

THE SENSE OF TRANQUILITY: BODILY PRACTICE AND ETHNIC CLASSES IN YUCATÁN

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While bodily practice has become a major area of investigation in cultural anthropology, its connection to ethnicity remains to be explored. Among the Yucatec Maya, however, one cultural value, tranquility, is enacted through bodily practices and also serves as an axis for ethnic distinction. Moreover, a specific logic associating tranquility with morality serves as an incisive critique of wealthier Others, all the more important as the Maya are incorporated into the global economy at the bottom of the class hierarchy. An understanding of ethnicity is incomplete without an ethnography of bodily practice and an investigation into how ethnic identity emerges daily in relation to embodied experiences. (Mexico, Maya, ethnicity, social class, embodiment)

Visitors to the Mayan village of Dzitnup, in Yucatán, Mexico, are told by virtually everyone they meet that Dzitnup is a wonderful place because it is “tranquil,” and that “everyone gets along here.” These repeated assertions are puzzling in view of the fact that the village has two political factions, people argue over the national political parties, and Catholics and Protestants accuse each other that their ways are contrary to the will of God. This article explores the ways these Yucatecans talk about tranquility, which involves its demonstration in bodily practice, and its importance for ethnic and class identities. It concludes with a call for a wider investigation into relationships between bodily practice and ethnicity, particularly the behavioral correlates of ethnic identities.

After three centuries of Spanish colonial rule, and arguably two centuries of neocolonialism, how Maya-speaking people configure social identity and difference has aroused scholarly interest. Concern in these matters intensified in the 1980s and 1990s during the civil war that pitted a Guatemalan army against Maya villagers, and again with the Zapatista rebellion of 1994 in Mexico and the military occupation of Chiapas that continues to this day. Some ethnographers suggest that romanticism about the Maya—involving tourists, archaeologists, cultural anthropologists, and *National Geographic* magazine illustrations—has placed constraints on how Mayan people assert their ethnic identity (Castañeda 1996; Hervik 1999). Others have stressed the creative articulation of ethnicity in the context of struggles for indigenous rights under state military power (Alonso Caamal 1993; Fischer 1999, 2001; Fischer and McKenna 1996; Hale 1994; Nash 1995, 1997, 2001; Warren 1992, 1998; Watanabe 1995; Wilson 1995). Still others focus on the correspondence between ethnic identities and class realities

(Gabbert 2004), or examine how identities emerged in relationship to colonial and state administrative procedures (Castañeda 2004:42; Eiss 2004; Fallaw 2004; Restall 2004; Watanabe 2000). Berkley (1998) points to the relationship between language ideology and ethnic identity, as does Castañeda (2004:41), who cautions against eliding the realities of cultural and ethnic diversity because “the terms ‘Indian,’ ‘ladino,’ ‘mestizo,’ ‘indigenous’ are not equivalent across the Maya world [and] *do not have any stable meaning*” (emphasis in original). Attention in this essay is given to a relatively neglected area: the relationship between identity and bodily experience.

In Santiago Chimaltenango, Guatemala, Watanabe (1992) found that a sense of community emerged through the experience of collective action, and argued for a study of the relationship between identity and experience (Watanabe 1995; see also Fischer 1999). How bodily practice (as distinguished from body adornment [cf. Turner 1995]) relates to perception and identity has become an area of anthropological concern (Bourdieu 1984; Csordas 1990; Farnell 1999; Lock 1993; Martín Alcoff 1999; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Van Wolputte 2004). It is useful to understand how perceptions and feelings that emerge with bodily experience relate to how Maya think about themselves and others. As words alone can never totally convey experience, in part because so much of embodied practice is never articulated in language, a person can never fully understand what another person feels. Nonetheless, through fieldwork, ethnographers have learned that research requires mastering bodily movements because bodily experience is an important part of culture (Farnell 1999:344). Mauss (1973) called for an ethnography of “techniques of the body” three-quarters of a century ago, but until recently few ethnographies included bodily practice, perhaps due to a Western mind-body dualism privileging of the mind (Farnell 1999:345), and a lack of a vocabulary to describe bodily experience.

An ethnography of bodily practice is especially relevant for Yucatec Maya speakers because ethnic and class identities correspond to values and themes that infuse bodily practice. An ethos of tranquility or “balance” informs bodily practice in areas ranging from child socialization practices to dance and greeting behaviors. In Yucatán, tranquility and wealth are said to be inversely related; hence, despite their relative poverty, Maya villagers can assert moral superiority and pride through bodily practices of tranquility.

THE SETTING

Dzitnup¹ is a village of about 800 people in the eastern part of the State of Yucatán. It is located along the peninsula’s main highway, which stretches from the capital of Mérida in the west to Cancún in the east. Until about 1980, families provisioned themselves through a combination of swidden agriculture, hunting,

animal husbandry, selling crafts, and kitchen gardening. Since 1980, life in Dzitnup has changed dramatically in ways that tie villagers into regional, national, and international networks. A crisis in agriculture brought about by impoverished soils, the insufficiency of government land grants (*ejidos*), the removal of government price supports for maize in the 1980s, and free trade agreements (GATT, then NAFTA) has discouraged farming. Now, most families depend on a cash income, particularly from tourism. On the periphery of village lands is Cenote X-Keken, an underground well formed by rivers that cut through limestone. Thousands of tourists annually stop to see the cenote² on their way from Cancún to the ruins of Chichén Itzá. Sales in tickets, refreshments, and handicrafts fill community and individual coffers. Some villagers have jobs in town and some work in the maquiladora industrial park just outside the village. A third of the men, young and old, have worked in Cancún and in the other tourist areas along the coast of Quintana Roo, regularly bringing money home. Between tourism, television, free trade, and maquiladora manufacture, Dzitnup participates in a global setting.

Through increased ties to outsiders, villagers perceive and emphasize differences between themselves and others, including Spanish-speaking townspeople and people from other countries. Outsiders (including anthropologists) have called Yucatec Maya speakers by several terms: Indian, indigenous, Maya. Dzitnupeños do not use these in self-reference, but categorize their social world according to social class (see Gabbert 2004). To be specific, they categorize themselves as ethnic classes, since the categories presume an overlap between economic standing, language, shared history, and other aspects of lifestyle. Class and ethnic categories are collapsed.³ The terms villagers most often use to distinguish among groups of Yucatecans are *masewal* and *ts'ul* (respectively, commoner and lord). According to local characterizations, a *masewal* is poor, a villager, Maya-speaking, and a farmer (or his wife). A *ts'ul* is rich, a townspeople, Spanish-speaking, and in commerce or in the professions. As often as villagers refer to themselves as *masewals*, they call themselves *óotsil máako'ob* (poor people). A third category consists of *gringos*, meaning any light-skinned foreigner, although people believe that most *gringos* come from the United States. *Gringos* are thought to be uniformly wealthy. Race, the categorization of people based on superficial physical characteristics, is also conflated with class and ethnicity. *Masewals* are described as being short with straight dark hair, dark skin, round faces, short necks, and flat noses. In contrast, *ts'uls* are described as being taller with lighter, sometimes curly, hair, fairer skin, longer necks and faces, and pointier noses. Naturally, individual people defy easy categorization due to different factors, including ethnic passing, with some Maya speakers accumulating wealth, moving to the city, teaching their children only Spanish, and even Hispanizing their surnames. Despite that, the categories persist

as ready-made terms for identification and discrimination. As will be discussed below, bodily practices of tranquility are key features distinguishing *masewals* from *ts'uls* and *gringos*.

DISCOURSES OF TRANQUILITY

The people of Dzitnup say that in Yucatán everything is tranquil, but that Dzitnup is much more tranquil than Cancún and the United States. In describing tranquility, people say, "Here, the people are humble"; "Here, no one will steal anything from you"; "Here, everyone will treat you with respect." Tranquility indicates the ideal state of affairs, one in which everyone is in agreement, everything of value is evenly distributed, and respect and respectability characterize human relationships. It implies consensus, evenness, balance, and equilibrium. Similarly, Mexican and Guatemalan ethnographies indicate that concepts of balance and evenness influence community relations (Fischer 1999; Greenberg 1981; Nader 1990).

Many Spanish words are incorporated in the Yucatec Maya language, although they are pronounced and inflected according to Maya linguistic rules. In Maya, the principles of balance and tranquility are encoded in three such Mayanized Hispanisms: *tráankiloj* (tranquility), *páarejoj* (evenness), and *íigwal* (sameness or equality) (from *tranquilo*, *parejo*, and *igual*). Tranquility is also expressed in the Maya word *nay* and evenness in *toj*, but in talking about these as abstract qualities, people almost exclusively use the Mayanized Spanish terms.

Sameness (*íigwal* or *laj*) is also used to describe village life, as agreement in action and opinion are thought to be essential for tranquil social life. People in the village will claim a harmonious similarity: "We are all farmers"; "We are all Catholic"; "We are all members of the PRI [Partido Revolucionario Institucional] party." These blanket statements about unity in production, religion, and politics are not true in a literal sense. Only half of the men still farm, 15 per cent of adults are Pentecostals, and a third of the voters are supporters of the PAN (Partido de Acción Nacional) opposition party. A relatively wealthy merchant declared, "Here in the village, we're poor," while a man who speaks excellent Spanish protested, "We don't know Spanish." All sorts of differences exist, but assertions of unity are commonplace.

Balance or evenness (*páarejoj*) is a concept used frequently. *Páarejoj* can also convey sameness and equality. *Páarejoj* was used in a particularly telling way at a program of *jarana* (Yucatecan folk dancing) presented by a group of teenagers. One girl stood out among the dancers, as her movements were sharp, energetic, and well-executed. An American audience would have praised her excellence, but a woman criticized her because the dancing "should be all *páarejoj*." It is significant that in order to say "different" in Maya, you have to say *jela'an*,

which carries the connotation of strange. Consensus is so highly valued that each dish is considered to have a single recipe, and the best cook is the one who can master that recipe, rather than add a unique, creative, or experimental touch.

In a conversation with Doña Irma, a member of the PRI party, she complained that the village PANistas (opposition party members) were divisive, which, she said, “isn’t good, it won’t help one get into heaven. It is better if everyone is *en unidad*” [united]. Since she used a Spanish phrase in the middle of a Maya sentence, I asked her how to say “united” in Maya. Don Basilio, who had been occasionally participating in our conversation, offered that one should say *ki’imak óolal*, which translates literally as “sweetness of soul (heart),” and is most commonly understood to mean happiness. Doña Irma concurred. The implication is that people should be united politically, and the ideal state is when individuals consent with glad hearts.

Catholics, who represent the religious majority, often refer to Protestants as *hermanos separados* (separated brethren). A Catholic man declared, “They’re just trying to introduce politics into religion. They’re just trying to separate people one from another.” The Protestants are sometimes ridiculed for their enthusiastic prayer, singing, and clapping, but also criticized for not participating in village collective activities, like weddings, baptisms, and fiestas, thereby disrupting conviviality. A Catholic woman who has attended Protestant services many times, and likes the singing and prayer, decided in the end not to continue. She explained that Protestant doctrine is very critical of Catholic lifestyles (especially fiestas, drinking, and dancing), and added, “Before you know it, you’re hating your fellow man just because of your religion.” Better, it seems, to get along with people than to disagree over points of doctrine.

LEARNING TRANQUILITY

However, to suggest that people try to get along with one another simply because it is their ideal presents a static, value model of culture. It implies that people make loyalty to tradition responsible for the reproduction of culture, and does not satisfactorily address why people might feel these cultural rules to be compelling. People cannot be convinced about the importance of a discursive notion without also sensing that such ideas are natural and true (Bourdieu 1977). Making the body his focus of analysis, since it is the locus of both learning and practice, Bourdieu introduces “habitus” (the set of dispositions or principles that tends to produce certain practices) and “hexis” (a system of bodily movement that tends to reproduce the habitus because it is informed by it). People adjust their bodily movements to the different senses (aesthetics, values, morals, proclivities) of the habitus, so their actions take on a unified logic. The hexis includes how people sit, stand, bow, show respect, worship, eat, and work. The

same principles that inform the hexis are extended by homology to all manner of embodied practices, including how people interact with one another, how they share food, converse, work together, do commerce, play, court, and marry. In turn, as people reproduce the hexis, they reproduce the dispositions (the habitus) that inform it (Bourdieu 1977:93–94). In addition to dispositions and principles, I suggest that the term “learnings” underscores the connection between the habitus and bodily practice.

Learning the dispositions of the habitus occurs at an unconscious level because they are learned through embodied practice rather than language. A child learns the habitus primarily by mimicking the bodily movements of the hexis (Bourdieu 1977:87). Further, the child learns social taxonomies by moving through space necessarily structured according to those taxonomies (Bourdieu 1977:89–93).

[T]he “book” from which the children learned their vision of the world is read with the body, in and through the movements and displacements which make the space within which they are enacted as much as they are made by it (Bourdieu 1977:90).

Bourdieu offers as an example that a Kabyle child learns about the structuring of gender by moving through gendered spaces of the house. Since the dispositions of the habitus are embedded in materiality (hexis and socially structured space) and are typically not learned through language, they appear to be natural and so are less open to disputation. Bourdieu insists that a principle learned as it is embodied, either in hexis or grasped as the person moves through socially structured space, “*goes without saying because it comes without saying*” (Bourdieu 1977:167; emphasis in original). Having been learned as part of the natural order, the principles of the habitus seem completely natural and therefore beyond reasonable contestation.

The principles embodied in this way are placed beyond the grasp of consciousness, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit; nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and therefore, more precious, than the values given body, *made* body by the transubstantiation . . . of an implicit pedagogy . . . (Bourdieu 1977:94; emphasis in original).

A logic that is unified, embedded in nature, and learned unconsciously, would be difficult to dispute. In fact, Maya speakers socialize their children largely without articulating rules of behavior. Rather, children learn socially acceptable behavior generally through watching adults, and watching others is an activity that quantitatively occupies much of their time (Gaskins 1999:43–44; Watanabe 1992:96–99). A series of bodily experiences in the home encourage dispositions of tranquility, and a wide variety of everyday practices, from

conversational styles to patterns of dress, oblige villagers to enact and put into practice, tranquility.

Through relations and socially structured spaces in the home, Yucatecan children sense the need for co-operation (tranquility) within the family. House size relative to family size teaches intimacy. Houses, whether thatch or cement, consist of one large room, typically measuring 4 x 6 meters (although more houses now have two or three rooms). The number of people in any one household is rarely less than seven, including people of different generations. House residents invariably share the company of others. The density encourages co-operation, which can begin at the age of four when children start running errands, delivering messages, and doing simple chores. By age twelve, children can perform almost all the tasks of same-sex adults. Through their early incorporation into the family's work, children participate in and practice co-operation.

Household life tends to encourage tranquility and co-operation more so than the development of an individual will. Unlikely to experience solitude, no one expects or seeks privacy. A person is usually alone once a day when bathing, either in a partitioned corner of the house or in a separate tiny structure out back. The exception is when a man goes to the fields without his sons, brothers, or father. In a house of eight or more people, there may be room to hang only four hammocks. Babies and toddlers sleep with their parents and, when older, with brothers and sisters. With few pieces of furniture, family members socialize during the day with their bodies pressed together in the intimacy of a hammock. Further, the body is not protected as one's personal space. Dress, grooming, and other habits are open to discussion. People are not sensitive to intimate discussion of their character, appearance, or habits, and do not take offense. In the home, no special attention is focused on one person at a time, even when one returns after a long absence. Babies are given a lot of affection, but are not doted on (Gaskins 1999:44). When a baby cries, people attempt to "make its soul tranquil" (*naisik u yóol*) and distract it from thinking about the cause of its unhappiness. They encourage it to play with a pretty object, or draw its attention to something else. These and other domestic practices instill in the child a disposition to get along with others, rather than to assert an independent will.

BALANCE AND HEALTH

Tranquility and balance are ideal states of the physical body. The body is imagined as becoming sick when tipped out of balance, which can happen by either disruptions in its hot-cold balance or by emotional upset. The body becomes used to certain states, and when jolted out of that state becomes sick. As with the social body, the physical body is healthiest when it is tranquil, even,

and balanced. How one ensures physical well-being is through calm, smooth actions, and relations with others.

Balance is embedded in a hot-cold system of classification. This system is present throughout Mexico and Guatemala (Adams and Rubel 1967:335; Currier 1966; McCullough and McCullough 1974; Redfield and Redfield 1940:64–65). It classifies foods, herbs, and other substances, and certain activities as hot or cold, but not in the sense of physical temperature. Physical health depends upon a balance of bodily “temperature.” Foster (1953) proposed that the system came to the New World from Greek humoral pathology via Spanish colonialism. However, early post-conquest documents indicate a more comprehensive ideology of health balance, suggesting that an analogous system of balance operated in prehispanic times (Burkhart 1989:130–69; López Austin 1980).

The main part of the body that must remain in balance is the *óol*, the emotional “heart” (not the physical organ) and the rest of the body (*wíinkilil*, *kweerpoj*). The *óol* is a spiritual element, a soul, in the sense that it is “roughly the will and the capacity for involvement and sensate experience” (Hanks 1990:87), a “center of awareness and intention” (John Lucy, personal communication). Different activities and foods can disturb or adjust the temperature of the *óol*, but the *óol* should not be shocked abruptly from one state into another.

Activities such as working in the fields, making tortillas over the fire, ironing, riding in a car, menstruation, and sex make your *óol* *chokol* (hot). You should then avoid contact with any cold (*síis*) things, which would shock your *óol*. Cold foods include limes, oranges, unheated water, and especially Coca-Cola. Cold activities include washing your hands, doing laundry, or bathing in cool water (especially shampooing), and walking barefoot on a cement or tile floor or in mud. A sudden hot-to-cold shift brings on fever, diarrhea, and sharp pains. Nothing is drunk with a warm meal (only afterwards) because teeth would decay from the constant shift between warm food and the cold of water or a soft drink. Furthermore, if your *óol* is already out of balance, you should stay indoors until your temperature re-equilibrates and you are strong enough to handle an encounter with evil winds (*k’ak’áas íik’*), which come at night, and during a rainstorm, and give people a chill.

When your *óol* is cool, such as when you wake up on a winter morning, you should slowly warm your body before shocking it with hot things. It is best to slowly remove the blankets and wait about ten minutes before getting up, and sit near, but not next to, the fire, until your body is adjusted and you can drink something hot without danger. While a host of supernatural agents are said to cause sickness, day-to-day smaller illnesses, especially fever, diarrhea, and pains, are typically attributed to hot-cold imbalances. Bodily balance also pertains to the *tipte’*, an organ located at the center of the body below the belly button, and

linked to all the other organs of the body. If the *tipte'* is jarred, all the organs are displaced, and sharp stomach pain or a general malaise results (see Villa Rojas 1980).

The fluidity of the body is also expressed in ideas about the *pixan* (soul). While the *óol* is a soul in the sense of awareness and intention, the *pixan* is the soul that lives on after death; it lacks conscious awareness and intention. Rather than being strictly contained by the body, the *pixan* floats in and around it. It can be under a hammock when someone is in it, and can float about at night and in the morning. If something catches your *pixan*, you will become ill.

The fluidity of the body is also manifest in the idea that people are hurt when jolted out of a state to which they have become accustomed (*suuktal*), which includes climate, physical environment, and social relationships. The sadness that accompanies separation from loved ones is often explained as due to this fact. Brides cry when they leave their mothers to live in their husband's family's home because they have "gotten used to" their mothers.

No vocabulary distinction is made between physical and mental illness, both are *k'oja'anil*. Emotional imbalances can produce physical symptoms (Adams and Rubel 1967). For good health, people should try to be calm, to maintain the ideal emotional state of tranquility and evenness by not upsetting each other or themselves. The most common response to "How are you?" is "My *óol* is even" (*Tooj in wóol*). The preferred state of tranquility is implied in a common criticism of a person who "gets angry quickly." Undesirable emotional imbalances are often expressed as movements of the *óol*, which can occur when riding in a truck, sewing, or doing laundry for an inordinate amount of time. However, it is a sign of weakness to admit that you are fed up with something; patience and evenness of temper are expected.

Because the *óol* and the body are linked, extreme emotion can make one ill. Doña Jacinta explained how her mother developed an embolism after she saw her other daughter, son-in-law, and grandchild crushed by a tractor that tipped on its side. The "blood rushed to her head," and she died a few months later. Out of her own grief, Doña Jacinta developed a temporary paralysis of the right side of her face. Similarly, Doña Jacoba claims that her husband became so upset when he felt that some of his neighbors hated him that blood rushed to his head, giving him a fever, which killed him.

Néerbiyos (nerves) is a sickness based on ideas of tranquility. It is a chronic illness brought about by powerful emotions, and commonly affects women. Doña Ana suffers from *néerbiyos*, she says, because her husband was a terrible drunkard and would beat and insult her. She has been affected with *néerbiyos* ever since he left her when she became pregnant. As a result of her illness, she "gets angry quickly," especially with her daughter, whom she then berates and insults, while at the same time suffering severe headaches and facial twitches. As

another example, Doña Lucía became afflicted with *néerbiyos* during a squabble over arrangements in her embroidery co-operative, and the other women began insulting her and laughing at her. She has become nervous, barely eats, and is unable to work in the house. She relies on her eldest daughter to cook and care for the children. Unable to control her own emotions, she curls up in her hammock, rocking back and forth, reading a book of children's Bible stories.

MUTUAL VIGILANCE

A severe emotional upset can lead to a chronic emotional imbalance with physical symptoms, and as such embodies principles of tranquility. But tranquility, particularly in the sense of unity of action, is enforced through mutual vigilance and gossip, which is apparent in standard greeting behaviors. To be asked, when meeting on the road, where you are going requires an honest answer. To hedge or lie is disrespectful. You might even be asked, "What are you going to do?" Your activities are not private by default. If your interlocutor believes that your actions are improper, you may be told so.

Practices of mutual vigilance are also rooted in conceptions of the body. Internal divisions within the self are little developed—there is little concept of a conscience or a sense of reason. There is an idea that if people do not feel fear, they will not behave out of a sense of right and wrong. For this reason, parents will hit errant children and husbands will hit errant wives, rather than scold them. If left to their own devices, people are assumed to inevitably do something wrong. If a person, especially a woman, leaves the village to work, people think it is to pursue an affair away from watchful eyes. The absence of an internal conscience was also made clear by two adages regarding the need to chaperone girls: "You cannot lock a cat and a rat together in a room, because the cat will eat the rat. You should not tie a sausage around the neck of a dog, because the dog will eat the sausage." Without an internal conscience, people cannot control themselves and must depend upon the care of others.

Women, in particular, are watched over, their sexual purity and reputation jealously guarded. A woman should always be at home unless she has to grind corn, run an errand, go shopping, or take a child to the doctor. And she must have a chaperone, preferably her mother, mother-in-law, aunt, or grandmother. Women must not walk alone at night, lest they be seen as inviting a male approach. Young men, when searching for a wife, look highly on a girl who is "taken care of" (guarded) because only then can he be somewhat assured of her virginity. Tranquility, particularly in the aspect of unity of action, is embodied in mutual vigilance.

Gossip assists mutual vigilance. People often criticize others as gossipers (*chismosos*), but then gossip about someone else. Gossip achieves collective

action in two ways. First, it frightens deviants into conformity as people fear for their reputation (Gluckman 1963). Second, it indexically signals commonality between the interlocutors, as their adherence to the same moral principles is reaffirmed. A piece of gossip often ends with the phrase, “That’s not good, don’t you agree?” Similarly in Zinacantan, “Gossip...is ordinarily talk about rules and goals as [much as] it is talk about the doings of others” (Haviland 1977:viii). By judging others, people assert a common morality and usher in tranquility. As Gluckman (1963:308) notes, “gossip does not have isolated roles in community life, but is part of the very blood and tissue of that life.”

RESPECT AND RESPECTABILITY

Respect and respectability are two qualities necessary for tranquility. Both are enacted through a series of gestures, postures, and patterns of avoidance. Respect should be shown for elders and members of the opposite sex, and one demonstrates respect in large part through showing respectability. An older person should not have to be disturbed by a younger person (Gaskins 1999:44); therefore, younger people show respect for elders largely through avoidance. If an adult is visiting, younger people should remain quiet and occupy themselves with some task, even leave the house temporarily. Further, if a younger and an older person cross paths, the younger person should greet the older person with a “Good day” (or afternoon or evening), and then turn his or her eyes to the ground, showing deference. Nothing more should be said unless the older person initiates conversation. Respect for members of the opposite sex is also largely demonstrated through avoidance. If one is friendly and conversant with a person of the opposite sex, it is assumed to be a sign of romantic interest. A woman should not initiate conversation with a man, unless she welcomes the criticism of his family. Similarly, a young man generally will not initiate idle conversation with a young woman unless he is considering marrying her. In certain cases men and women can converse more freely, as in long truck rides where avoidance is nearly impossible, and at public events with many people present.

Respect is shown with gestures and manners of speaking. In general, people do not touch each other much. Exceptions are for close female friends, playing with children, and younger men greeting one another. Friends and relatives who have not seen one another in months or years will greet each other calmly and formally with a limp handshake, little more than a mutual clasping of fingertips. Visiting calls for many gestures of respect. One should wait by the road and call out until someone responds. At the doorway, each elder person is greeted with a “Good day” and their name with the title of don or doña. Once in the house, a visitor should not take a seat until it is offered. Conversation should begin with

mundane, innocuous topics, and always defer to the direction that an older person takes.

Respectability also embodies tranquility enacted through posture and dress. One walks upright and slowly. A woman sits with the knees touching, feet resting flat on the ground, and hands folded together in the lap or loosely crossed across the stomach. A man may spread his legs slightly while seated, but his hands are usually resting on his legs rather than by his side. A lounging posture is not acceptable. Dress should similarly be formal and respectable. A man wears pants and a short- or long-sleeved shirt, not shorts or tank tops. A woman hides her figure with the *ípi*, a loose embroidered dress that hangs straight to the knee. A *pik* (a white skirt with a wide lace trim, similar to a petticoat) is worn under the *ípi* so that it protrudes about four inches; a woman is considered naked if she does not wear this. If a young woman wears Western dresses or skirts, these should reach the knee, and clothing should be loose, not tight. A respectable woman combs and ties her long hair back in a neat bun with no straying wisps. A girl should also always have her hair neat and controlled, not loose, and pulled back in barrettes, clips, or bows. For formal occasions, many women wear a *rébos*, a long, finely woven silk shawl, which is wrapped around the back and over the arms.

Respect and respectability are performed in postures and gestures at dances. *Bailes* (dances) with live *cumbia* bands take place in town or one of the neighboring villages every weekend, and they are a major form of entertainment for young people. Girls wear their best dresses and high-heels. Couples dancing do not talk with one another, do not look one another in the eye, and move their bodies very little. Girls are chaperoned by their mothers, with whom they sit when not dancing. The folkloric *jarana* dance also embodies respect and respectability. The young women don their *ternos* (elegant, formal versions of the *ípi*) with the silk shawl draped elegantly around the arms. Their hair, in a bun, is covered with a big red bow, and they wear white high-heeled shoes and the family's best gold jewelry. Young men wear the rural costume of the nineteenth century: the white guayabera shirt and white pants, a Panama hat, a red bandanna hanging out of the right pants pocket, and white *alpargata* sandals with thick wooden soles. The *jarana* is danced with torso and neck erect, head held high and straight. The dancers do not look at one another or touch. The young woman holds the ends of her shawl in a fixed position straight out in the air, while the young man holds his left arm behind his back and his right at his chest. The dance steps consist of stepping and thumping with hips and shoulders motionless, always with dignity.

TRANQUILITY AND ETHNIC CLASSES

Bodily practices of tranquility also figure in ethnic and class identity. Dzitnupeños say tranquility distinguishes them from others. As mentioned previously, they divide the peninsula into two ethnic classes: commoners and lords; poor villagers and rich townspeople. The importance of these class distinctions is in part related to their incorporation into a cash economy. In past generations, families provisioned themselves from the fields and yards and sold a portion of their products to buy a few things. Now, almost all the men are wage workers and petty merchants, fully dependent upon a cash income. They are vulnerable, not to the whims of the weather, but to other people—to teachers who provide them with skills, bosses who pay their wages, and tourists who buy their goods. This makes them vulnerable to groups who hold an advantage in the economy, i.e., both Spanish-speaking city dwellers and international tourists.

In competition with Spanish-speaking urbanites, villagers fare poorly. Villagers are employed by Spanish speakers, as the latter own the businesses in town, the large ranches, and most of the hotels, restaurants, and shops in the tourist areas. They are the engineers who control construction projects and hire villagers as day-laborers, they are the managers in the maquiladora factories, and they are the teachers who offer the education and Spanish-language skills needed for advancement. Villagers are also dependent on foreigners, including the owners of the maquiladora factories, the owners and managers of tourist concerns, and the tourists whose purchases at the cenote make the difference between whether villagers will eat meat or just tortillas and beans that week. According to villagers, gringos, most of whom are Americans, are very wealthy people, so rich that each gringo has his own tractor. Gringos will regularly plop down \$5 for a margarita, the same amount that a maquiladora worker or a farmhand will make in a single nine-hour workday. And gringos may have three or four margaritas, an appetizer, and a steak fajitas dinner before the night is through, then retire to a hotel room costing \$100/night, or what an average Maya worker earns in a month. As Maya become absorbed within the global economy, they perceive themselves as occupying the lowest in a global class hierarchy that includes the descendants of Spanish colonists and wealthy foreigners.

Villagers use the logic of tranquility as a critique of class inequities and to assert moral superiority over those more powerful. While poverty evokes disdain in the city, in the village it is reclaimed and reinterpreted by a particular morality of wealth. Tranquility connotes composure and control of desire. Possessing wealth, in contrast, is an indication of one's inability to control one's desires within the limits of what is reasonable and fair. Even though villagers seek ways to make money, they say that money is not a good thing because "money controls the bearer" [*Taak'in ku máandar*], and one is compelled by a desire to

constantly have more. Characteristics claimed for the *masewal*—hard work, humility, contentment, and sexual restraint—all stem from tranquility. The negative qualities of *ts'uls*—laziness, greed, vanity, and sexual promiscuity—stem from their inability to control their desires.

Tranquility is practiced steadfastly in the face of hard work. Adults proudly recount times of extreme hardship and grueling toil. Hard work is praised, especially physical labor. The nicest compliments are: “What a hard worker you are!” [*Jach meyjul máakech!*] and “How you never tire of work!” [*Jach sak'óolech!*]. Work done in offices and shops “is not real work.”

Tranquility also entails humility and contentment. Villagers dramatize their humility by characterizing their diet as one of beans, tortillas, and garden vegetables, even though it is often more ample. They remind one another not to put on airs, and not be ashamed of their peasant roots. In contrast, *ts'uls* are said to be proud and haughty: “They think a lot of themselves” [*Jach ku kreyéertikubao'ob*].

Again, tranquility implies composure, so that one should always comport oneself with dignity, restraint, and respectability. *Ts'uls* are criticized as *loco* (crazy), which connotes being out-of-control and having desires that are not kept in check. *Ts'uls* are criticized for talking and laughing loudly, wearing flashy clothing, and gesturing and dancing wildly. *Loco* also connotes sexual wildness. *Ts'uls* are criticized for their relative lack of constraint in male-female relationships, such as the lack of parental supervision and public displays of affection. Townspeople are said to have multiple boyfriends and girlfriends before marriage, extramarital affairs, and marriages that more often end in divorce than do village marriages.

Gringos are regarded as *ts'uls*, but wealthier, rendering them so much more morally impoverished. As *ts'uls*, gringos are considered lazy and sexually out of control, but much more so. This stereotype is in part based on observations of vacationers in Cancún, who in the spirit of partying often leave their standards of propriety at home. Villagers say that gringos marry for a contractual period of ten years, and that girls have operations to remove their hymens, which is why they can have sex indiscriminately. Most gringas are thought to be barren because so few bring children with them on vacation. The high rate of divorce in the United States is attributed to excessive wealth, for if a man has money, he will leave his wife when he tires of her because he can afford to pay for a divorce and another wedding. In this way, money and sexual promiscuity are directly related. Through the logic and embodied practice of tranquility, villagers dismiss the economic power of gringos and can assert moral superiority.

When tranquility is deployed in identity politics, poverty is revalued. While *masewals* feel humble in the cities because of their relative poverty, within the village they subvert this paradigm and associate poverty with virtue. They regret

their poverty, but claim the moral high ground through embodied practices of tranquility, humility, restraint, composure, and respectability. In fact, the reason that tranquility, evenness, and respectability are expressed with Mayanized Spanish words may be that these qualities have taken on special meaning in the construction of self and other, effectively critiquing others by using their own words against them. Fanon (1967:110) suggested that, “For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.” Indeed, for the social subordinate, self is always defined with respect to the categories of the dominant. Insofar as the categories can be subverted, the self can be infused with new, positive meanings. In this case, tranquility, evenness, and respectability have been captured from Spanish speech and attached to a variety of everyday bodily practices, enabling Maya speakers to create a positive self-image, even in the context of poverty and discrimination.

CONCLUSION

Many anthropologists working in Yucatán have moved beyond romantic notions about direct cultural continuity with the prehispanic past, and have worked to grasp the terms that Maya speakers use to talk about themselves and others, while respecting the complexity, diversity, and dynamism of such conceptions (Berkley 1998; Castañeda 2004; Eiss 2004; Fallaw 2004; Gabbert 2004; Hervik 1999, 2001; Restall 2004). Still, a great deal of work remains to be done in terms of understanding how ethnicity emerges with everyday experience. Practices that perform or enact tranquility are central to conceptions of social class and ethnicity. There is a connection between identity and bodily experience. Tranquility for Dzitnup villagers is the key to personal health, both emotional and physical. It is embodied in a variety of practices deemed essential for polite social interaction and personal reputation. These include posture, gesture, personal adornment, and dance style. Tranquility is also a marker of ethnic difference, and as long as economic inequalities correlate with ethnicity in Yucatán, the idealizations of tranquility and critiques of *ts’uls* and *gringos* as being loco and out of control will persist.

There is a widespread anthropological aversion to discussing cultural correlates of ethnic identities. This may be traced back to Barth (1969), who suggested that what is important about ethnicity is not the cultural practices of the people but the categories as they define them. “The critical focus of investigation...becomes the ethnic *boundary* that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (Barth 1969:15; emphasis in original). Further, my suggestion that various bodily practices are informed by a single cultural logic may seem like an anachronistic revival of Benedict’s (1959) notion of cultural patterns or styles. We have been cautioned not to write overarching descriptions

of static, systemic cultures because they dehumanize, by making people seem frozen in time and rule-bound (Abu-Lughod 1991). By describing a set of bodily practices that correspond to an ethnic group in Yucatán, one runs the risk of essentializing race, of making it appear as though there are behavioral correlates of biology, of appearing to be trafficking in ethnic stereotypes. However, the underlying goal is to show how behavioral differences emerge through childhood socialization in the home, and how they are reinforced through interactions with people who enjoy other ethnic and class privileges.

Anthropologists are presently concerned with eradicating racism, aiming to deny any scientific reality of race (American Anthropological Association 1998; American Association of Physical Anthropologists 2000) and demonstrate how racial categories are social categories created through specific histories of armed conflict, colonialism, empire, and exploitation (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). These approaches attempt to reveal racial categories as misperceptions and thereby deflate them. Anthropologists need to say more, however, about the dynamics of bodily practice and ethnicity, how bodily practices are learned in socialization and, if bodily practices are united around a certain aesthetic, the degree to which this aesthetic is conscious or unconscious, and how such practices play a role in distinguishing self and ethnic Others. Despite the growing interest in embodiment in anthropology, it seems that only philosophers (Ciavatta 2004; Martín Alcoff 1999) have begun to explore the relationship between bodily practices and ethnic identity.

I have tried here to demonstrate that many Maya bodily practices are informed by values placed on tranquility, that these bodily practices are key markers for distinguishing themselves from wealthier, Spanish speakers and gringos, and that these bodily practices allow the Maya to bear up under the burden of poverty by laying claim to moral superiority. As such, bodily practices and an embodied ethnicity are tools to combat ethnic and class inequalities. In her discussion of patterns of culture, Benedict (1959:53) suggested that “[w]ithin each culture there come into being characteristic purposes not necessarily shared by other types of society. In obedience to these purposes, each people further and further consolidates its experience, and in proportion to the urgency of these drives the heterogeneous items of behavior take more and more congruous shape.” That the words most often used in Maya speech refer to tranquility, evenness, sameness, respect, and respectability are Mayanized Hispanisms indicates that these concepts have become charged in Maya-Spanish interactions over the centuries. Bodily practices informed by principles of tranquility provide the parameters for everyday life and the measure against which to critique powerful outsiders.

Ethnographers working in other world regions may find as well that a thick description of bodily practices helps reveal the contours and textures of everyday

experience as well as that of ethnic identity. Ethnicity is not just a social category created in order to justify conquest and exploitation. Ethnicity has an experiential grounding, often rooted in bodily practices learned during childhood and solidified through the mutual inspection of uncomfortable, wary social interactions.

NOTES

1. Two years of fieldwork in Yucatán from 1990 to 1999 consisted of eighteen months spent in Dzitnup, three months in Sisbicchen, and three months in Cancún.
2. The orthography used here was developed in the mid-1980s by bilingual Maya-Spanish educators trained in anthropological linguistics (Movimiento Nacional de Alfabetización 1984).
3. Gordon (1964:51) invented the term “ethclass” to refer to a set of people created by the intersection of class and ethnic categories, but he did not presume that the overlap would necessarily be substantial.

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