Ethnic identity in Yucatán can best be understood within the context of regional politics and the promulgation of a regional folk culture. While Yucatecan communities contain several named groups—mayero, catrin, blanco, ts’ul—and their share of ethnic enmities, members of these groups are also always “mestizos” or “Yucatecos,” a regional identity that is fostered through poetry, dance, and humor. In exploring this phenomenon, I focus on the jarana, a popular folk dance that is thought to epitomize the unity of Maya and Hispanic culture and has become a familiar feature in political campaigns and tourist venues, as well as in the perennial village fiesta. While in theory the jarana is open to all residents, in practice it has become a spectacle in which well-to-do Yucatecans don the traditional folk costume and re-present themselves as cultivated mestizos, the first among equals.

From the pyre of the dead subject rises the phoenix of identity.

Ethnicity Above and Below the Belt

Discussion of ethnic relations in Meso-America, if not a topic of perennial concern, is certainly never far from the surface of Mexican or Guatemalan ethnography. Like debates over exchange in the western Pacific or hierarchy in India, consideration of ethnic relations in Meso-America seems to follow a natural rhythm, reemerging every two decades and dominating discussion for several years before vanishing as quickly and mysteriously as it appeared. In the 1940s and 1950s, ethnographers (de la Fuente 1951; Tax 1942) attempted not only to draw a clear conceptual distinction between ethnicity and race but also to demonstrate that the relationship between Indians and Ladinos in Guatemala was fundamentally different—more fluid or more changeable—than the relationship between blacks and whites in the United States. When the topic reemerged in the mid-1960s, attention, not surprisingly, turned to the relationship between ethnicity and class (Stavenhagen 1975). Is ethnicity concep-
tually distinct from social class, or should the former be thought of as a distorted image of the latter? The social implications of the question were clear. If an ethnic group were simply a class with certain cultural trappings (e.g., a folk costume and a certain way of speaking), then reaffirming one’s ethnic identity would do little more than “fix,” so to speak, one’s lowly place in the world.

Within folklore, discussion of ethnic and other identities has followed a somewhat similar trajectory. Although Elliot Oring (1994) argues that identity has been the constant companion of folklorists from the early days of “artifact collecting” and through its reorientation toward performance, more intense scrutiny of the subject can arguably be linked to Richard Bauman’s “Differential Identity and the Social Base of Folklore” in 1971 and a spate of articles in the early to mid-1990s (Abrahams 1993; Badone 1987; Brandes 1990; Flores 1992; Glassie 1994; Jordan and De Caro 1996; Kirshenblatt-Gimblatt 1994; Oring 1994; Sommers 1991). Through these and other articles found in the pages of the *Journal of American Folklore*, anthropologists and folklorists have addressed the importance of place, dance, ballad, fiesta, and politics in the construction of ethnic and pan-ethnic constellations, and, apropos of the present article, ethnic relations in Meso-America (Hale 1999).

Most recently, discussion of ethnic relations has focused on the origin and ontology of key terms like “Maya” and the question of self-ascription (Castañeda 2004; Castillo Cocom 2004; Eiss 2004; Fallow 2004; Gabbert 2004b; Restall 2004; Sullivan 2000). Why does the term “Maya” appear so infrequently in colonial documents? Was resistance to public education in rural Yucatán (ca. 1930) really rooted in concerns about preserving Maya language and culture, or were locals more opposed to coeducation? Do the Maya really think of themselves as Maya, or is Maya-ness a colonial, or even a postcolonial, construct imposed on Meso-America from without? In *Becoming Maya*, for example, Wolfgang Gabbert (2004a) argues that the Maya have rarely been a cohesive, self-conscious group. To the extent that it exists, Maya ethnicity is an ephemeral, highly localized phenomenon limited to certain periods and places. While I am reluctant to delve into a discussion based largely on historical documents and on a time period that ends precisely where my expertise begins (1935), the absences or lacunae to which historians like Restall (2004) and Gabbert (2004b) refer may well serve as an historical predicate to the present discussion. Indeed, the promulgation of a regional culture that emphasizes the mestizo or Yucateco over the Maya—the topic of this article—may help to explain why Maya identity (e.g., the tendency toward self-ascription) remains weak in Yucatán, especially when compared to Guatemala or highland Chiapas.

At the same time, however, my aim is to shift the emphasis from the problem of essentialism and Maya identity writ small to an analysis of the broader semantic and political fields in which group and category operate in contemporary Yucatán. As Ueli Hostettler notes in his rejoinder to Restall (2004) and Gabbert (2004b), our task as scholars is not complete once “we detect ethnicity” or the tendency to essentialize identity. Instead, he argues, “[w]e need to document the social processes that draw culturally defined groups into hierarchically structured fields of power, status, and wealth . . . to document how such processes operate in everyday practice . . . and under what circumstances ethnic identifications are perpetuated, modified, or discarded” (2004:195).1
In my view, this requires examining past and ongoing forms of prejudice, insult, and innuendo as well as the habitual pairing of the lovely mestiza, the pride of Yucatán, with images of vulgar or unsightly Indians. Indeed, reluctance to identify oneself as Maya—one of the central paradoxes of regional ethnography—must also be understood as a result of a long history of defamation and semantic derogation, repeated attempts to depict indígenas as cannibals, wild animals, or rebellious savages, and a social system in which social mobility was and is achieved through assimilation or cultural hispanicization. Nevertheless, the latest round of discussion has, in my view, served to rekindle important questions about ethnogenesis, the relationship between ethnicity and politics or “governmentality” (Casteñeda 2004), and the nature of ethnic labels.

* * * * *

What are ethnic labels? Are they like the taxa or nomenclature zoologists use to classify the natural world? Such a comparison is not as absurd as it first appears. The mission of colonial Spain, after all, was to introduce order in the New World by domesticating nature, including los naturales, the term used by Spaniards to describe aboriginal Americans. How better to accomplish this task than by cataloging residents of New Spain based on phenotypic characteristics? However, as Gonzalo Aguirre Beltrán notes in his Obra Polémica (1992:130), Spanish authorities soon came to grief trying to create legal or scientific-sounding categories ex nihilo. After applying the familiar Español, indio, negro, mestizo, and mulatto to the appropriate populations, authorities drew on an incongruous collection of mathematical terms, animal names, and insults, including cuarteron (three-quarters Spanish, one-quarter African, from the Spanish cuarto or quarter), lobo (wolf), zambo (knock-kneed), jarocho (rude, brusque), chamiso (half-burnt log), albarazado (black streaked with red, leprous), gíbaro (Caribbean Indians known for shrinking heads), and cuatralbo (animal with four white legs). Such a system illustrated both their interest in biological precision and the supposed continuity between phenotype and moral character (Montalvo and Codina 2001). And in a “final act of desperation,” to borrow Aguirre Beltrán’s words (1992:130), the authorities resorted to derogatory phrases such as torna atrás (throw back), ahí te estás (there you are), and no te entiendo (I don’t understand you), a belated recognition of the enormity or the absurdity of the whole enterprise. Therefore, if ethnic labels are one part science or taxonomy, they are certainly also one part insult or innuendo.

Starting with this insight, I will argue that ethnic categories of the Maya region, particularly Yucatán, are best understood as figures or tropes within a broader discourse, a regional rhetoric in which the mestizo or Yucateco serves as the master trope. While Yucatecan towns like Maxcanú, the site of my original fieldwork, are composed of several named groups—mayero, catrin, ts’ul, blanco—members of these groups are always also “mestizos.” In this sense, named groups are, perhaps, analogous to religious images like the Virgin of Guadalupe or the Virgin of Remedies. While the latter retain a unique history and hagiography, they are ultimately incarnations of the Virgin Mary and share in her importance. And while I confess to a latent structuralist impulse, an artifact of my interest in hierarchy, my goal is to understand
ethnicity as manifest in performance. After all, it is only by participating in specific folk performances (e.g., regional theatre, dance, poetry) that many Yucatecans become “mestizos” at all.

Here, special attention is given to the jarana or vaquería (cattle dance), a dance originating on the eighteenth-century corn-and-cattle hacienda that is thought to epitomize the unity of Maya and Hispanic culture and that has become an essential feature of political events and tourist venues as well as the village fiesta. While, in theory, the jarana is open to all residents, in practice it has become a spectacle in which well-to-do Yucatecans don an elegant version of the traditional folk costume and publicly re-present themselves as mestizos legítimos (cultivated or legitimate mestizos), the first among equals. In this way, the article demonstrates how invidious distinctions between groups persist within a regionalist ideology or rhetoric that emphasizes common heritage and equality (Brandes 1990).6

The Many Meanings of Mestizo: Modeling Ethnic Relations from the Ground Up

Mestizos and the World of Work

In ethnographic accounts of Yucatán (Hansen and Bastarrachea 1984; Press 1975; Redfield 1941; Thompson 1974; Villa Rojas 1987), the term “mestizo/a” is most commonly employed in its most restrictive sense—that is, as a way of denoting individuals who wear the traditional folk costume, or what little remains of it. In this instance, however, dress is less an indication of one’s fealty to regional tradition than a way of signifying work or occupational differences: farming versus manufacture, outdoor versus indoor employment, and so on.7 Indeed, as Irwin Press notes in Tradition and Adaptation (1975), mestizos often point to the impossibility of using catrin attire (city clothes) for work in the fields; such clothing—and presumably the people who wear it—are simply too delicate. Similarly, farm workers in Maxcanú say that they dress as mestizos because they work in the campo (fields), although, given the tendency of parents to dress and socialize a certain proportion of their children as mestizos in order to tie them to the homestead, it might be more accurate to say that they work in the campo because they wear mestizo clothing.8

Moreover, because agricultural work is generally considered the defining feature of Indian-ness, mestizo, in this sense of the term, is actually a euphemism for the forbidden indio as well as a synonym of mayero, a name that points to the close association of ethnicity and work. By affixing the Spanish -ero to the nominative Maya, an ethnic label is effectively transformed into an occupational category similar in form to the Spanish carpintero (carpenter) or mesero (waiter).9

Mestizos and Race

The term mestizo is also understood in a more inclusive sense in which the opposition noted above (e.g., mestizo/catrin) is resolved. This necessarily brings us to the
issue of race, since it is bodily images, notions of inherited traits or shared substance, that unify this dichotomy as well as distinguish this broader concept of mestizo from ts’ul or blanco (white) at a higher level of the social order.

While ethnographers since the early 1940s have attempted to minimize the importance of race, and, more specifically, the tendency to reduce culture or ethnicity to human biology, physical or anatomical differences do figure in local typologies, especially when the discussion turns to questions of health and illness, sexual orientation, or sexual prowess. Human physiognomy is also commonly noted in nicknames. Thus, residents of Maxcanú referred to a wealthy shop owner in the center of town as *mulix* (lit., mound) because of his kinky hair and affectionately applied the name *chino* (Chinese) to the commissar of the ejido (government farm) because of his straight, flaxen hair. Similarly, they addressed the municipal president’s personal chauffeur as *box pato* (black duck), due to his dark complexion. While the standard binomial invective is composed of the Maya term *box* (black) and a reference to one or another orifice (e.g., *box it, box pel*; black anus, black vagina), *boxita*, formed by adding the Spanish diminutive -*ita*, is often used to demonstrate affection (if rather paternalistically), like *morena* (brown) and *negra* (black) in the following popular verses:

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Boxita, tu tia y tu madre
me ponen tremenda cara;
no le hace, las meto en varas
y que otro perro me ladre
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Little black one, your aunt and mother
gave me terrible looks;
don’t worry, I caged them
as any other barking dog. (quoted in Menéndez Díaz 1986:80)
Por ti perdería la vida  
si me niegas tu querer  
y entonces negra querida  
no me volverás a ver

For you I would kill myself  
if you deny me your love  
and then my precious negress  
you shall not see me again. (author unknown; my translation)

Por eso cuando tu cantas  
mi dulce y bella morena  
el anima me levantas  
y se me olvidan mis penas

Therefore when you sing  
my pretty, sweet brown woman  
my spirit rises  
and I forget all my troubles. (author unknown; my translation)

Another interesting example of race consciousness is the belief surrounding the wah (lit., tortilla) or makal (lit., tuber), a birthmark that appears on certain infants and that is considered proof of their Maya ancestry. Indeed, according to Jesús Amaro Gamboa, the author of a popular peninsular “folk dictionary,” the arrival of a newborn produces an irrepressible desire in certain “aging hypocrites” to check for the infamous spot:

It is a . . . custom among old gossips . . . to visit women who have recently given birth, and with the pretext of admiring their infant’s beauty, they . . . discreetly observe the lumbar region . . . in search of the Mongolian spot . . . which is present among newborns of Indian ancestry; this spot . . . if it is indeed present produces a triumphal joy among the comadres, and, if absent, they announce it in front of the contented mother who, if not a cretin, will understand why the intrusive visitors have come. (1984:267; my translation)

And while the wah reportedly fades away by the time the unfortunate individual reaches adulthood, youth who have it often go to great lengths to conceal it.

The wah is also thought to be the outward sign of the Indian/mestizo’s inner essence (naturaleza) as well as a logical explanation for his “unseemly” comportment. Indeed, expressions like “Eduardo has retained his wah” or “Josúe must have a tremendous makal” are used to embarrass individuals who display their anger in public. In other words, bodily features taken as a set of symbols—a set deceptively close to nature itself—can be seen as the foundation upon which other cognitive or affective features rest. Just as nature, conceived of as el monte (the untamed forest), is thought to determine the kinds of clothes men must wear to work, the Maya mark of Cain points to an underlying conception of nature (in this case, biological substance) that accounts for the difference between angry, brutish mestizos and genteel, effeminate ts’ules, a category discussed below.
In fact, the use of the term *makal* might be seen as an attempt to relate racial differences or human taxa to differences occurring elsewhere in nature. As Amaro Gamboa notes in *El Uayeismo en la Cultura de Yucatán* (1984:267), there are actually two common varieties of makal; a small, light-skinned variety (*Xanthosoma Violaceum*) and a more voluminous, dark-skinned type (*Colocasia Antiquorum*) known in Maya as *makal box* (black makal).

Similar to the wah is the *sinik* (lit., ant), a Yucatec Maya term referring to red spots that are said to appear on the necks of Indians or mestizos when they get angry, thus revealing their true identity. Indeed, both the sinik and the wah point to a prevalent belief that the fine clothing worn by the catrin simply serves to disguise a more enduring, biologically rooted identity. As a popular Mexican expression states, “Aunque el mono se pone seda, mono se queda” (A monkey can dress in silk, but he’s still a monkey.) Or as Víctor Suárez plainly comments, the catrin is simply “a mestizo who abandons the traditional folk costume in order to wear European dress” (1979:167). In short, the catrin is not simply the mestizo’s counterpart but also a species of a more inclusive mestizo genus (see also Hervik 1999).

Taking this analysis one step further, it can be argued that the catrin is also a feminine or feminized mestizo. Here, it is important to note that Yucatecans generally draw a distinction between an individual who adopts Western dress as a young child—which is less problematic—and one who embraces the style as an adult by referring to the latter as a *catrin forzado*, a phrase translated as “forced” or even “raped” catrin. In other words, by Westernizing his attire and demeanor, a Yucatecan moves along a gender continuum towards ts’ul—a sophisticated individual, but one who is prone to hair loss, is considered effeminate or gay, and seems to lack stamina.11 Indeed, as Redfield commented a half a century ago, “The Indian can work, work, work, eat only a little *atole* and some dried tortillas, and endure the heat . . . but ‘the blood of the dzul is weak’” (1964:157).

**Politics, Parody, and El Catrín**

While ethnographers have tended to emphasize the opposition between mestizo and catrin, they frequently overlook or fail to comment on the important distinction between the *catrin simple* (average catrin) and ts’ul (the gentleman). In part, this can be attributed to the fact that Yucatecans with money and a little common sense are seldom found in the places that anthropologists and folklorists perennially inhabit. The oversight, however, also reflects a lack of curiosity about the origin and meaning of key terms, a failure, in short, to do the necessary historical spadework.

As noted above, the term *catrin* is applied to individuals who compare favorably with others mestizos in terms of education, occupation, and dress; however, the term has other, negative connotations that reflect a bitter history of class struggle. As several authors have noted (Fallow 1997; Joseph 1982; Loewe 1995), education and agrarian reform were integral and equally important aspects of the political transformation attempted by the Cárdenas administration in Yucatán in the late 1930s. By recruiting the sons and daughters of Maya agriculturists to serve as rural educators, the Cárdenas administration not only began to break down occupa-
tional and class barriers but also developed an effective cadre organization that could carry out the political objectives of the administration. Rural educators were expected to petition the Department of Agriculture for ejido lands on behalf of their communities and to aid in the diffusion of Cárdenist political culture through drama and art. 12

Rural teachers were also encouraged to wear contemporary garb (e.g., leather shoes, colored slacks) as part of a deliberate attempt to subvert established ethnic/class codes. Consequently, poor mestizos dressed in city clothes began to appear in towns and villages where even some of the wealthiest merchants still spoke Maya and wore the traditional folk costume, a situation that all but insured biting insults—“dandy,” “fop,” “catrin”—from more conservative Yucatecans.

In fact, while Redfield (1941:64) notes that this unusual moniker was just beginning to grace the lips of Dzitas residents during his stay on the peninsula, 13 he either failed to mention or was unaware that the term actually comes from a satirical novel entitled Don Catrin de la Fachenda (The pretentious Don Catrin) by José Joaquin Fernández de Lizardi, a humorist and pamphleteer who lived in Mexico City in the early 1800s. 14

In Fernández de Lizardi’s novel, the protagonist, Don Catrin, comes from a family of very modest means. Consequently, Don Catrin’s father assumes that his son will be groomed for an honest trade such as carpentry or tailoring; however, the mother, who claims to have the “blood of Poncos, Tagles, Pintas, and Velascos” in her veins (Spell 1931:74), will hear nothing of it and insists that her son be sent to a good preparatory school. Don Catrin attempts to follow the course set by his mother but only succeeds in acquiring an unhealthy disdain for honest labor. Unable to complete the work required for a professional degree, and unwilling to serve anyone “unless it was the king himself” (1931:75), he moves from one ill-reputed occupation to another. Beginning as an attendant in a bordello, he works briefly as an actor and, finally, ends up as a gambler’s assistant.

After Don Catrin goes broke, his friends abandon him. This surprises him, because he still has stylish clothes, and in his view it’s the clothes that make the man:

I was simply floating in the air—without education in military matters, business, farming, the arts or anything worthwhile, just a clean and simple citizen [paisano mondo y lirondo],—when my old comrades “the officials” turned their backs on me. None of them showed me the least respect; they even refused to greet me. Perhaps it was because I was broke. In those days my clothing was not indecent, because with the money I earned from selling my uniform, I purchased a blue shirt with tails [frapecillo] at the Chinese market [Parían], a top hat, a pair of nice boots, a watch for twenty reales, a stylish chain for six pesos, a little cane, and a handkerchief. (Fernández de Lizardi 1944:45; my translation, with help from Rosa Vozzo)

In short, the use of the term catrin to denigrate rural educators and other supposedly pretentious Yucatecans was not simply a rhetorical strike against the Cárdenas administration but rather an ardent attempt to reinforce distinctions within the upper tier of Yucatecan society, a boundary marked by the distinction between gente de
vestido (individuals who wore European dress) and mestizos who didn’t or hadn’t until then.15

A similar attempt to defend ethnic and class boundaries can be seen in contemporary jokes about undiscerning Mayas or mestizos who attempt to raise their stature by translating Maya surnames such as Ek (star) into the Spanish equivalent, Estrella. Because the Spanish equivalent is often a common noun rather than a recognizable Spanish surname, nobody is fooled. The effort, as the jokester notes, simply draws attention to the ignorance and vanity of the individual in question. The jokester also invariably adds that nobody named Pech, a common Maya surname, ever assumes the translated Spanish name Garrapata (tick or bug), since that would just compound his shame. Then there is the tale of Juan Mierda (Juan Excrement), a narrative I’ve heard several times but have never actually recorded. Juan Mierda, as the story goes, decides to change his unusual name and goes to the civil registry or to court, where he engages in the following conversation:

Juan: I’ve come here to change my name.
Judge: So you have. And what is you name?
Juan: Juan Mierda, your honor.
Judge: Oh I see. Well, have you thought about a new name?
Juan: Yes, I’d like to change my name to José.

Ts’ul: A Gentleman and a Devil

Continuing up the social ladder we arrive at ts’ul, alternately defined as “gentlemen,” “foreigner,” “white person,” and “Satan.” While ts’ul stands at the acme of the social order, it is by no means clear who, aside from anthropologists or visiting government functionaries, merits this designation in rural communities. It is a social category that currently has few if any members in Maxcanú. In fact, one way to generate an interesting barroom debate is to ask a group of drunken schoolteachers whether the son of a former hacienda owner should be considered a ts’ul.

During my initial stay in Yucatán, I was privy to two such debates, and in both instances the arguments centered on the status of Don Eladio Téllez y García (a pseudonym). Don Eladio was a friendly man in his early sixties who spent a good part of the day reading the newspaper and sipping whiskey in his matrimonial-size hammock. However, he also found time to tutor high school students in French and Latin, teach ballet and folk dance (the jarana), handle government correspondence for illiterate farm workers, and talk with ethnographers sent his way. He was also quite proud of his ability to speak Maya, something the children of hacienda owners commonly know and, thus, a mark of distinction, although a rather ironic one given the general prejudice toward indigenous Maya speakers.

Eladio had no children of his own but was the padrino (baptismal godfather) of more than eighty children. This feat was especially impressive because he had, reportedly, never set foot in the local church. Not only was Eladio a die-hard empiricist who believed only what he saw with his own two eyes, but he also considered the parish priest a hypocrite for railing against sin in the pulpit while fathering illegitimate
children on the side. Indeed, Eladio often bragged that the only church he attended was the *Capilla Seistina* (Sixteenth Street Church), his way of referring to a cantina on Sixteenth Street and a play on the Spanish name for the Sistine Chapel (*Capilla Sistina*).

Eladio was comfortably retired in the home his parents had owned, a heavy cement structure that sat across from the church, about a hundred yards off the main square. At one time, according to Eladio, the building covered almost an entire city block; however, as time passed and Eladio’s siblings began to settle in Mérida, the house was partitioned into several separate apartments and rented to newcomers or transients. The interior of Don Eladio’s apartment was simply yet tastefully decorated with curios from different parts of the world and a few family heirlooms. The most important item in Eladio’s house, however, was an old album that sat open on a wooden coffee table and contained photos of actors, dancers, and filmmakers he had met in Mexico City. Although Eladio originally went to Mexico City to study medicine, he dropped out after one year and began to dance with the *Ballet Folklórico*, a vocation that took him to Europe and the United States. As a result of his travels, Eladio learned a little Italian, a touch of English, and even managed to get a minor role in a film.

After an injury ended Eladio’s dancing career, he returned to Maxcanú but continued to be something of a showman, displaying articles and affectations he picked up in Mexico City. To convey the image of a cultivated man, or simply to ruffle the feathers of his compatriots a bit, Eladio would appear in public with a stylish top hat and a cane or address people in Italian. And while most people accepted Eladio as a walking anachronism—a “fossil,” as one teacher blithely put it—others were clearly bothered by what they considered an attempt to put on airs. For them, even his good posture, the telltale sign of a former ballet dancer, appeared arrogant and exaggerated.

Don Eladio was an ebullient, talkative person who had an opinion on practically everything, but when it came to discussing his family, he was more selective. He was quite comfortable talking about his mother, the daughter of a refined Campeche family. On several occasions, in fact, he pulled out pictures of her posing in an elegant gown and recalled her stern, forceful manner. Because of her insistence on proper etiquette, especially around the dinner table, Eladio and his siblings learned the meaning of manners at an early age. Eladio, however, was reluctant to talk about his father. Although Don Sebastián had apparently made a small fortune by purchasing sisal plantations and putting them to productive use in the 1930s, he was not a cultivated person. By all accounts, Eladio’s mother had married below her station, and it was this issue that raised questions about her son’s place in society.

The fact that Don Eladio still resided in Maxcanú also undermined his standing. As in Europe (Badone 1987), place, ethnicity, and class are intimately related in Yucatán, and the ts’ul has always been defined more by his absence than by his presence. As Alberto García Canton notes in his nostalgic *Memorias de un ex-hacendado henequenero* (Memories of a former henequén hacienda owner), only during the summer months, when family reunions were held, did the *hacendado* and his family spend much time on their rural estate (1965:10).
In short, then, if Don Eladio was considered by many to be Maxcanú’s last ts’ul, it was not based on his ability to speak proper Spanish or his use of a particular garment, things that define the ordinary catrin. Nor was it a question of wealth. Though wealthy enough to live off the interest from his savings account and a rental property or two, he had been surpassed long ago by the town’s mestizo merchants, men who, in Eladio’s view, had sullied their reputations by bootlegging whiskey. Rather, it was a question of abolengo (lineage) and his ability, for better or worse, to maintain the image of a knowledgeable, well-bred gentleman. In other words, while all ts’ules are by definition catrins insofar as they wear Western attire, speak good Spanish, and purchase prestige items in the market, not all catrins are ts’ules.

The Legitimate Mestizo

At the highest level of society, however, even the intractable opposition between catrin and ts’ul is reconciled, this time by a conception of mestizo that emphasizes the cultural unity of all Yucatecans regardless of ethnicity, status, or class. Taken in this final sense, the mestizo is the central figure in the highly celebrated cultura regional mestiza.

When Yucatecans speak of regional mestizo culture, they refer to two separate but related types of practice. On the one hand, regional culture is thought of as a body of custom, gesture, and disposition that not only unifies the peninsula but also sets Yucatecans apart from residents of central Mexico, or waches, as they are better known. Notwithstanding the criticism of Don Eladio’s exaggerated posture, Maxcanú residents insist there is a distinctly Yucatecan gait that is infinitely more graceful than the central Mexican stride. When asked to account for this difference, one primary school teacher explained that Yucatecos, including a good number of ts’ules, practice the hetsmek’, a Maya “baptismal” ritual in which a newborn child is placed on the hip of a godparent of the same sex and is carried nine times around a table arrayed with gender-appropriate objects. Straddling the godparent’s broad hip, I was assured, opens the newborn’s young legs so that he or she can walk properly.

Similarly, despite the middle-class penchant for ridiculing the Spanish syntax of poor peasants (e.g., individuals who speak Yucatec Maya as a first language), educated Yucatecans proudly note the distinctiveness of peninsular Spanish that results from neologism, semantic transposition, and the hybridization of Spanish and Mayan forms.

One oft-cited example, drawn from popular writings of Alfredo Barrera Vásquez (1980b) or Víctor Suárez (1979:176), is the verb apesgar, meaning to “hold down” or “put pressure on an object.” While apesgar has all the morphological features of a regular Spanish verb, it is unique to Yucatán, and according to the Diccionario Maya Cordemex, it is thought to derive from a homophony between the root of the Spanish verb pesar (to weigh) and the Yucatec Maya pet’ah (to hold down with one’s hand) (Barrera Vásquez 1980a). In short, Yucatecans tend to view the regional vernacular as both more expressive and more melodic than the Spanish spoken in central Mexico.

Regional culture, however, also refers to a set of standardized performances that both symbolize and articulate the unity of peninsular residents. They are perfor-
manances, moreover, that frequently receive government sponsorship or support and that are rapidly becoming institutionalized. Here, I include such things as teatro costumbrista (popular theatre), certain types of handicraft production, and poetic verses that artfully combine Yucatec Maya and Spanish.18

For example, by including well-known Maya phrases in lyrical Spanish sonnets, Yucatecan writers illustrate the mestizo character of peninsular speech as they transform a widely disseminated poetic genre into a more popular, regional form of expression. The poetic fragment reprinted below—with Maya phrases enclosed in quotation marks—is but one of several pieces published in Noticias, a regional newspaper. Needless to say, the sonnet also depicts Maya speakers as vulgar individuals, an example of how the valorization of mestizaje in form is paired with an insulting view of indigenous people in content.

Me llamo Tiburcio Euan
Pero me dicen “El Xix”
porque de catorce hermanos
yo vine a ser “el dziriz.”

Crecí como un “Xlucuncan”
flaco, feo, un “malix”
tomando “choco zacan”
y comiendo “pac,” “kut bi”

My name is Tiburcio Euan
but they call me “residue”
because of fourteen siblings
I was the last one through.

I grew like a “Xlucuncan”
skinny, ugly, a mutt
drinking hot corn gruel
and eating ground chiles (Vasquez López 1987; my translation)

An even more derogatory example of this poetic form is the infamous Purusxon Kawich (Fatso Cauich). Maya place names and substantives have been set in italics.

Purusxon Kawich
nacido en Tähmek
un pobre winik
con cara de pek.

Cuando era dz’iriz
su papa Don Sos
lo dejó k’olis
de tanto wask’op.

Ya grande purux,
quiso hacerle mek
a la Linda Xpet
de la hacienda Xtu’ul.
“Ay no!” dijó Xpet
No estoy tan poch
para que un werek
venga hacerme loch.

Si estás tan poch
de hacerle alguien hich
vete a tu wotoch
y abraza a tu chich.

Fatso Cauich
born in Tahmek
a poor Indian
with the face of a dog.

When just a child
his father Don Sos
left him bald
from so many head swipes.

Now grown, the fat lunkhead
wanted to embrace
the beautiful Xpet
from the hacienda Xt’u’ul.

“Oh no!” said Xpet
I am not so vulgar
that a gross Indian
will come hug me [have sex with me].

If you’re so forward
to get someone pregnant
go to your house
and make love to your grandmother. (quoted in Bartolomé 1988:311; my translation)

However, the crown jewel of regional culture is the jarana, a dance that was popular among Yucatán’s creole population in late colonial times and is performed throughout the peninsula today. Originally part of the vaquería (cattle fiesta), a popular celebration held on corn-and-cattle haciendas following the annual cattle branding, the jarana has become an emblem of regional identity and is seen at political assemblies and tourist venues, as well as at fiestas held in honor of patron saints.

In Yucatán, the jarana has two common variants: a slow waltz choreographed in 3/4 time similar to the Spanish Jota Argonesa and a livelier dance in 6/8 time that derives from the fandango of Andalucía (Pérez Sabido 1983). However, despite the many similarities between the Spanish and American forms, Yucatecan writers are quick to point out that the jarana contains several aboriginal traits that distinguish it from the Spanish Jota, a not-so-subtle reminder of the nationalist or regionalist underpinnings of Mexican folklore (Brandes 1998; De Los Reyes 2006).19
For example, the musical accompaniment, appropriately known as *sones mestizos* (mestizo songs), often involve indigenous instruments like the *güiro* (an instrument made of corrugated wood) that give the jarana a more percussive flavor. In fact, according to Pérez Sabido (1983), none of the instruments that originally accompanied the fandango—guitar, violin, castanets, and cymbals—are still used by *jaranero* musicians. Similarly, Maya influence, particularly the indigenous love of wildlife, is revealed in the names and lyrics of the more popular jaranas. Among Yucatán’s best-known jaranas, one finds titles such as “El Ch’om” (The vulture), “El Xulab” (The ant), and “La Tsutsuy” (The wild dove), names that, incidentally, mix Spanish articles with Yucatec Maya nouns (Luna Kan, Hoyos Villanueva, and Echánove Trujillo 1977:779).

The originality or “regionality” of the jarana is also noted in the *suertes* (novelties), neither Mayan nor Spanish, that have grown up alongside it—embellishments such as waltzing with objects balanced precariously on one’s head or dancing atop a narrow wooden box used to measure maize (*almud*). These tricks not only distinguish the jarana from the jota and highlight the abilities of more talented dancers, but they also are the subject of numerous anecdotes that emphasize the color and creativity, not to mention the drinking prowess, of famous Yucatecan performers (Pérez Sabido 1983).

Standard female attire for the jarana is an elegant version of the mestizo folk costume. Female dancers dress in a resplendent *terno* (lit., three) that, thanks to a cloth overlay extending from the waist to the knee, contains three rows of brightly colored embroidery. To make the costume even more elegant, the dancer wears a decorative slip (*justán*) with a lace border that hangs at ankle length just below the hem. The third element of the outfit is a silk scarf (*rebozo*) called the Santa María that came into vogue in the late nineteenth century and that has since served to distinguish wealthy mestizas from poor ones. The dancer’s status is also conspicuously displayed through the medallions and gold chains she wears around her neck. Customarily these include a rosary made of red coral beads, gold filigree, one or more gold coins, and a gold medallion embossed with the image of the Virgin of Guadalupe.

Male attire is equally elegant but less complicated and colorful. Typically, male dancers will appear in a *filipina*, a long-sleeved, white cotton shirt with a round collar. The *filipina* may have gold buttons connected to one another by a thin gold chain that runs down the inside of the garment. In keeping with tradition, the dancer’s pants are white and lack a crease; however, unlike the crude, cotton pants formerly worn by peasants and field hands, those used for the jarana are made of *dril*, a tightly woven fabric. Standard footwear is the *alpargata*, a distinctive white sandal with a decorative leather band that crosses the toes, an elevated heel, and a thick sole made up of several layers of leather (*tiras*). In the past, “social standing” could be measured quite literally by counting the number of *tiras* a dancer could legitimately wear given his family’s background or reputation. Today, however, elevated sandals connote femininity or homosexuality and have been abandoned for the most part. The last element in the outfit is a white, narrow-brimmed Panama hat made from *jipi*, a soft, flexible fiber that provides a vivid contrast to the coarse straw hats worn by peasants and farm workers.

It is this refined, meticulously dressed individual whom Maxcanú residents have
in mind when they speak of the mestizo legítimo or legitimate mestizo. Since the term legítimo is generally understood as “pure” or “unadulterated”—as in legítimo Maya, a phrase referring to the supposedly uncontaminated spoken Maya of times past—the idea of a “mestizo legítimo” at first appears to be a contradiction in terms, namely an “unmixed mixture.” The phrase appears even more ironic when one considers that for older residents, men who experienced the epoch of slavery in person (1880–1914) or through stories they heard as children, a mestizo is often thought of as the bastard child of a hacienda owner and his Indian concubine, the epitome of scandal and illegitimacy (Press 1975).

Contradictory propositions, however, have a way of revealing interesting secrets, and the unspoken truth in this case is that the jarana dancer par excellence is not a mestizo at all—at least not according to any of the previous definitions—but a ts’ul. Ts’ul, who in every other instance stands apart from and above the society of mestizos, is ritually reintegrated through the jarana. Situated in the hallowed space of an open-air dance floor, the ts’ul is no longer a secluded individual but the primus inter pares, the first among “half-breeds.” In short, once the jarana is understood as a forum in which ts’ul and a few well-heeled catrins gain legitimacy by becoming mestizos, the concept of a “mestizo legítimo” begins to make more sense.

Indeed, from John L. Stephens’s account of the Dance of the Mestizas, a jarana he observed in Ticul in 1842, it is clear that this colorful pageant has served as a Yucatecan Saturnalia for more than 150 years:

![Image](image-url)
El báyle [sic] de las Mestizas was what might be called a fancy ball, in which the señoritas of the village appeared as las Mestizas or in the costume of Mestiza women: loose white frock with red worked border round the neck and skirt, a man’s black hat, a blue scarf around the shoulder, gold necklace and bracelets. . . .

To sustain the fancy character, the only dance was that of the toros [toritos, little balls]. A vaquero [cowboy] stood up, and each Mestiza was called out in order. This dance, as we had seen it among the Indians, was extremely uninteresting and required a movement of the body, a fling of the arms, and a snapping of the fingers, which were at least inelegant; but with las Mestizas of Ticul it was all graceful and pleasing, and there was something winning in the snapping of the fingers. . . . This over, all dispersed to prepare for the báyle de dia, or ball by daylight. . . . At length a group was seen crossing the plaza: a vaquero escorting a Mestiza to the ball, holding over her head a red silk umbrella to protect her from the scorching rays of the sun; then an old lady and gentleman, children, servants, a complete family group, the females all in white with bright-colored scarves and shawls. The place was open to all who chose to enter, and the floor was covered with Indian women and children, and real Mestizos, looking on good-humouredly at this personification of themselves and their ways. (1963, 2:63–5; emphasis added)

Noting that the dance was intended to provide a vivid picture of hacienda life, Stephens goes on to describe the behavior of two fiscales (hacienda foremen) dressed in filthy white shirts, crude cotton drawers, ridiculously oversized sombreros, and “long locks of horse hair hanging behind their ear” (1963:65). They were the masters of the dance and demonstrated their authority by forcibly seating cowboys on the floor and threatening to whip the “mestizas.” At the least provocation, the foremen would expel male dancers from the hall and steal their partners or make idle males sing a vaquería (four line stanza) in “alternate lines of Maya and Castilian” (1963:69).

At noon the Dance of the Mestizas ended with a hearty meal of tortillas, beans, eggs, and meat, but much to Stephens’s chagrin there were neither forks nor knives. Finally, to make sure the meaning of the event did not escape their distinguished guest, one of the fiscales pulled the intrepid visitor’s hat down over his eyes when he attempted to thank a “mestiza” for serving him and informed him that there was no need for compliments since “we [are] all Indians together” (1963:69).

If the attorney cum ethnographer missed something of importance, it is probably the numerous gender inversions that occur in the vaquería, since Stephens mentions that the mestiza’s “black hat was repulsive” (1963:69) but avoids further comment about this typically male piece of apparel. In contemporary jaranas women are thought to have greater stamina than their male counterparts and will accept new partners as the vaqueros grow weary and retire to the sidelines. In fact, these gala performances are often extravagant dance contests whose competitive character increases as the night progresses. Since there is no conventional end point, couples only vacate the dance floor because of boredom or exhaustion. As long as there are dancers present, custom dictates that the band must continue playing. When only two couples remain, the male onlookers line up behind their favorite female contender and place their sombreros
on her head, offering encouragement in the form of a symbolic coronation. When the dance is finished, the victor is honored with a silk sash and small gifts and may be referred to as “t’ok xich’,” a Maya phrase meaning “exploding tendons” (Luna Kan, Hoyos Villanueva, and Echánove Trujillo 1977:789).

A similar inversion occurs in “Toritos” (Little Bulls), which, according to Stephens’s account, was the only piece performed in Ticul in 1842. In this dance, performed in 6/8 time, the vaquero removes a large, red handkerchief from his hip pocket and attempts to parry the charge of the female “bull” as he dances. The “bull,” on the other hand, makes no pretense at dancing, her only objective is to knock the toreador down and penetrate him, yet another example of the transformation of ts’ul into a feminine or feminized mestizo.

Ultimately, though, the importance of the jarana as a token of regional unity or regional politics is revealed not by what happened 160 years ago but through the actions of the state government over the last two decades. Currently the jarana is still the opening gambit of the traditional four-day village fiesta; however, there is an ever-present fear that the next fiesta organizer will replace it with a more popular dance (e.g., rock, salsa, or tropical music) in order to ensure a healthy return on his investment. Suspicions of this sort are, apparently, not unwarranted given the recent tendency of fiesta organizers to economize on the jarana by hiring little-known bands or charging steep admission fees. Therefore, while the jarana is a ubiquitous feature of regional politics and can be found at campaign speeches, public dedications, official commemorations, gubernatorial addresses, and dozens of tourist venues, the dance is threatened with extinction in the one place it counts most, the rural town or village. This threat, not surprisingly, has led to several attempts by the state government to preserve or revitalize the event, a process referred to as rescaté cultural (cultural rescue).

One of the more notable attempts at revitalizing the jarana was the Vaquería de Rescate Cultural held in Maxcanú on April 16, 1983, a carefully scripted and highly publicized event organized by a prominent resident and then minister of cultural affairs for the state of Yucatán. Unlike most pre-dance advertisements, which typically sport the logo of the beer company that underwrites expenses, posters announcing the 1983 event promised “good clean fun in remembrance of times past” and specifically prohibited the sale or consumption of alcoholic beverages. Pre-dance publicity also contained a series of rules that participants should follow. Women were expected to wear a terno or a huipil, the regional folk dress described above. Men were to wear a filipina or a guayabera (a short-sleeved white shirt with ribbing), and all participants were admonished to be punctual.

In a rather ironic break with custom, not to mention the normal rhythm of rural life, the promotional literature for Maxcanú’s first state-sponsored jarana listed the order and precise starting time of each event in the “traditional” opening ceremony. Residents of the town’s four main barrios would be summoned by the explosion of fireworks at 8:00 p.m. They were to arrive at the center of town by 8:20 p.m. with ribbons, canes, and a decorated pig’s head to request permission to enter the municipal building. At 8:25 p.m. the band was to play “La Angaripola,” the musical piece used to signal dancers that they can enter the dance floor, and at 8:30 p.m. the dance would
begin with “Aires Yucatecos” (Yucatecan airs). Finally, the dance was scheduled to end promptly at 12:00 p.m. with “Toritos,” the musical finale.

The pre-dance publicity was also much more didactic than normal. Unlike most advertisements, which simply contain the date, the name of the band, and a few adjectives describing the festive atmosphere one can expect at the event, promoters for the Vaquería de Rescate Cultural produced a thirty-inch flyer containing a detailed description of pre-Columbian dance as well as an account of the unique, antimodern character of the jarana Yucateca: “what is certain . . . is that it is executed in a unique way, with artistry, with its own unique style that varies according to region, [and] in which every individual places his own unique, ancestral experience . . . in front of others . . . a condition that must not be lost or confused with modern rhythms or styles that are not characteristic of this performance” (my translation).

Finally, underscoring the political character of the event, special invitations were sent to the constitutional governor of Yucatán, Alpuche Pinzón, the first lady, a dozen prominent state politicians, and the municipal presidents of fifteen cities and towns. Although dance organizers attempted to achieve the broadest possible participation, the requirement that all participants wear the regional costume was publicly announced and rigorously enforced.

Conclusion

At this point it is worth emphasizing that the point of this article is not to develop a model of ethnic relations that stands apart from other aspects of social life, a neutral, colorless representation whose “only job is . . . to become the vehicle of a meaning
conceived quite independently of itself” (Eagleton 1983:136). On the contrary, my aim is to highlight the interconnectedness of ethnicity, culture, and politics in one remote corner of the republic, to analyze, as it were, an “ethnic rhetoric” or ideology that relies heavily on euphemism, parody, insult, and innuendo.

Despite many excellent studies, the ethnography of Yucatán sorely lacks a sense of irony. Fernández de Lizardi’s fictional Don Catrin de la Fachenda—used to great effect by Yucatán’s upper class—has been hypostatized by Redfield, quantified by Thompson, and used as a taxonomic category by many anthropologists who show no awareness of the conservative parody embedded in this term. Equally conservative in its effect is the jarana, a public spectacle that links the nostalgia that residents feel for the Yucatán of their youth and their interest in conserving cultural traditions to the preservation of a political order rooted in ethnic and racial difference. Above all, the jarana is an attempt to measure the present in terms of the past. Amidst all the discussion of mixed codes, histrionic social inversions, and elegant costumes, it is important to remember that Maxcanú residents feel that by preserving the jarana or vaquería they are preserving a way of life, a moral order that is threatened not only by economic and political transformations but also by aggressive, well-financed evangelical groups, foreign companies, and new and unusual forms of music. Within this milieu the mestizo legítimo is a symbol of virtue, an incorruptible figure whose elegance and simplicity recall a more honorable past. He is a romantic figure who treats women with respect and who has the decency and “preparation” to place a handkerchief between his sweaty palm and the shoulder of his female consort.21

Nor is the model outlined above intended to be the final word on ethnic relations in Yucatán. While I believe that it helps to illustrate the dominant (e.g., nationalist) conception of ethnic relations, it is not a unique or uncontested view of things ethnic. However effective the rhetoric of mestizaje is in creating unity out of difference, it is an ethnic discourse that has begun to fray around the edges as indigenous community leaders reassert their identity as Maya speakers. Not only do many young teachers from rural areas bristle at the suggestion that they are mestizos or catrins, but the rough outline of an alternative political current rooted in Maya identity can be seen in campaigns to promote Maya literacy and to make Maya an official language of government.22 While it is true that many Maya speakers do not readily identify themselves as Mayas, the situation in Yucatán is, perhaps, not unlike that of Guatemala a generation ago. “Twenty years ago,” writes Diane Nelson, “the only Maya in Guatemala were on thousand-year-old glyphs and in tourism literature. Until about the mid-1980s the word Maya was primarily used in archaeological discourses to refer to the builders of Tikal... Maya was not used popularly, or by those self-identifying, to refer to existing indigenous people” (1999:6). However, in the wake of the quincentennial and the protests against it, there has been a dramatic increase in identity politics in Guatemala and the willingness of people to think of themselves as Maya, rather than simply as residents of a particular town or as speakers of a particular linguistic group.

Finally, it is also important to remember that through their writings and representations—and, perhaps, most notably, their tendency to deconstruct other people’s identities and traditions—anthropologists and folklorists are very much a part of the
identity politics that they describe. As Charles Hale has noted in the case of Guatemala, no one is quite as enthusiastic about the idea that indigenous dress was created by the Spaniards or that the “term Maya is a recent invention” (1999:309) as the ladinos of Chimaltenango. And in Yucatan, there is probably no one quite as enthusiastic about cultura regional mestiza as the state government.

Notes

Special thanks go to my mother, Bess Loewe, for her valuable editorial assistance, and to Rosa Vozzo of the Department of Foreign Languages at Mississippi State University, for help with some of the Spanish translations.

1. A similar argument can be found in an earlier issue of JAF, where Charles Hale calls for a “militant particularism” that focuses attention on “pointed political questions about . . . identity that reach well beyond their allegedly ‘hybrid’ and ‘essentialist’ characters” and asks questions about the agents who deploy such tropes, their position in the political order, and their effects (1999:313).

2. I would simply add that my own reluctance to self-identify (as a Jew) during an early phase of fieldwork in Yucatán was based on the unflattering comparisons that have been made over several hundred years between my ethnic group and devils, Moors, monkeys, and hypocritical priests.


4. Restall notes that the term Maya itself was sometimes used in a demeaning fashion. “One usage in this context was by nobles in reference to commoners, with the term seemingly somewhat derogatory. Thus, when applied to Mayas of another region, the term sometimes implied that such people were of lesser status, although at other times the reference seems neutral” (2004:68–9).

5. The importance of the “mestizo” as a trope in Mexican nationalist discourse can be seen in the works of anthropologists like Manuel Gamio (1916) and other writers such as José Vasconcelos (1966) and Andrés Molina Enríquez (1978). As Leopoldo Zea (1974) notes, intellectual life during the Porfiriato (1877–1910) was dominated by the conservative sociology of Comte and Spencer; however, in the work of Andrés Molina Enríquez (1978), Social Darwinism provided the theoretical armature for a resurgent nationalism that placed the mestizo at the cupola of Mexican history. Drawing on the ideas of Ernst Haeckel, who suggested that hybrid species had greater vitality than either of the strains that produced them, Molina Enríquez concluded that the mestizo population would eventually assume political control over Mexican society. In fact, the mestizo was considered the only group capable of uniting Mexico. While lack of a common language prevented Indians from unifying the nation, Mexicans of European ancestry were considered unfit because of their slavish addiction to foreign fashion and their lack of patriotism.


7. In the case of men, the difference between mestizos and catrins is quite subtle; however, one can often judge their standing by the type of clothing their wives wear. It is also important to note that with the advent of mass marketing even the boundary markers between groups have become commoditized. A generation ago the identification of a teenager as a mestizo or a catrin was based on the footwear he used, sandals being the last remnant of the traditional folk costume. Today, identity is determined by the brand name of tennis shoes he wears. To become a catrin, or to encatrinar, a teenager will return from a lengthy stay in Mérida with a pair of Adidas tennis shoes, a pair of reflecting sunglasses, and an expensive T-shirt with an English phrase emblazoned on it.

8. In some cases one finds rather astounding differences between brothers separated by only a few years. Manuel, one of my best informants, grew up in a household where Yucatec Maya was used almost exclusively. By the time I met him, he had been granted the right to work in the ejido near Maxcanú. It was, thus, expected that he would remain near his parents’ home and take care of them in their old age. In contrast, Manuel’s brother, his junior by just four years, was discouraged from speaking Maya either in public or private. He was expected to pursue an education, learn to speak Spanish fluently, and even-
ually move to Mérida. Similar distinctions are made among the daughters in families that make at least part of their income from farm work. In the Rodríguez family, for example, the three older daughters were raised as mestizas (e.g., dressed in the folk costume) while the younger ones were raised as cri-nas.

9. While, according to Fischer and Hendrickson, the term “indio” is sometimes used by Guatemalan intellectuals as a way of defusing “the destructive power of the term as some African-Americans use ‘nigger’ in English” (2003:26), I have not noted this usage in Yucatán. Other derogatory references to Indians or Mayas include: *malix*, a Yucatec Maya term defined as “dog without a pedigree” (Barrera Vásquez 1980a); and *huaro*, presumably from the Spanish *huir* (to flee or escape), and thus a possible reference to Indians who fled into the forest during the Caste War of Yucatán.

10. For example, in an article published in *América Indígena*, Sol Tax criticized his contemporaries—ethnographers Morris Siegal and John Gillin—for suggesting that racial difference was an important aspect of social stratification in Guatemala; he argued that an Indian with the requisite skills would have little difficulty assuming a position of authority in his own society. “It may be said with confidence, therefore, that essentially the difference between Ladino and Indian in Guatemala is not thought of as biological difference. . . . Once it is clearly understood that the difference between an Indian and a Ladino is not biological, but cultural, it need not seem strange that one of two brothers can be Indian and the other, perhaps, living in the same town, a Ladino” (1942:46).

11. After explaining that Don Pedro’s habit of standing on the front stoop and patting his bald spot was actually a way of emphasizing his Hispanic heritage—Mayas generally don’t go bald—Don Felipe, Maxcanú’s most openly gay male, added that there weren’t many kolis (bald men) who weren’t also k’uruch (gay; lit., cockroach; Barrera Vásquez 1980a).

12. One example of Cardenist political culture is the drama *Justicia Proletaria*. Written by Santiago Pacheco Cruz (1936), a well-known folklorist and political operative, the drama depicts an angry mob of Mayan workers surrounding the home of a hated hacienda foreman. Produced during the Cárdenas agrarian reform in Yucatán, the drama was intended to remind villagers of the things about plantation life they most disliked so that they would support Cardenist political initiatives.

13. Although the term *catrin* is clearly not of Maya origin—Yucatec Maya does not use the “tr” consonant cluster—this unusual moniker is also absent from the *Academia Real Española* and other nineteenth-century Spanish dictionaries. Only in dictionaries printed after 1929 does the term appear.

14. Sometimes described as Mexico’s first novelist (Turner 1968:258), Fernández de Lizardi is also reputed to be one of the founders of modern Mexican folklore or costumbrismo. As Guillermo de los Reyes notes (2006:278), *El Periquillo Sareniento* (1816), one of Fernandez de Lizardi’s better-known works, is a costumbrista novel that stimulated interest in local folklore through its description of different social classes.

15. Yucatán of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries is often depicted as a tripartite political system composed of Indians, mestizos, and whites. Although mestizos, like whites, were considered vecinos (fully vested citizens), they were distinguished from the latter by their dress and, in some cases, their surnames. As Redfield notes, “the word vecino . . . a more or less legal or technical term, included in Mérida two groups socially distinguished: whites and mixed bloods wearing the same garb as the Indians” (1941:375). Tax describes Guatemala in similar terms, noting that race actually was an important criterion of distinction between the top two groups. “The educated people who think of themselves as pure White . . . invest in the term all or many of the connotations that it has when used to distinguish Whites from Indians or Negros; they, therefore, strongly tend to set up a tripartite classification of Guatemalans as Indian, Ladino, and White, and define the Ladino as a mestizo” (1942:46).

16. According to the *Diccionario Maya Cardenex*, the origin of “wach” is unknown. The editors, however, suggest that it may derive from the Maya wa-paach, a term that refers to Aztecs who arrived in Yucatán during the precolonial period (Barrera Vásquez 1980:905). According to popular accounts, the term wach derives from the Spanish huarache (pronounced “warache”), a type of sandal worn in central Mexico that is quite different from the Yucatecan alpargata (a white, thick-soled sandal with a buckle and a single band of leather across the toes). Still others contend that the term wach is an onomatopoeic expression referring to the squeaky boots worn by soldiers in General Alvarado’s army, the force that placed Yucatán under the control of the federal government in 1915.
17. Common lexical hybrids include a regional dish called mukbipollo, from the Maya mukbil (to bury or cook underground) and the Spanish pollo (chicken); a game called ts’opsandia from the Maya ts’op (to pierce or stab) and the Spanish sandia (watermelon); and chocolomo, another regional delicacy, from the Maya chokó (hot) and the Spanish lomo (meat from the back of an animal). See Barrera Vásquez (1980) and Suárez (1979) for additional examples.

18. See Fernando Muñoz’s El Teatro Regional de Yucatán (1987) and earlier works by Alberto Cervera Espejo (1973), John Nomland (1967), and Alejo Cervera Andrade (1947) for a detailed discussion of regional theatre or teatro costumbrista. The study by Muñoz is of particular interest since it contains an index of authors and their works, brief summaries of many “low-brow” dramas, and excerpts in Maya and Spanish from several musicals.

19. The Yucatecan jarana and the Spanish jota are so similar that a group of Spanish archaeologists who were excavating the ruins at Oxkintok (a preclassic site near Maxcanú) in 1990 could dance the jarana without training.

20. While most Maxcanú residents acknowledge that spoken Yucatec Maya has forever lost its purity, a few older residents view themselves as the conservators of legítimo Maya and tout their ability to count to one hundred or to say things in Maya that everyone else now says in Spanish. Such was case with Don Rogelio, one of my best informants. While Don Rogelio gave freely of his time, he always insisted that I replay our tape-recorded discussions so he could review the contents and remove any contaminating Castilian elements.

21. Eligio Ancona’s tragic novel, La Mestiza, provides a glimpse of the romanticism surrounding the mestizo/a in Yucatán. Set in San Sebastian, a picturesque barrio in eighteenth-century Mérida, the novel contrasts an unscrupulous Creole youth, who seduces and then abandons a young mestiza, with a valiant mestizo, who saves the young woman and her bastard child from infamy.

22. One step in this direction was the publication of the Guía para la alfabetización: población Maya (Literacy guide for the Maya population) by the Secretary of Public Education (Instituto Nacional 1987). First printed in 1987, the guide contains a brief description of Maya grammar and phonology, a set of recommendations for teaching literacy, and a curriculum, divided into fifteen lessons, that is intended to train students to read and write stories in Yucatec Maya. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the cover photo shows three women in elegant ternos dancing the jarana. For further discussion of the renaissance of spoken Maya, see Berkely (1998).

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