to be taken as seriously legitimate — as not simply petty local politics — by the highest levels of the National Institute of Anthropology and History. Thus, without any fanfare, she was not charged with any criminal conduct, but only required to pay a symbolic fine and penalized with a seven-year prohibition of government employment. Cover ups take a different shape in México. In any case, the discrepancy between the state and the federal levels of income of receipts from Chichén Itzá has been rendered invisible and mute.

When I congratulated him on his success, he said simply “we” did it. Me? No. You did it. I was not part of it. The ethnographer is not hero. Yes, he said, yes, *you did your part*. “We” did it. Lo logramos. I grunted a smile appropriate for an “engaged anthropologist” and then we actively pushed our tequila shots back with a laugh. I wondered, with not a little agitation and half in jest, half just fibbing, if I should call him my “handler!” The

ethnographer is not hero, I said to myself as I thought about the espionage of fieldwork, and the ethics of ethnography (Castañeda 2006).

## Unconcluding Conclusion, Inconclusive Questions

The newspaper announcements of the elimination of ticket fraud, however, only provided occasion for regional tourism businesses, travel agencies and business associations to ask: where indeed does the income from Chichén Itzá, and other lucrative sites such as Uxmal go? Who benefits? We might also ask similarly about Tulum and Teotihuacan, the top two major archaeological tourism destinations of México. Why have the touristic services and infrastructure that CULTUR provides Yucatán sites not been continuously developed and improved beyond routine upkeep? Or so protested the regional tourism businesses and travel agencies. As well it is evident to inhabitants of In Pisté, Xcalacoop, or San Francisco, it is evident to there has not been a major reinvestment in either tourism infrastructure of Chichén or in their communities. Certainly the nearby communities of archaeological sites such as Pisté or in the Puuc region of Yucatán do not receive any direct allocation into municipal and town governments. Thus, the perennial question remains, What happens to the receipts earned at Chichén? Who else beyond locals are in on the *bistec* in order to ensure that it happens? This is a question that all locals and anyone in the region involved with tourism have, as well, so do many repeat visitors to Chichén, according to a number of guides with whom I have spoken.

How many other scams, illegalities and semi-illicit activities are happening and how can these be policed? *Should* these be policed? At what cost? Structurally, Chichén is governmental chaos and anarchy as it is without a singular, authoritative structure of control and management. There is not one but several authority structures with overlapping vested interests of state, federal, town, and municipal governmental institutions that have distinct domains of operation and mandates as well as private ownership of land and businesses. All these elements prevent a single, unitary and effective hierarchy of authority to rule and regulate Chichén, whether with impartial benevolence or rapacious command. This in turn allows for a multiplicity of opportunities for illegalities that cannot be contained by any single authoritarian structure. Although there is much to lament about this, it may actually be an appropriate mirror of what passes for “democracy” in México. The multiplicity of authorities, private and public interests create a set of check and balances. Perhaps these criss-crossing interests and authorities might be viewed as the bars of the grill on which everyone has a chance to cook their *bistec*.<sup>16</sup> It is true, however, that some meat does not get the best position on the fire: There is no equality among illegalities.

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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The use of “purely” is a particularly common Yucatecan idiomatic expression. It is based on the Maya word *hach* which is typically glossed only as “very” but it also means “truly” (etymologically derived from the word for true, *haah*) and thus by extension “purely.” Similarly, the Maya word “just” *chen* is also used in ways that connotes the essence of things or the thing being modified; in other words it too points to the “pure” thing in itself.

<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that a reviewer of Breglia is quite misguided by her own prejudices and misreading when haranguing Breglia for quoting an archaeologist who called this group of *custodios* a mafia (2005:388).

<sup>3</sup> See Breglia 2006 for discussion of how sites are inscribed into the INAH.

<sup>4</sup> Felix was an intimidating personage who demanded respect even from the artesanos of the first invasion (1982-1985). I remember seeing Felix furiously stomping around the Parador one spring day in 1988. He had just come from Chichén Viejo (southern part of the site) where he had just had an antagonistic encounter with some Pisté ejidatarios. He fumed that this year was the last year that any ejidatario was going to be allowed to make milpa inside the archaeological zone at Chichén. See Breglia (2006) for an account of how the conflict between ruins as archaeological versus ejido heritage played out Chunchucmil.

<sup>5</sup> While the INAH sells tickets to see the ruins, CULTUR technically charges a fee for touristic services located archaeo-tourism complex both within and outside the legal heritage zone; these include parking, bathrooms, on-site ambulance, emergency medical team, baggage storage, information booth, and the Light and Sound. As well CULTUR allows concessions for private businesses to sell food, refreshment, books, bus tickets, and handicrafts in designated locations.

<sup>6</sup> Villas Arqueológicas is a Mexican chain of hotels that was originally owned and operated by Club Med until about 2006. Villas Chichén, constructed in the early 1970s, has no historical connection to the site as do the Barbachano hotels. The Hotel Mayaland was built in 1930 at the initiation of tourism to the site. Before the Hacienda Chichén Itzá became a hotel it was rehabilitated in the early 1900s by archaeologists and used as a rented lodging in the 1923-1940 by the Carnegie Institution of Washington archaeologists.

<sup>7</sup> During my different research periods at Chichén over the last thirty years, I have not conducted sustained participant observation in this location.

<sup>8</sup> The *way k'ot* is related to devils and commodity fetishism elsewhere in Latin America, including Chiapas among Mayans. See Loewe (2008) for a rich account of the variations, contemporary uses, and analysis of the practice of this specifically Maya discourse.

<sup>9</sup> Duende is the general Latin American concept of supernatural beings that are the owners of special topographic and historical sites that have special powers. In Maya these are called *alux*; although *alux* can be both singular and plural, *aluxo'ob* is the plural.

<sup>10</sup> The *factura* and *facturacion fiscal* is an important policing technology created by the the federal tax office in the mid-1990s. A sociopolitical history of Mexican governmentality based of this and related policing techniques, such as cell phone registration and limits on foreign currency exchange, is begging to be conducted.

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<sup>11</sup> The plan for SECAY was in early 2011 and established legally by September 15, 2011. This also subsumed the Instituto de Cultura de Yucatán (ICY) with which Bazan and CULTUR had conflicts (Sipse 2011; Diario de Yucatán 2011; Kumán n.d.a, n.d.b; Noticias Yucatán Hoy 2012).

<sup>12</sup> “Mayan” is in quotes as this is an incorrect use of the word. Mayan is an adjective that can correctly be used only with reference to language or to identify speakers of a Mayan language. The word Maya, being both a noun and an adjective, is the correct word to use in English, Spanish, and Maya to identify objects that are Maya, such as Maya civilization, Maya culture, Maya calendars, and Maya history. See Castañeda (n.d.)

<sup>13</sup> When I arrived Pisté in the third week of May 2011, I was told that Hacienda had just taken over the ticket sales at the end of April.

<sup>14</sup> To estimate this amount in dollars one would have to account for changing exchange rates within and between these periods. A quick glance at the figures shows that the 2011 rate ranged from 12/1 and below while the 2012 rate was generally above 12/1 with peaks significantly above 13. See <http://www.oanda.com/currency/historical-rates/>

<sup>15</sup> This is based on a tendency evident in the foreign-to-national tourist ratio from figures for the 1960s to the 1990s that I collected from diverse INAH and State Government of Yucatán sources in 1989.

<sup>16</sup> See DeCerteau (1986:190-191) on cooking recipes and on Foucault’s recipes of theory.