

# Keeping World Heritage in the Family: A Genealogy of Maya Labour at Chichén Itzá

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*This account of the everyday politics of the World Heritage archaeological site of Chichén Itzá (Yucatán, Mexico) contributes to a new impulse in the study of heritage and tourism: the interests and participation of multiple publics in the production of sites of national cultural identities and international tourism. For decades, Maya residents in and around Chichén Itzá have been employed in the site's excavation, maintenance, and protection. For these indigenous heritage workers, patrimonial claims to the site are based not on the monuments themselves but on inherited job positions. The transformation of these workers into a local elite has occasioned contentious broader community politics as other local residents advocate opening the site's benefit stream to a wider group of stakeholders. This case study thus addresses the role played by heritage workers in the micro-politics of patrimony at a World Heritage Site.*

*Keywords:* Chichén Itzá; Heritage Workers; Maya; World Heritage Site; Mexico; Stakeholders

Just about everyone who lives near the world-renowned Maya archaeological site Chichén Itzá knows that the *antiguos*, the ancient ones, still haunt the ruins. While an occasional tourist might hope for some kind of spiritual or mystical connection with an *antiguo*, they are likely to be quite surprised—and more than a little disappointed—upon realising that Chichén's *antiguos* wear blue uniforms and carry walkie-talkies. No, these 'ancient ones' are not some sort of *Doppelgänger*, they are actually federal employees of Mexico's National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH), the central agency charged with the protection and investigation of the nation's cultural

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and artistic patrimony. For more than six decades now, archaeological site custodians have stood on the front lines of the protection of Mexico's national patrimony. For the thousands of tourists arriving at Chichén Itzá, the *antiguo* custodians—despite their distinctive uniforms and equipment—blend into the infrastructure of the ancient ceremonial centre and international tourism destination.

This essay discusses multiple layers of conflict in defining, constructing, and claiming heritage at Chichén Itzá. A public interest approach to studying these conflicts might foreground a number of critical issues ranging from the development of specific strategies to increase community participation in archaeological projects to the study of the contemporary politics of representing the ancient past. This paper has chosen specifically to focus this discussion on an issue not widely addressed thus far in the literature of heritage, tourism, or public archaeology: the local conflicts occasioned by the political economy of indigenous labour at a major site of international cultural tourism.<sup>1</sup> The transformation of jungle-covered ruins to a premier international heritage tourism destination, declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1987, requires a careful development strategy matched with a keen vision of the 'future in ruins', so to speak. More importantly, however, the reconstruction of an ancient site requires a good deal of labour—not only archaeologists and tourism planners, but also a local (indigenous) workforce which carries out the monumental task of creating a modern World Heritage Site. When Mexican and US agencies sought to undertake the clearing and rebuilding of Chichén Itzá, they turned to local residents as their primary labour pool. Maya residents in and around Chichén Itzá have been employed in the site's excavation and restoration, maintenance, and protection since the 1920s. After the establishment of the INAH in 1938, a select number of these Maya workers became official 'custodians' of the site—residential caretakers charged with the protection of Chichén's internationally famous monuments. It followed for the next six decades that the everyday care of Chichén Itzá became a dynastic enterprise, as work positions passed from father to son, and so on, until today. Thus, the contemporary caretaking of this World Heritage Site is a sort of family business. And the modern *antiguos* remain among the ruins—not as ghosts of the ancient past but as the none-too-distant descendants of the modern Maya,<sup>2</sup> the very first workers at Chichén, the men who rebuilt and reconstructed the monuments and plazas one sees today upon visiting the site.

This research is based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork carried out in 2000–2002 within the archaeological zone and the site's neighbouring community, Pisté. With the generous permission of the INAH's state director, Luis Millet, and head administrator of the zone, Villevuado Pech Moo, a great deal of time was spent on site conducting formal and informal interviews, observing the work routines (and anomalies), and regularly accompanying custodians as they went about their business of guarding the monuments, patrolling the grounds, and reprimanding tourists. Rather than setting to work on an anthropological inquiry designed from afar, I developed a set of questions, concerns, and points of discussion not exclusively my own but reflective of the custodians' own beliefs, experiences, and anxieties as caretakers of this World Heritage Site. This organically produced research agenda proved to act as a conduit not only between author and informants but also among the informants themselves. This sort of research



**Figure 1** INAH guards on Chichén's main plaza.

engagement reflects an anthropology done in the interest of the public with whom we directly work. Using such a public interest approach, this essay seeks to draw these custodians out of the façade of magnificent ruins into the political foreground of everyday life at the archaeological site. The public interest approach here moves beyond an after-the-fact presentation of the results of the research to the multiple publics of Chichén Itzá—whether workers, archaeologists, state administrators, or local residents. Through this ethnographic engagement in a site typically interpreted through the machinations of archaeology, nationalism, or tourism,<sup>3</sup> I am seeking to nuance our understandings of public interest anthropology at the level of research design and at the moment of knowledge production.

For the local communities in and around this site, the heritage of Chichén Itzá is not exclusively archaeological. Not solely the stuff of stones and bones, the heritage of Chichén Itzá is the complex set of social relations. An analytical approach to the problem of social relations at this site has to take as its concern from the outset how these social actors function as multiple 'publics' in the overlapping discourses of heritage and tourism. This is precisely what anthropology in the public interest, at its core, takes as one of its primary tasks. Public anthropology or archaeology is not simply an add-on, or aside, to workaday disciplinary fieldwork engagements and methodological procedures. Instead, this endeavour emerges in the interest of communities, not exclusively according to terms set out by scholars.<sup>4</sup> This essay reflects that commitment by engaging an already existing public discourse at Chichén and its environs that circulates

around a public problem—the relationship between local Maya people and the development of the archaeological zone as a heritage tourism destination. The scholarly task in tackling this problem is to frame this contemporary issue within the broader set of historical dynamics of employing local indigenous people as the primary workforce in archaeological excavation, preservation, and reconstruction projects. While archaeology in the public interest indeed promotes an ethical engagement between professionals and local or resident communities, its focus on contemporary development runs the risk of dehistoricising the ongoing engagements that local communities have held with archaeology for generations. In this essay, a genealogy of archaeological labour at Chichén Itzá may suggest one possible model for addressing this crucial aspect of archaeology in the public interest.

### Caring for Ruins

Chichén's modern 'ancients' or *antiguos* don't hide in a shadow of mystery as the popular discourse on Maya civilisation suggests. Much to the contrary, they occupy the archaeological zone with loud silver whistles and unmistakable swaggers. One even rides a shiny red scooter up and down the tourist paths. They guard Chichén, they protect the monuments, they say they love these ruins. The archaeological zone is the dominion of the *antiguos* in a fashion that cannot be perceived through the eyes of tourists. Here they work, and here, until the early 1980s, they actually lived. It is from Chichén Itzá that all have earned their livelihoods. The *antiguo* custodians claim that the knowledge, ability, and sensitivity required properly to care for Chichén Itzá is 'in [their] blood'. From an outsider's perspective, the commitment to the past and future of Chichén Itzá on the part of the *antiguos* is admirable, if not a bit romantic. Perhaps the site does benefit from such skill and dedication passed from generation to generation. This is especially true from the disciplinary perspective of workaday archaeology.<sup>5</sup> Yet the transformation of these self-identified Maya workers—by virtue of their intimate proximity to the economic resources of this cultural heritage site—into a local elite has occasioned contentious broader community concern for the equitable access to the archaeological zone. The dominant role of the *antiguos* in the micro-politics of the zone is a source of great consternation, if not conflict, for other social actors heavily invested in Chichén, including non-*antiguo* site workers, archaeologists, and INAH administrative officials. Indeed, through the inheritance of job positions in the zone, the *antiguos* have, in a sense, kept this World Heritage in their families. But in a slightly more sinister commentary, one archaeologist went so far as to call the *antiguo* dynasties at Chichén a 'mafia'.<sup>6</sup>

Instead of claiming inheritance to Chichén based on descent from the ancient Maya, Chichén's *antiguos* base their patrimonial claims to the archaeological site through modern usufruct principles; Chichén is theirs not by right of cultural affiliation to the ancient Maya but by their twentieth-century presence living and working in the archaeological zone. In today's tourism industrial complex, rapidly becoming transformed by neo-liberal agendas, is there a place for alternative kinds of claims to cultural patrimony such as this? The predominant discourse on indigenous claims to cultural and

intellectual heritage requires, for the most part, a demonstrable link between ancient civilisations and their contemporary descendants. These ‘cultural affiliations’ are notoriously complex, caught up in a confusion of identity politics in an unholy alliance with the scientific rigidity of the archaeological record. But the *antiguos*—these second- and third-generation federal employees at Chichén Itzá—have formed a very powerful claim to Chichén Itzá that cleverly re-articulates the relationship between ancient material and contemporary indigenous people in a fashion that skips over the fraught debates of identity politics, cutting straight to the heart of the matter; he who has the knowledge to care best for the archaeological zone, in other words, he who sees his labour as his patrimony, has the right to benefit economically from this endlessly renewable resource.<sup>7</sup>

Chichén’s current custodians are the 36 men and women, most of whom are Yucatec Maya-speaking, who sell tickets, guard the entrance gates, keep the monuments free of weeds and debris, and frantically blow their whistles when children get too rowdy while climbing the precarious steps of a pyramid. Custodianship at Chichén Itzá is more than keeping the grounds clean and keeping visitors safe. They are also the people who articulate a sense of pride in their work, which many of them illustrate through the use of the possessive ‘My Chichén’ when speaking of the ruins. Their intimacy with the zone cannot be accounted for in the dominant discursive arenas of either archaeology or the state. Nor does it find a venue of expression in the tourism industrial complex, rigid as it is in both creating and disseminating proper interpretations of ancient history. Instead, the intimacy of Chichén Itzá emanates from experiences of the night-watchman who has spent 20 years of long and very dark nights protecting the archaeological zone. It arises out of the banter between older workers as they seek the shade of a ceiba tree during a slow afternoon shift; for those who walk across the site’s main plaza remembering the baseball games or *fútbol* matches played there in their youth. Indeed, the everyday life of the archaeological zone is a pastiche of memories and overlapping images, of what the site used to be, what it has now become, and how one’s own life has intertwined with the monuments. Part of the intimacy of Chichén Itzá is how it gets under one’s skin, into one’s blood, and, once there, how it will continue to be, in a word, possessed. For Chichén’s workers, there is great concern for keeping World Heritage in the family.

In the preliminary phases of my ethnographic research at Chichén Itzá, custodians were not exactly reticent in conveying the need for my work (1) carefully to outline the duties and obligations of heritage custodianship and (2) to make the unequivocal distinction that not all custodians are alike. This kind of negotiation is part and parcel of the spirit of anthropology in the public interest. From an observational point of view, custodianship could not be more straightforward. Custodians stand guard at various points throughout the archaeological zone, inside the small museum, and at the two entrance gates. One custodian is responsible for safeguarding Chichén Viejo, another part of the zone located 2 km from the main tourist area. All site custodians are salaried federal employees who receive health care and pension benefits, uniform allowances, and generous paid vacation. Officially, a custodian may be a man or a woman, but there is only one woman at Chichén who carries this

particular title.<sup>8</sup> The custodians at Chichén are divided into two groups, arbitrarily designated as *grupo norte* (North Group) and *grupo sur* (South). Each group has a leader, or administrative coordinator. These coordinators are both second-generation *custodios*, and both have fathers who are still on the payroll full-time. Workers are paid every two weeks, on the first and fifteenth of each month. Most travel to the INAH regional office in Mérida (the capital city of Yucatán) to receive their pay cheque, and use the extra day off work for shopping, doctor consultations, and other city business.

Also observationally apparent are the multiple tactics undertaken by custodians in the strategy of keeping control over the site. The job of a *custodio* is to maintain order and security in the everyday life of the archaeological zone. Security is a doubly faceted issue in terms of cultural patrimony. On the one hand, there is a concern for the material patrimony itself, whether this is an artefact in a museum, a monument, or archaeological materials yet to be excavated and unearthed. On the other hand, there simultaneously exists a security concern for the safety and comfort of the visitors, who might very well be the same parties who pose a security threat in the first place. Safety often goes hand in hand with a concern for visitor comfort and convenience, and Chichén's custodians work with their eyes toward both. In the harsh, hot climate of Yucatán, a basic visitor needs refreshment. Thus, cold drinks and snacks are available for purchase at most sites.<sup>9</sup> Visitors are aided on site through maps and informative signage in front of monuments, presented in English, Yucatec Maya, and Spanish.<sup>10</sup> While these multiple amenities are provided at the highly visited site of Chichén Itzá, visitor comment cards passed on to INAH officials at both the regional and national levels cite the lack of other basic services at the site, including access for disabled individuals.

Maintaining order in an archaeological zone means keeping control over large crowds of people numbering thousands even on a slow day. While most wear a whistle on a cord around the neck, some are known for using it too much, while others will rarely use it. Don Hugo is one example of a *custodio* known for overusing his whistle, which is connected to his complex and often contradictory opinion regarding both his work and the tourists he observes and often interacts with at the archaeological zone. He coined the term *turismo agresivo*, or, aggressive tourism, to describe those visitors to the site who are actively and blatantly non-compliant with the regulations of the zone. Don Hugo and other custodians rank different national groups based on their tendency toward *turismo agresivo*, and their behaviour in general.<sup>11</sup> A lack of uniformity regarding the manner of protecting archaeological monuments around the world seems to promote disagreement on the appropriate forms of interaction that members of the public may have with an archaeological site. They are more specific in articulating problems they have encountered with Mexican national tourists. 'They assume the rules don't apply to them', according to one Maya custodian, 'They ignore the *No Trespassing* signs and walk around and climb wherever they want.' He continues: 'More than once, I have stopped someone by shouting or blowing my whistle, only to have the visitor shout back at me, arguing that it is his patrimony, too, and he can do what he pleases.' Complaints such as this are illustrative of one kind of conflict in the everyday

operations of the heritage site. But as we will see, the problems between site custodians and visitors constitute only one level of conflict at Chichén Itzá. Indeed, conflict over both the meaning and value of the cultural and economic patrimony represented by this site of national and UNESCO World Heritage exists on a very local level as well, among the custodians themselves.

### Privileges of Membership: Rise of the INAH Elite at Chichén

While the ins and outs of custodianship detailed above might be easily determined by observation, there are less visible structures of feeling and meaning in the work of custodianship that become apparent only when understood in their historical, categorical, and ideological complexity. Extensive participation in the daily grind of guarding Chichén Itzá gave me the opportunity to listen to how different custodians unravel this complexity in order to make sense of the site and their multiple relationships to it. Due to the public nature of the work (conducting interviews and participant observation in the workplace rather than in private homes), custodians were easily able to talk with—and certainly debate with—each other spurred by the terms of the ethnographic inquiry. Hence dialogues grew around the foundations of rights to benefit from Chichén Itzá as well as the historical and legal contingencies of these rights. In this fashion, a public interest anthropology was always emergent in the course of my research. Rather than passive interview subjects who may or may not have stood to be future recipients of anthropological knowledge, the custodians were able to work together in the moment of knowledge production not unlike self-formed focus groups.

One of the main concerns among custodians is the maintenance of an impermeable distinction between *antiguos* and *nuevos*. Today, only about half of Chichén's current custodial staff can count themselves as *antiguos*. For the elite, *antiguo* status is derived from having once lived inside the archaeological zone. From the 1940s until the early 1980s, Chichén's custodians, along with their families, lived within the site centre. The employees' duties were to sell tickets, keep the grounds free of litter and debris, clear the reconstructed monuments of weeds, and maintain the visitor paths that provided access from one part of the zone to another. Women, wives and daughters of the custodians supplemented the family income through the sale of food and drinks to visitors. One contemporary *antiguo* describes how the care of Chichén has been in his family for three generations:

My grandfather worked in Chichén Itzá, keeping the structures he had helped reconstruct clean and free from weeds. ... The next generation of custodians came to love this place, too. Not only did they work there, but they made it their home, just as my grandfather had. My grandfather passed on the conception of the protection of the archaeological zone to my father. And he, too, loved it. Thus they became, along with their other *compañeros*, the most protective (*celoso*) guardians of the site.

The claim on the archaeological site as inheritable family patrimony is maintained through the articulation of two overlapping notions. The first is based on consanguinity and the second on the collective memory and tradition of working in the site. While the first is a patrimonial link by default, the second complements the importance of

blood ties to another key body fluid, to put it crudely, this being the sweat of one's brow. Birth is important, but the labour carried out by one's hands is perhaps equally important in demonstrating one's ties to Chichén. Custodianship of the archaeological zone becomes a usufruct right as it is equated with agricultural cultivation. Working the monuments and the land around them is a kind of traditional, outdoor work not unlike clearing weeds from a field, planting a crop, or keeping a watchful eye over one's prize harvest so neither man nor beast may intrude under the cover of night. Indeed, Chichén's first custodians were local men chosen for their skills as *campesinos*, and it is only very recently that other skills—such as archaeological knowledge and language competencies—have been required by the INAH. Over the course of three generations, these two notions (right by birth and right by work) are nearly indistinguishably mapped onto each other in such a way that their correlation is seamless. Though justifiable, are the patrimonial claims made by Chichén's *antiguos* to keep World Heritage in the family fair?

The *antiguo* lineages are known today not only within the archaeological zone but in the town of Pisté (just 2 km away from the ruins) where most living members currently reside. Here, the '*antiguo*' label is neither neutral nor simply descriptive. Rather, it carries a host of other characteristics that arise from the historical dimensions of the genealogies of not only the family lines themselves but also of the wealth of privileges that membership in an INAH family carries. As a result of generations of secure, federal employment, INAH workers tend not to be subject to the same precarious economic dependence on the tourism economy like many of their neighbours. Numerous paid holidays afford leisure time unthinkable for those who have to vend handicrafts in the streets on a daily basis to make ends meet. Clothing allowances and educational opportunities are also among the job benefits enjoyed by INAH employees, even those technically considered 'unskilled' workers.

Residence patterns kept the INAH workers ideologically distant from their geographically close neighbours in Pisté until the early 1980s. After several decades of living amidst the ruins, INAH workers were forced to relocate their homes and families as a major state-sponsored infrastructural development plan sought to 'modernise' Chichén. The plan raised the stakes for the resource potential of the site, including its promise to wipe out the kinds of claims and practices the *antiguos* and their families had been building upon since the late 1930s. This 'modernisation' of the site has included the construction of hotel facilities, food, souvenir, and handicraft vending areas, most of which are located on the perimeter of the area declared as federal property.<sup>12</sup> Thus, Chichén's modernisation was not an abstracted process; it was very much accompanied by the quite visceral experience of new regulations and restrictions within the zone's territory. This intensification affected the structure and organisation of labour relations at the site as well as the relations between the site and the surrounding residential and business communities.<sup>13</sup>

Successive years of federal INAH employment have led to capital accumulation, making investment in new local business opportunities possible. Not only are they among the most privileged in their employment, INAH workers are entrepreneurs. Since the 1940s, INAH families have been using their presence in the archaeological



zone to provide direct tourist services, specifically through refreshment vending. The relatively small-scale sale of a cold drink or a plate of food to hungry and thirsty tourists in front of one's home—as was the typical business practice until the zone's modernisation in the early 1980s—raised few eyebrows. Coinciding with the tourism boom in Cancun, the cultural resource presented by Chichén Itzá piqued the interests of officials, particular at the state level. The custodians' inhabiting of the nation's patrimony—actually living within the ruins—became, ironically enough, an image problem in the 'tourist gaze'.<sup>14</sup> A contemporary Maya population, with their rambunctious children, dogs and chickens running about, hanging laundry alongside the vista of monuments was incongruent with the modern representation of a tourist destination.<sup>15</sup>

If they could not live in the archaeological zone, raising their families, planting their crops, and providing services for tourists, the *antiguos* were determined to (1) be compensated for the loss of their homes; and (2) find another way to maintain the dominion they had held over Chichén Itzá for decades. When bulldozers levelled the last of the INAH custodians' houses in the archaeological zone, cash compensation was given to each head of household to purchase property and build new homes in the nearby town of Pisté. Left unresolved was the greater concern for many of the *antiguos*—their exclusive presence in the zone which had afforded them opportunities to earn over and above their federal salaries through the provision of tourist services. The situation was shortly rectified through an under-the-table agreement between the custodians, state officials, and federal INAH representatives, allowing for the establishment of two refreshment and souvenir vending stands (known as *palapas*) that would



**Figure 2** An INAH cooperative refreshment *palapa*.

be under the control of the custodians, organised as cooperatives. Thus, for more than 15 years the *antiguo* vending cooperatives continued to operate private, quite profitable business enterprises within the federal borders of the archaeological zone.

Though legally suspect, the practices are justified by INAH families on the basis of usufruct rights economically to benefit from the archaeological zone. Because their fathers ‘worked the land’, they have inherited the right to the space.<sup>16</sup> They too imagine their duties as a kind of working of the land of Chichén Itzá, not as *campesinos* (like the earlier generations), but as caretakers of the nation’s patrimony at an international tourism destination. One third-generation custodian, son of a former (and highly respected) site manager, rationalises the establishment of the vending cooperatives:

No one can own cultural patrimony ... it belongs to everyone. Therefore, we have to claim our part of our heritage that we deserve for a *custodio*, everyday you go to Chichén Itzá, there you spend your time, on the side you have a little business. For me, this is something that should be respected by history, the people, and the government. After all, how many men have dedicated their lives to the archaeological zones?

Why would officials buy this rationale and even allow the establishment of the refreshment stands—especially given that all archaeological zones in Mexico are under a constitutional mandate declaring them under the custodianship of the nation? The answer comes in the form of a caveat to the genealogy of *antiguos* at Chichén Itzá. In fact, the whole archaeological zone is actually privately held land, having been purchased in bits and pieces between the 1920s and 1950s by a single, very wealthy Yucatec (non-Maya) family.<sup>17</sup> In this site of Mexican national cultural patrimony, only the monuments are technically under federal control. The land upon which the monuments sit may indeed be privately owned. Because the refreshment stands do not interfere in the built architectural space of the monuments, they are on the land owned by the descendants of Fernando Barbachano, the first tourist agent and hotelier of Yucatán. The *antiguos* need only pay steep rental fees to the property owner to continue their own enterprises within the zone. Today, the Barbachano family owns and operates multiple hotels (two of which are technically inside the borders of archaeological zones), restaurants, bus lines, and guide services. All of this is made possible by a patriarch’s keen vision of the future of Maya ruins in the international tourism industry. Now that’s keeping World Heritage in the family!

Alongside the strong private-sector presence in Chichén Itzá represented by the Barbachano family, the *antiguo* vending cooperatives do not look quite so exclusive. But this is not the perception on the part of the multiple ‘publics’ who have vested interests in the archaeological zone. Why, other local residents ask, should only a privileged few benefit so directly from what is, at least rhetorically, patrimony of the whole of the nation? The question is one not likely to be resolved any time soon, especially as the interests of all of Chichén’s stakeholders are increasingly under the threat of privatisation of national patrimony in Mexico. Over the past several decades, the *antiguos* of Chichén have demonstrated a certain flexibility in (1) shaping their patrimonial claims, and (2) their ability to manoeuvre around de facto legalities (perhaps not unlike the ‘mafia’ they have been labelled) regarding who has the right to benefit from cultural

heritage resources in Mexico, and how. Whatever we want to call them, these *antiguos*, these ‘mafiosi’, these Maya, these workers, these indigenous people are just one segment of one local population who find themselves in the everyday negotiation of the global political economy of tourism.

### **Conclusion: ‘Working’ in the Public Interest**

There is something about the splendour, mystery, and magic of Maya ruins that conveniently produces a sense of wonder and obscures the intimate politics of the everyday production and maintenance of an archaeological site. A public interest approach intervenes precisely in this anti-politics of obfuscation by foregrounding the social contexts of heritage sites in order to detail both the political economy and the everyday life of Chichén Itzá. The purpose of this essay is to call particular attention to the role of indigenous labour in the production and reproduction of the heritage site. In doing so, we can see that it is not always and exclusively the state or even the big-business private sector that sets the terms for the commodification of cultural resources and the interpellation of these properties into the heritage industry. Indeed, different constituencies of local populations are shaping the value of heritage.

Under such complex circumstances, it is not surprising that conflict arises at this World Heritage Site. Conflict exists between different constituencies of INAH custodians, the larger local community, and the Mexican state as each seeks to garner or maintain ideological and economic custodianship over the meaning and value of this heritage resource. In conflict with statist visions of archaeological resources is an array of competing claims emanating from diverse constituencies of social actors ranging from indigenous rights groups to multinational tourism operators and other developers. Within this constellation of conflict over cultural patrimony we find Chichén Itzá’s custodians negotiating their ‘blood and sweat’ patrimony claims. As this case demonstrates, the *de facto* circumstance that sets the limits for shaping and constraining these claims is the regime of private ownership that has governed Chichén Itzá for nearly a century. Lucky for tourism interests, this conflict does not take an overtly visible form. Frustrating for the custodians, the dominant discourse of national heritage will most likely always obscure and de-legitimate their claims of family and job patrimony at Chichén.

The case of custodianship at Chichén Itzá is instructive for public interest anthropology as it is based on a clear acknowledgement of the diverse constituencies of the communities affected by and involved with heritage tourism through a micro-level ethnographic analysis of these communities.<sup>18</sup> This ethnographic portrait of local labour at Chichén Itzá suggests new directions for the study of heritage tourism. The ethnographic study of the diverse constituencies deeply involved in the production and reproduction of heritage across the globe would benefit enormously from a public interest approach. Millions of people around the world work in the heritage tourism industry, part of the most far-reaching, fastest growing sectors of the global economy.<sup>19</sup> Yet we know so little about cultural labour and the transformations this sector stands to face given changing state policies including neo-liberal privatisation

agenda, de-unionisation, and lack of uniformity and compliance in labour standards in the culture industries across the globe. Sustained attention to labour in the heritage sector (or, more broadly, the social histories of heritage sites) stands to fill the widening gaps in our understandings not only of heritage tourism but also the global political economic landscape itself. Now is an especially important moment to take up the question of cultural labour, given the rapid pace at which the global circulation of capital is constantly restructuring both the social and economic arrangements that lend heritage its multiplicity of values, market and otherwise.

## Notes

- [1] Shepherd, 'When the Hand that Holds the Trowel is Black', marks an important recent contribution to the study of local 'native' labour in archaeological excavation.
- [2] Citing Redfield and Villa Rojas, *Chan Kom*, 5–6, Castañeda, in "We are Not Indigenous!" claims that 'The trope of the Modernizing Maya is a metaphor ... created in the 1930s' (54).
- [3] Castañeda, in *In the Museum of Maya Culture*, presents a very thorough examination of the interpretive assemblage built by anthropological science, tourism, and the state.
- [4] See, for example Green et al., 'Indigenous Knowledge and Archaeological Science', 366–98; Watkins et al., 'Community Relations', 73–82.
- [5] In their monographs, biographical, and autobiographical materials, archaeologists working under the auspices of the Carnegie Institution of Washington's Project Chichén Itzá as well as Mexican archaeologists working under the INAH's precursor institution reference their indebtedness in the field to the local Maya labour force. See, for example, Brunhouse, *Sylvanus G. Morley and the World of the Ancient Mayas*; Morris, *Temple of the Warriors*. Nineteenth-century travelers and amateur proto-archaeologists did the same; see Desmond and Messenger, *A Dream of Maya*; Stephens and Catherwood, *Incidents of Travel*; Maler, *Impresiones de viaje a las ruinas de Cobá y Chichén Itzá*.
- [6] The person making this comment is a key figure in the ongoing archaeological investigation of the site. I have chosen to protect this informant's actual identity owing to the inflammatory nature of the comment.
- [7] In this specific case of the custodians at Chichén Itzá, patrimonial discourse is highly masculinised, thus I emphasise the pronoun 'he'.
- [8] The only other female custodians in the INAH Centro Regional Yucatán system work inside the Palacio Canton anthropology museum in Mérida. Women are underrepresented as holder of the title 'custodian' because historically the caretaking of monuments is a highly masculinised form of labour, tied as it is to heavy, outdoor work.
- [9] As we will see, the actual provision of vending services inside the zones is a hotly contested issue between state officials, INAH officials, and the custodians.
- [10] The Maya-language signs are a source of much joking among locals. Native Maya speakers will read the signs out loud with exaggerated, funny accents, and test others around to see if they could understand what was being read. For the most part, the linguistic style of the signage is not compatible with local practice.
- [11] Custodians report that they find Argentineans to be the rudest and most likely to break the rules. Italians rank high as well, not to mention Mexican nationals. Note here that the category of 'Mexican' would not refer to local people, or anyone from Yucatán. In the cases of the Argentineans and Italians, many *custodios* perceive a generalised aggressive, non-compliant behaviour, often stemming from visitors' previous experiences in archaeological sites in their home countries.
- [12] Peraza López and Rejón Patrón, *El comercio de artesanías en Chichén Itzá*, and Castañeda, *On the Correct Training of Indios*, give accounts of the 'artisan invasion': an ongoing conflict at

- Chichén Itzá between local handicraft vendors who wish to market their products inside the archaeological zone and INAH site officials, who have taken measures to keep them out.
- [13] Castañeda, *In the Museum of Maya Culture*.
- [14] Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*.
- [15] Castañeda, *In the Museum of Maya Culture*, and Himpele and Castañeda, *Incidents of Travel in Chichén Itzá*, in an analysis of the spring equinox event at the archaeological site, suggest that the Mexican state, working in tandem with archaeological science, seeks to ‘clean and clear’ the space (in both a literal and figurative sense) of Chichén Itzá, in order to promote a properly modern image of ancient Maya culture.
- [16] The intricacies of land and labour relations in the social histories of archaeological sites is the focus of my comparative ethnographic study, *Monumental Ambivalence*.
- [17] For a more detailed discussion of the genealogy of privatisation at Chichén Itzá, see Breglia, *Docile Descendants and Illegitimate Heirs* and *Monumental Ambivalence*.
- [18] There is a small but growing field of research based in the ethnographic study of communities deeply intertwined in the politics of archaeology. Notable among these are Bartu, ‘Where is Çatalhöyük?’; and Shankland, *Integrating the Past*. Archaeologists have approached the same territory. Examples from this body of work include Ardren, ‘Conversations about the Production of Archaeological Knowledge and Community Museums at Chunchucmil and Kochol, Yucatán’; Edgeworth, *Acts of Discovery*; and Hodder, ‘The Past as Passion and Play’.
- [19] Studies by the World Travel and Tourism Council (WTTC) indicate that the tourism industry is indeed the world’s largest employer, expected to generate 328 million jobs by 2010. See <http://www.wttc.org/2005tsa/pdf/world.pdf>

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