

Yucatán's Dancing Pig's Head (*Cuch*): Icon, Carnival, and Commodity

As a central feature of the annual fiesta, the Maya cuch ceremony and its various transformations have been a staple of ethnographic description for more than fifty years. Through this investiture ceremony, responsibility for organizing the fiesta is passed from one religious confraternity to another. Although descriptions of the cuch abound, the ethnography of performance remains fragmented. Ethnographies tend to privilege or essentialize particular performances and ignore variants that violate the ethnographer's notion of authenticity. Indeed, the multiplicity of labels in Spanish and Maya used to describe the cuch and its transformations—cuch, k'ub pol, okostah pol, baile del cochino, etc.—leaves the impression that different enactments or performances bear little or no relation to one another. In contrast, the present article demonstrates the dialogical relations between various transformations of the cuch—pious, satirical, and folkloric—as an aid to interpreting more heterodox performances. In particular, following Bakhtin, the author argues that the rich parody which permeates the k'ub pol—a transformation of the cuch performed on some former henequén plantations—is invariably lost, or reduced to an innocent burlesque, if one fails to recognize its relationship to more sober, “Catholic” interpretations of the cuch.

In every age the attempt is made to wrest tradition away from the conformity that is about to overpower it. Nothing could be further from the conservative nostalgia for the past.

—Walter Benjamin

Ethnography and the Politics of Performance

ONE OF THE STANDARD FEATURES of Meso-American ethnography is a chapter describing the annual fiesta held to honor the patron saint of a town or village (Friedlander 1975; Hansen and Bastarrachea Manzano 1984; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1990 [1934]; Smith 1977; Vogt 1969; Watanabe 1992). Thanks to the formative influence of anthropologists such as Robert Redfield and Alfonso Villa Rojas in Yucatán and the Harvard Chiapas Project of the 1960s, one can find dozens of descriptions of vil-

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lage fiestas spanning the last half-century. Considerable attention has also been directed at the religious confraternities that organize the fiesta, especially in Chiapas and Guatemala. An article by John Chance (1990), which makes no pretense of being exhaustive, contains data from no less than twenty-three ethnographies of Meso-American cargo systems. The cargo system is also the central theme of at least one ethnographic novel, Carter Wilson's *Crazy February*, a pious, slow-moving piece of fiction that dramatizes the immense personal sacrifices cargo holders endure (1974).

A third focus of ethnographic inquiry—and the object of the present study—is the Maya *cuch* ceremony (Loewe 1995; Pacheco Cruz 1960; Pérez Sabido 1983; Pohl 1981; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1990 [1934]; Villa Rojas 1987). Literally “burden,” the *cuch* is a type of investiture ceremony in which responsibility for organizing the fiesta is passed from one *cofradía*¹ to another. It is also considered by some (see Redfield and Villa Rojas 1990 [1934]) to be the central performance of the fiesta. Notwithstanding this ethnographic bounty, the anthropology of performance remains fragmented. Performances of the *cuch* and its transformations are presented as spatiotemporal isolates, reflecting a view of indigenous or community life prevalent in Meso-American ethnographies of the 1940s and 1950s (Tax 1937, 1941; Wolf 1957). Indeed, the multiplicity of labels in Spanish and Maya used to describe the *cuch* and its transformations—*cuch*, *k'ub pol*, *okostah pol*, *baile del cochino*, etc.—leaves the impression that different enactments or entextualizations of this investiture ceremony bear little relation to one another.

In revisiting this staple of Yucatecan ethnography, my first goal is to highlight the dialogical relationship between the *cuch* and its various transformations. Like the ideal or “prototypic” performance outlined by Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs in their review of performance studies, the *cuch* indexes a broad range of speech events—religious rituals, stories, negotiations, and prior performances—and, thus, challenges the “reified, object-centered notions of performativity . . . that presuppose the encompassment of each performance by a single, bounded social interaction” (1990:61). Indeed, following Mikhail Bakhtin (1984), I argue that the rich parody that permeates the *k'ub pol* (literally, head delivery), a transformation of the *cuch* performed in San Bernardo and other former *haciendas* (plantations), is invariably lost or reduced to innocent burlesque if one fails to recognize the sometimes obscure references to more sober interpretations of the *cuch*. Similarly, although middle-class Yucatecans have developed a more aesthetically pleasing interpretation of the *cuch* for tourist consumption, referred to as *el baile del cochino* (the dance of the pig), I argue that the value of the performance depends less on its intrinsic merits (e.g., artistic quality) than on its assumed connection with vulgar “folk” performances of the rural hacienda. In short, ludic performances of the vaunted *cuch* not only gain meaning and sustenance from more orthodox enactments, but also lend authenticity and value to a new genre of performance.

Second, in line with José Limón's call for a more politically conscious approach to performance studies (Limón 1989; Limón and Young 1986), I have attempted to delineate the contending structures and agents that shape the fiesta and its key performances. For example, whereas the clergy insists on strict adherence to the Christian calendar and aims to make solemn religious observance the centerpiece of the fiesta

in obeisance to Catholic tradition, the state and the tourist industry exalt artistically refined, secular performances such as the *jarana* (a popular folk dance),² which illustrate the convergence of Spanish and indigenous cultural forms and, thereby, lend support to a multiethnic state. As I demonstrate, however, fiesta organizers and performers may subvert either or both of these agendas in the name of Maya tradition, or simply to ensure a return on their investment. As Susan Gal and others have noted, performances by subaltern groups at the periphery of the capitalist system are often explicitly aimed at deconstructing dominant ideologies and artistic forms (Briggs 1988; Gal 1989; Levine 1977; Limón 1983; Paredes 1966; Weigle 1978).

In particular, I take issue with Peter Hervik's recent study of the k'ub pol in Oxkutzcab (1999). Although Hervik provides an interesting and very personal account of the competition and ill feelings that exist among journalists, anthropologists, and folklorists (e.g., second-line interpreters) who have observed this performance, the actual performers are thought to lack both artistic temperament and desire. Describing the Campeche residents who help with the performance, Hervik, following Pascal Boyer (1990:11, 13), argues that they "know how to make the ritual, but they do not rationalize it In this case, ritual competence is passed on automatically 'i.e., through a process that is quite independent of people's desire'" (1999:145). Elsewhere Hervik comments that "they enact the celebration . . . through what has been called a 'form of unreflective common-sense and habit' [Hanks 1990:7]" (146). In contrast, following Geoffrey Bent (1991)—who thoughtfully compares Richard Burton's rendition of *Hamlet* with that of Laurence Olivier and John Gielgud—I consider the performers to be the *first-line interpreters*.³ What, after all, is performance if not an act of interpretation? Similarly, desire, in my view of the k'ub pol, is virtually unbounded, ranging from the pecuniary to the libidinous!

My final objective is to draw attention to the politics of ethnography by demonstrating how second-line interpreters privilege or essentialize certain interpretations of the *cuch* in their accounts and implicitly align themselves with local agents or institutions. For example, whereas Redfield clearly favored the more sober, "Catholic" interpretation of the *cuch* in *Chan Kom* (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1990 [1934]) and ignored Villa Rojas's description of a more raucous performance in Tusik (1987), leading Yucatecan folklorists like Pérez Sabido maintain that vulgar performances of the *cuch* (e.g., k'ub pol) are among Yucatán's most traditional performances. Only by exploring these differences is it possible to understand the fragmentary nature of ethnographic description as it relates to performance.

The Fiesta as Icon

In many accounts of the village fiesta, the leviathans of tradition suffer no creative genius. Activities that make up the *fiesta patronal* are prefaced by adjectives like "customary" or "typical," suggesting the existence of well-established norms, and the ethnographer's task is limited to describing such issues as the time-honored division of labor, the rules of reciprocity, the norms governing the selection of officers, and so forth.

This conception of the annual fiesta as a labor of mindless conformity is, perhaps,

most pronounced in *Cultura Popular y Religión en el Anahuac*, where Gilberto Giménez reduces the “traditional peasant fiesta” to seven cardinal rules, a kind of catechism for students of anthropology and religion. According to Giménez, all fiestas have the following characteristics: a rupture in the normal flow of time; a collective expression of the local community in which no class is excluded; a global celebration that includes the most heterogeneous elements (games, dances, etc.); a celebration that requires wide-open space and “free air” (the plaza, the atrium of a church); a celebration that is strongly institutionalized, ritualized, and sacred (the traditional fiesta is inseparable from religion); a celebration that is impregnated by the logic of use-value (in which fiesta equals participation); and a strong dependence on the agricultural calendar (1978:xx).

Similarly, in *The Folk Culture of Yucatán*, Redfield, following Emile Durkheim, highlights the consensual aspects of the fiesta as well as its division into discrete categories of religious and profane activity,⁴ with only a passing reference to the authority of the Catholic Church: “The activities which make up these fiestas are much the same in all communities of Yucatán. They form a regional style, a special type, within the more general outlines of Middle American, or of Catholic American, folk festivals of patron saints Whatever else the festival is, it is both worship and play. The presence of these two elements is recognized in the program of the festivals and in such accounts of them as appear in the newspapers: those which are *religiosas* are set off against those which are *profanas*” (1941:270; emphasis added).

Having witnessed the severity of Protestant evangelicals in Chan Kom, it is not surprising that Redfield saw the Catholic Church as a benign presence. For residents of Chan Kom, as Redfield notes, words such as “religion” or “Catholic” were rarely spoken prior to 1930, when the first Protestant missionaries arrived (1964 [1950]:88). The Maya-Catholic syncretism of rural Yucatán was *doxa* (unquestioned practice) (Bourdieu 1977:168). Still, Redfield’s treatment of religion is somewhat ironic, in light of the fact that Catholic authority, far more than Protestantism, is beholden to ritual schemes that purposely distinguish between sacred and secular, faith and frivolity. Whereas evangelical Protestantism is totalizing and seeks to reform the sinful nature of man, the Catholic Church operates by establishing boundaries between different spheres of human activity and deliberately *setting off* the sacred and profane activities to which Redfield refers in passive voice. The debaucheries associated with carnival pose no threat to the moral order and the church, as long as the perpetrators conclude their activities on time and show up for mass on Ash Wednesday.

Through his writings, however, Redfield did more than simply reify the administrative practice of the church, transforming its agency and authority into “custom”—he simultaneously bolstered the clergy’s emphasis on solemn ritual, whether Catholic or Maya, as the core feature of the fiesta. As the following description of the fiesta of X-Kalakdzonot reveals, the *cuch*, in Redfield and Villa Rojas’s view, was not only an extremely solemn occasion, but the very essence of the fiesta:

At noon the present *cargador* (majordomo), together with his wife and his associate organizers, the *nakulob*, go to the house of the future *cargador*, whom he thereupon invites to his house, that he may deliver the *carga* or *cuch*. This is the essential part of the fiesta and gives its name (*cuch*) to the whole. On

a table the *kulelob* place a cross, a clay vessel containing the cooked head of a pig, a pile of tortillas, several bottles of rum, and on a little plate, some cigarettes. The present *cargador* carries the *cuch*: a decorated pole from which hang many colored paper streamers, packages of cigarettes, cloth dolls and loaves of bread made in the form of an eagle. He addresses the *cargador* of the fiesta to be celebrated next year, saying: "In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, I deliver to you this charge (*cuch*), and that which is upon this table, so that next year you may make your fiesta to the holy cross." . . . Then he tells the three *nakulob* . . . to take what is on the table. Lifting up the various objects, these men move around the table, turning about as they go, and dancing a slow dance, with little leaps, while the musicians play the air of an old Spanish song—"La Carbonerita." (1990 [1934]:155; emphases added)

In *The Folk Culture of Yucatán*, Redfield reiterates his views on the *cuch*, describing it as a sacred vow "by which the community is perpetually bound to its supernatural guardian" (1941:277) and noting that in X-Cacal, one of the two remote villages studied by Villa Rojas, the "ceremony is attended with much religious significance" (1941:286). By omitting any reference to the investiture ceremony in Tusik, Villa Rojas's other field site, however, Redfield carries out what might be described as an ethnographic *auto-da-fé*, or defense of the faith. Indeed, in *Los Elegidos de Dios*, Villa Rojas's seminal monograph on the Maya of east-central Quintana Roo, one finds two radically different descriptions of the investiture ritual—or *okostah pol*, as Villa Rojas refers to it (1987). Whereas the performance in X-Cacal was, as Redfield noted, characterized by its sobriety, the dance in Tusik was most notable for its irreverent humor.

As in X-Cacal and San Bernardo (described below), the Tusik offering was adorned with polychrome paper, sweet breads (*arepas*), cigarettes, male and female Castilian rag dolls (*dzulitos*),⁵ and a sweet bread (*chuchuc-uah*), which was placed between the jaws of the newly anointed swine. The only apparent difference was the presence of a bamboo crown, suggesting the head's function as a mock Jesús, and a thick tortilla with four sticks arranged in a quadrilinear fashion, representing the spatial coordinates of the Maya cosmos. The performance, as Villa Rojas notes, however, was quite "frivolous":

The activities of the following day began in the early morning hours with a dance called *okostah pol*. For this dance which represented the sale of a pig, nine women . . . were selected. The dancers were organized as follows: in the first place was an individual who played a rattle made by placing corn kernels in a gourd shell and wrapping it in a handkerchief; this individual who represented the owner of the pig, pretended to lead the animal with a cord which hung down from the head/offering. [The offering] was carried by a man who followed the owner; immediately following were the women with their gourds. The musical accompaniment recalled an old Spanish melody known as "La Carbonerita." The individual who opened the march was proposing the sale of the pig with these words: "who will buy the pig that I bring tied up, who will buy it from me?" Two other individuals assume the role of buyers and respond by offering a very low price. This led to bargaining between the two parties, and comic exaggeration of the defects and fine qualities of the animal which produced laughter from those present. The joyous event reaches its climax when the bearer of the pig's head takes on the role of the pig, "cuts" the cord with his teeth, and escapes from the room, bringing the negotiations to an abrupt halt. The owner and the musicians chase after the "pig," capture him, and return him to the hall, whereupon the dance is resumed and the eighteen turns are completed. It was at this point that the host of the fiesta, using the musicians as witnesses, "purchased" the "pig" saying: "I place on this table 100 cigarettes in payment of this 'pig' which I have bought today." (1987:358; translated from the Spanish by author)

Redfield's reluctance to mention the more satirical Tusik performance is, no doubt, bound up with his conception of the latter as the sacred pole of a sacred-secular continuum stretching across Yucatán. X-Cacal, nestled deep in the jungles of Quintana Roo, was considered the *sanctum sanctorum* of the peninsula, a place of utmost privacy and reverence, and Tusik one of nine "homogenous" folk villages that supported it.

By pointing out the sober, serious-minded tone of Redfield's work, my intention is not to argue *contra* Redfield that the *cuch* is really ludic—at least not all the time—but simply to note the unmistakable convergence between Redfieldian ethnography and the orthopraxis of the Catholic Church with regard to tradition and festive activities. After all, to be effective, parody requires a set of rules that are recognized and generally respected. As Umberto Eco notes in *Carnival!* "The law must be so pervasively and profoundly introjected as to be overwhelmingly present at the moment of its violation" (1984:6).

This process can be seen even more clearly in the Mexican *coloquios*, or traditional nativity plays, described by Bauman (1996:318). Here satire is affected by enabling the audience to hear both the narrator or prompter's rendition of a written, religious text (the straight verse) and the actor's parodic counterstatement, a type of word play in which syntactic and phonological parallelism foreground humorous semantic differences. For example, while the prompter states that, "*Parece que voy saliendo sin perder una pisada*" ("It appears that I am getting out without losing a step"), the Hermitano, the parodic figure of the drama, remarks, "*Ya me estoy poniendo sin perder ni una pisada*" ("Now I am getting used to it without missing even a single fuck"). In the *okostah pol*, the religious referents may be more hidden than those of the *coloquio*, but the "audience" is presumably conversant with religious norms and knows what is being satirized.

The Fiesta of San Bernardo: The Cuch as Carnival

The Setting

It is perhaps ironic that the fiesta of San Bernardo is now considered one of the state's most traditional fiestas. Located in the northwestern quadrant of the state, the *zona henequenera* (sisal zone), San Bernardo is not only far removed from the *zona Maya* (Quintana Roo) but has never led an independent existence. Like many communities in this part of the state, San Bernardo was for many years little more than an appendage to the great sisal plantation of Las Palmas, supplying workers to plant, harvest, and process sisal in semifeudal conditions (Joseph 1982; Katz 1962; Turner 1969). Even today, San Bernardo retains the juridical status of a hacienda rather than a *pueblo* (village), a grim reminder of its former, dependent status (Loewe 1995).⁶

San Bernardo is also an improbable site because it figures prominently in the regional development of western Yucatán. Over the past several years, the state government, in collaboration with private investors, has begun to lay the foundation for an expansion of tourism in this part of the state. In addition to preparing the archaeological site at nearby Oxkintok for public consumption, efforts are underway to transform the Las Palmas hacienda into a luxury hotel and a henequén-era museum. In

this way Yucatán's burgeoning tourist industry can offer a panoply of Maya images from preconquest to postcolonial times to its consumers, a strategy that reflects the new, almost obsessive concern for diversity in this former monocrop economy.

Although access to San Bernardo is presently limited to a rocky, dirt road, the partially restored plantation has actually served as a minor tourist attraction for many years. Visitors who pass through the wrought iron gates of the Las Palmas hacienda find themselves in a nicely manicured yard punctuated only by an occasional *ceiba* tree. On the inside, visitors can wander through several partially completed exhibits: a dining room whose former elegance can still be detected amid the aging furniture; an office with dusty, early model typewriters and adding machines; and, finally, an exhibition room with a horse-drawn carriage and a series of lithographs depicting the evolution of ground transport in Yucatán.

The main attraction, however, is the plantation's restored decorticating equipment, which rests above the north wing like the sacrificial altars, or *chacmools*, found atop Mayan pyramids. Indeed, the development of a viable rasping machine is one of the major leitmotifs of contemporary Yucatecan folklore. As Gilbert Joseph notes in *Revolution from Without: Yucatán, México and the United States*, it is a matter of great pride that a native Yucatecan rather than a foreign national developed the first prototype in the early 1850s and brought progress and prosperity to the peninsula (1982).

Notwithstanding its early integration into the world economic system via sisal production, however, San Bernardo is considered a Maya preserve of sorts, and according to Pérez Sabido, the *k'ub pol* performed by the plantation's former work force is considered one of only five dances that have "resisted the passage of time and can still be seen in . . . the interior of Yucatán" (1983:129). Not surprising perhaps, these comments—echoed in newspapers, magazines, and even a few television documentaries—have served to transform the fiesta into a popular regional celebration, which draws hundreds of visitors from nearby towns and villages as well as the state capital and now rivals the maudlin Las Palmas museum as a local tourist attraction.

Performance: The San Bernardo *K'ub Pol* (Field notes: June 4, 1989)⁷

Arrived in San Bernardo around 8:00 A.M. to observe preparations for the *k'ub pol*. By this time, a group of men had gathered around a long, wood table on the dirt road leading into the plantation and were beginning to minister to a 400-pound pig that had been slaughtered and disemboweled the night before. While one *campesino* was busy shaving the upper portion of the body to remove unsightly hairs, a second was brushing the pig's teeth and a third was scrubbing its body, removing soot and grime.

One resident asked me if I thought the pig was beautiful. When I said "yes," he asked if I would like to have sex with her. I declined, saying that my wife was likely to show up at any minute. Also present were three students from Mérida dressed in leisure clothes and sharing a camera among them. They admitted to understanding Maya, but responded to questions in Spanish and watched the preparations from a distance.

After the pig had been cleaned and groomed, she was turned on her back and large circular bamboo rings were inserted in the body cavity to restore her figure, because without her entrails the body had a rather collapsed appearance. As the pig was be-

ing sewn up, one of the attendants pulled out a bottle of rum, took a swig and commented that it was rum that had led to the poor pig's demise. The last step before transferring the animal to the dance hall was to pry open her jaws and insert a wood block.

Once inside the dance hall, the pig was set in front of an image of San Bernardo, the town's patron saint, and his two companions, San Antonio de Padua and the Virgin del Carmen. At this point, the women of San Bernardo took over and began to decorate the animal. The first step was to construct the *ramillete*, a makeshift cage made by arcing a series of branches over the table supporting the pig. From the ramillete were hung bottles of rum, coca cola and mineral water, ginger bread cookies in the shapes of men and animals, flowers, and a number of mestiza cloth dolls. The finishing touch was provided by placing two elegantly dressed Barbie dolls, one male and one female, at the front of the ramillete. While the ramillete was being prepared, other decorations were attached directly to the pig. Perforations were made in the pig's sides and tinsel flowers mounted on sticks were inserted into the openings. Silver coins wrapped in pink cloth were affixed as earrings, and another coin, rolled up in a bright bandanna, was tied around the animal's forehead. Finally, the offering was completed by placing cigarettes, bowls of rice, candied papaya, and *ciruelas* (plums) on the table next to the beast and inserting a large square cake in her mouth.

Around 5:00 P.M. the procession began. A group of twenty or so residents assembled around the table, took hold of the two beams extending out from either end, and with a collective groan hoisted the beast onto their shoulders. In front of the group stood the *chik*, or clown, a lanky mestizo about thirty-five years of age who was dressed in tattered clothing. Stationed next to the *chik* was his *maestro*, a much older man who had taught him several verses for the occasion. Also present were two *mayokoles*, or assistants, with handkerchiefs tied over their heads. The first *mayokol* was a man from Maxcanu nicknamed *Tierra Linda* (beautiful land), a poor mestizo who spoke little Spanish. In one hand, Don Tierra held a rattle made from dry kernels of corn and a hollowed-out *jicara* (gourd). This was used to "summon" the pig. In the other hand he held an empty *jicara*, which he used to bathe the animal. Meanwhile the second *mayokol* stood ready with a bottle of rum. Finally, posted next to the two *mayokoles* was a small group of musicians; a drummer with dark sunglasses and two men with brass wind instruments.

As the band struck up "La Angaripola," a popular dance tune, the *chik* and his assistants began to file out of the dance hall, followed by twenty or so pig bearers. The latter moved like drunken sailors, weaving back and forth as they attempted to throw their companions off balance. As the entourage emerged from the hall, one person shouted "*la capilla*" (the chapel), and the entourage staggered off toward a simple thatch-roofed hut. About twenty yards from the hut, the pedestal was lowered for the first time as the *mayokol* shouted: "*hap a chi'o, hap a chi'o*" (open your mouth), and insisted that the pig was thirsty. With this he filled his gourd with rum and threw it over the animal's body. Then, while the others shouted "*ba'ax tawalah*" (What did you say?), the *chik* stepped forward to recite the first of many humorous quatrains or *bombas*.

From the "church" the pig bearers reversed direction and headed off toward the

house of the new president, the villager who would take responsibility for organizing next year's k'ub pol. En route the pig was lowered every twenty yards to be watered, and to give the chik an opportunity to recite another humorous quatrain.

As illustrated below, several of the quatrains refer to illicit sexual escapades, whereas others highlight the antagonism between villagers and the state (*la federación*). These original and, in some cases, impromptu verses enhance the image of the chik as a wanton, carefree individual, a character un beholden to laws or moral constraints. Other quatrains or bombas (not shown) are clearly stock, ready-made verses heard at folk dances (jaranas) and can be found in pamphlets sold in Mérida bookstores. All of the quatrains become less and less intelligible as the procession advances and the chik becomes increasingly drunk.

1. Le tun tech ukichpam ch'up
[As for you beautiful young woman]

ka' manen tuhol abel
[when I passed the entrance to your street]

[inaudible] yaan ump'e luch
[... there is a bowl (made from a gourd)]

ka'ten soten wech inpak'tik kep
[two times I inflated the "armadillo," I thrust my member]

ka' bin la puch [ka'] bin la tuch
[when the back goes, the navel goes]

2. Federación bin inkahal bin xan
[The federal authorities left; my "mistress" left, too]

presidente kumanik bin
[the president reportedly paid them]

yeetel inhijo [le tusah] bix u tak'in
[and my son (remitted the money?)]

kusik bin tinwotoch xan
[he reportedly gave them my house as well]

3. Oxtun federación kotal u k'axten xan
[Three federal police are coming to look for me, too]

mix un tohol yaan in bo'ot[ik]
[not even a "cent" have I to pay them]

tumen tulak[al] inwatan tints'ah xan
[because all of it I gave to my wife also]

4. [Ts]'ok bin tak'in ti[n] kahal bin xan
[The money ran out, my mistress ran out, too]

Maxcanú bin u taal bin
[(To) Maxcanu she will come they say]

San Bernardo bin kuchu[1] xan
 [(In) San Bernardo she will arrive also]

yeetel ulak' inwatan yak xan
 [my wife is with another person, too]

5. Oxp'e dia ma' haantken tinwatan
 [For three days my wife doesn't eat me]

mix inwatan tsenken xan
 [nor does my wife feed me either]

yaan tun kubo'otik bin up'ax
 [she must, then, pay the debt she owes]

[inaudible] ko'olibi bo'otik xan
 [(inaudible) the virgin pays it, too]

6. Cinco lequas intak ink'aan
 [Five leagues I come for my hammock]

yeetel uxay unabil chi'
 [with the woman with the wide mouth]

yeetel bin ukaxah wupik inwatan
 [and go in search of my wife's slip]

chen ubin ukaxah bin upik bin yaan
 [she reportedly just goes to search for her slip]

When the entourage finally arrived at the house of the incoming president, the decorations and festal foods were removed and distributed among the *cofradia's* members along with an admonition that they donate a similar or larger item the following year. The pig was then handed over to a team of talented butchers who quickly reduced her to one-kilo portions.

Discussion

Although the activities that make up the *k'ub pol* take place within a two-day period, the spectacle can be seen as the culmination of a lengthy, sometimes acrimonious struggle between fiesta organizers and the clergy. Fiesta organizers want the local priest (a resident of Maxcanu) to visit San Bernardo and perform mass during the fiesta; however, Padre Justo has repeatedly told them that he will only do so if the celebration is held on the day corresponding to San Bernardo in the Christian calendar. From the priest's perspective, the sacred character of the event is undermined by festival promoters, who schedule the celebration on a weekend (even when the saint's day falls on a weekday) in order to attract more visitors and increase revenues.

In deference to a tradition of their own, however, *k'ub pol* organizers insist that the celebration cannot be held until the pig has reached the appropriate dimensions, a date that rarely coincides with the day assigned to San Bernardo in the holy calendar.⁸ Along with his quotidian of pig flesh, the deputy selected to organize the *k'ub*



Figure 1. The San Fernando pig makes her way to the chapel on a portable altar similar to those used to transport saints when they go out in public.

pol is given a length of rope to measure the beast's enormous paunch. When the circumference of the pig's belly matches the length of the rope, it is time to sacrifice the pig and hold the k'ub pol. Therefore, although the fiesta of San Bernardo would ordinarily be held on May 28, the actual date of the celebration is indeterminate. In 1974, according to Pérez Sabido, it was held on May 23, and in 1989, as noted above, it was held on June 4. Although this breach in the liturgical order is, perhaps, the most blatant challenge to priestly authority, it is merely the first in a series of acts that seek to nullify the ecclesiastical opposition between sacred and profane activities. The others occur within the spectacle itself.

Frame 1: The Burden Bearer and the Devil

Although the San Bernardo k'ub pol refers directly or indirectly to a variety of texts, events, and other performances and defies any desire for analytic closure, the leading referent or frame is unarguably the *cuch* (see Redfield and Villa Rojas 1990 [1934]), an investiture ceremony in which responsibility for the annual fiesta is transferred from one *cofradia*, or, as San Bernardo residents say, one "generation," to another. At the same time, however, the k'ub pol distinguishes itself from more solemn enactments of the *cuch* through a series of unconventional substitutions or permutations. Most notable is the substitution of devils and drunkards for the *dramatis personae* of the *cuch*. The *chik*, described above, is everything the *cargador*, or burden bearer, is not. Whereas the latter is considered a model of moral rectitude, an individual who

literally carries the obligation of the community on his back, the *chik* is thought of as a playful animal like the *coati*, or badger, for whom he is named.

A similar effect is achieved by the substitution of *mayokol* for the *nakulob* or *noox* (ritual assistants). In describing the *cuch* ceremony in Chan Kom, Redfield noted that the *cargador* is assisted by several subordinates who help cover the expenses of the *fiesta* and perform certain tasks. In referring to these helpers, Redfield used two Mayan terms interchangeably—*nakulob*, which is defined simply as “a subordinate of a *cargador*” (1941:393), and, *noox*, which is described as a person or an object used to support someone or something else.⁹

In the San Bernardo performance, however, neither of these ritual specialists is present. The two assistants who minister to the pig, and repeatedly ply her with rum, are referred to as *mayokoles*, a term normally applied to plantation foremen, devils of a different sort. As older villagers recall, the daily operations of a *henequén* plantation were generally left in the hands of a trusted administrator or *encargado*, a well-to-do *mestizo* who spoke Spanish as well as Maya and handled the plantation's accounts. The *encargado*, in turn, supervised several minor functionaries, or *mayokol*, who were responsible for meeting production quotas and administered corporal punishment to Maya peons who worked too slowly or stole plantation property.

The *mayokol*'s reputation is, perhaps, best revealed by a rather interesting folk etymology. The word *mayokol* is neither Maya nor Spanish, but a Yucatecan neologism formed from the Spanish word *mayor*, meaning “elder,” “principal,” or “main,” and the Maya word *kol*, which translates as “field.” It is, therefore, clearly a regional variant of the Spanish *mayoral* (foreman, boss) or *mayordomo* (majordomo), heard in other parts of México; however, Yucatecans familiar with the *mayokol*'s role in protecting plantation property suggest that the term actually derives from two Maya morphemes: *ma*, a negative particle that precedes the verb stem, and *okol*, a verb meaning “to steal.” In short, although the *mayokol* was a native Maya speaker, he was an anathema in the eyes of the Maya work force because of his loyalty to *dzul*, the plantation owner.¹⁰

Evidence that the *k'ub pol*, and the *fiesta* more generally, is intended as a humorous representation of *hacienda* life is also found in Villa Rojas's description of the *fiesta* in X-Cacal. Here, the latter notes that the event was officially inaugurated at two o'clock one morning with a nominating ceremony in which individuals were selected to play the part of *hacienda* administrators. In all, twenty-five individuals were selected to fill different roles including:

- U nohoch dzulil ixtancia [the owner of the *hacienda*]
- U x-nuc xunanil ixtancia [the wife of the *hacendado*]
- U chan dzulil ixtancia [the owner's son]
- U chan xunanil ixtancia [the owner's daughter]
- U nohoch mayordomoil ixtancia [the first *majordomo*]
- U chan mayordomoil ixtancia [the second *majordomo*]
- U nohoch capularil ixtancia [the first corporal]
- U x-nuc capularil ixtancia [the corporal's wife]. (Villa Rojas 1987:362; translated by author)

To round out the staff, seven cowboys and five cowgirls were selected along with four men and women who were responsible for taking care of the pigsty (*cuidadores de*

chiqueros). Predictably, Villa Rojas notes, those selected to play the part of the hacienda owners did little but issue orders, while the majordomos and corporals were obliged to carry out numerous tasks associated with a village fiesta (1987:363). Similarly, in reflecting upon the k'ub pol he observed as a young boy, Santiago Pacheco Cruz remarked that the performance was a feature of hacienda life, not something found in the city or the town.¹¹ In short, then, by historicizing and politicizing the omnipresent *cuch*, the San Bernardo performance not only continues a satiric tradition going back fifty years or longer, but also challenges the romantic conception of plantation life proffered by the Las Palmas museum.

Finally, the subversive character of the k'ub pol is manifest through an implicit comparison between the moral economy of a religious offering and the mercantile ethos of the marketplace. In the *cuch* ceremony described by Redfield, it was understood that the pig's head and the delicacies that accompany it are offerings made on behalf of the community and constitute the fulfillment of a sacred vow to the patron saint. Those who accept the offering are expected to make an equal or greater contribution the following year. In the performance described by Villa Rojas (*okostah pol*), however, two "buyers" haggle with the owner of the pig in order to purchase the animal at the lowest possible price, inverting the traditional relationship between donor and recipient and transforming an august exchange (e.g., gift) into a vulgar economic transaction. Indeed, after the pig's notorious escape, the host of the X-Cacal fiesta purchases her for a mere 100 cigarettes!

Frame 2: The Parade of Saints

The other principal object of k'ub pol parody is the *santa procesión* (saints' procession), an activity that occurs on the last day of the annual fiesta and is characterized by great solemnity. On this occasion, the patron saint is lowered from his pedestal and carried through the streets on a portable altar. For example, following the mass said in honor of St. Michael (the patron saint of Maxcanu) on September 29, the congregants pour into the street behind the church and reassemble in their respective *cofradías*. Once in place, the image of St. Michael is lowered from his pedestal and set on an altar at the front of the procession. An altar boy leads the procession, swinging a ball of incense. Close behind are the priest and four litter bearers who agonize in silence under the tremendous weight of the altar and image. From the church, the procession passes the main square and silently circles the plaza in a slow, deliberate manner before returning to the starting point. After a rosary is recited, the patron saint is returned to his pedestal.

The similarity between the *santa procesión* and the San Bernardo k'ub pol is revealed through a series of indexical relationships: the raiment of the pig with jewelry and ornaments in emulation of Catholic images that must be properly dressed before they go out in public; the placement of the finely manicured beast on a portable altar similar to those used to carry religious images; her association with the images of St. Anthony of Padua, the Virgin of the Conception, and St. Bernard in the corner of the hacienda's outdoor shelter, and, finally, her incorporation into the procession that enters the church. Indeed, the procession that Pérez Sabido witnessed in San Bernardo in 1974 included the three Catholic saints named above, as well as a 200-

kilo pig. After several stops, during which the chik recited “strophes in Maya” (1983:140), the holy trinity were returned to their modest temple. Only then was the pig delivered to the incoming president and divided among the villagers.

At the same time, the satirical nature of the k'ub pol is revealed through a series of paradigmatic shifts: the insertion of a raucous shoving contest in place of the silent pilgrimage described above and, of course, the substitution of a raw, corpulent beast for the saint or the nicely adorned pig's head that accompanies the cuch. In other performances, such as the k'ub pol that Pacheco Cruz observed in Santa Cruz de Bravo, the chik irreverently combines iconic representations of the devil and the priest into one role. “The joker,” writes Pacheco Cruz, “had a painted face; the same was true of his naked body in which nothing but ‘the parts’ were covered; a diadem of turkey feathers and a pair of horns in imitation of the devil replaced his *sombrero*, he even had a long tail” (1936:30). Dressed in this fashion, the chik goes about his priestly duties. Following the delivery of the pig's head to the incoming deputies and the delivery of an “epistle” by the outgoing president, “the chik lightly sprayed everyone with *balche* (holy water),¹² which according to them, is the benediction which authorizes the new deputies” (1936:130).

Including the clergy in a satire of hacienda life is, of course, only fitting in light of the fact that throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries the cleric and the hacienda owner were frequently one and the same. In *Maya and Spaniard in Yucatán*, for example, Robert Patch notes that priests were quite often estate owners: “Two priests . . . Miguel and Pedro Antonio de la Paz . . . owned ten haciendas. Miguel had two in Mérida, one in Uman, one in Motul and one in Mococho, while Pedro Antonio's five estates were in Mérida, Conkal, Acanceh, Mochocha and Motul” (1993:191). Similarly, Rugeley disputes the notion that clergy had a difficult time adjusting to the world of commerce by noting that the priest of Sotuta, José Manuel Pardio, owned multiple estates, including haciendas as far south as Tekax: “The padre's economic success together with his warm ties with the town's leading citizens, provides a classic example of clergy adapting themselves into the local bourgeoisie . . . through their shared interest of estate ownership” (Rugeley 2001b:133–34).¹³

The most seditious act, however, is the recitation of vulgar Maya/Spanish quatrains or bombas during the “santa procesión.” The latter, in fact, are doubly subversive, because they not only evoke the festive image of the jarana (a sensuous, colorful folkdance) in what would normally be an extremely solemn affair, but also debase the refined character of the Spanish *cuarteta* itself. The bomba's predictable rhyme scheme, consistent meter, and long association with genteel courtship rituals have, in recent years, become so attractive to the Yucatecan middle class that the poetic form of the bomba is now frequently used in advertising jingles on television. Urban consumers are entreated to purchase anise liquor and other goods through clever bombas. In the k'ub pol, however, the quatrain is irreparably damaged. Its gentle sexual allusions are rendered overt, and its poetic form is distorted almost beyond recognition as the drunken chik stumbles through each verse.

Indeed, though several aspects of the k'ub pol may be evocative of indigenous rites and practices, it is less the content of the performance than its ribald style that leads observers like Pérez Sabido to view the ritual as part of an unbroken Yucatecan tradition. What makes the k'ub pol truly “authentic” for some are the grotesque move-

ments of the performers and their slurred, piquant speech—in short, a code of conduct that conforms to popular stereotypes of rural mestizos or Indians. In regional parlance, such individuals are referred to as *che' che winik*, a Mayan phrase translated as “raw or unseasoned people,”¹⁴ or *werek*, a term of unknown origin used to designate grotesque or unsightly persons. For example, in *El Uayismo en la Cultura de Yucatán*, Jesús Amaro Gamboa's popular encyclopedia of Yucatecan profanity, the *werek* is described as “a crude individual, who generally has dark skin although not black skin; the majority of the time the *werek* is a heavy person, fat but not obese; his facial characteristics, which are generally ‘ordinary,’ may present Maya vestiges; if in reality he has these ethnic characteristics, his skin surely suffers from acne or scars left from it, because the Maya may suffer in his youth or in adulthood from acne or from blackheads” (1984:8; translated by author). Similarly, the rural mestizo is ridiculed for his irregular Spanish syntax. He is said to jabber (*chapurrear*) rather than speak proper Spanish. In short, the raw, grotesque image in San Bernardo's *k'ub pol* is a perfect homology of the “grotesque” men who carry it on their shoulders.

Here it is worth noting that the *Danza de las Cintas* (the ribbon dance), a Yucatecan version of the maypole dance, also appears on Pérez Sabido's list of most traditional performances. In this account, the author makes no attempt to trace the event's origin. He simply notes that the dance is performed in a rural location (Ticul and Santa Elena) by “autochthonous groups” who lack sophistication (1983:146). To emphasize the last point, Pérez Sabido mentions that in the performance he witnessed a strange person suddenly appeared and attempted to join the dancers. The dance group stopped at this point, and the pole man asked the intruder in Maya to explain what he wanted. “I want to dance with you,” remarked the intruder. “No you don't,” countered the pole man, “you're a dog and you want to urinate on the pole, get lost!” (1983:146).

By equating authenticity with profanity and crude, irreverent acts, Pérez Sabido's account of the *k'ub pol* and other traditional dances can be seen as the antithesis of Redfieldian ethnography. While the latter exalts the sacred, the former emphasizes only the primitive and the profane. However, like Redfield, Pérez Sabido ultimately fails to recognize the dialogical relationship among performances, as well as the political and performative context in which the *k'ub pol* is enacted. Consequently, the meaning of its countless figures and tropes is lost or reduced to signs of mere “primitiveness.” Like Roland Barthes's mythical signifier (e.g., form)—a signifier that is already a sign—the *k'ub pol* is robbed of its original set of meanings and placed at the disposal of a new signifying consciousness (Barthes 1972). Parody and satire, the *raison d'être* of the *k'ub pol*, are reduced to an innocent burlesque that offends no powerful institution or individual—an image of *das volk* that will henceforth serve as the foundation, alibi, or “raw material” upon which an aesthetically pleasing, nationalist folklore is constructed.

The Cuch as Commodity and Symbol of the Nation

Since the early 1960s, the phenomenal growth of tourism has not only led to the development of new forms of handicraft production in the peninsula, but has also refocused attention on the value of things past. In fact, following the disappearance of henequén in northwest Yucatán, a process essentially complete by 1970, many Maxcanu residents made their living by selling artifacts that they scavenged from

nearby archaeological sites or from facsimiles that they produced in their homes.

The growth of tourism and tourist consumption has also enhanced the appeal of folk goods, such as *huipils* (indigenous dresses), among middle-class Yucatecans. In the late 1960s, upwardly mobile women from Ticul and other towns wouldn't be caught dead in huipils or other vestments associated with indigenous women (Nathanial Raymond, personal communication, 1989); however, by the late 1970s, thanks to the buying habits of North American tourists, the mini-huipil, a dress that resembles the older huipil but is tapered along the sides and considerably shorter, had become popular among middle-class Yucatecans. The new style huipil, worn without the typical insignias of Indian identity (e.g., long lace slip and scarf), not only allowed middle-class women to show off their figures, but also enabled them to demonstrate regional pride, or present a more folksy appearance, in a nonstigmatizing manner. In short, as a result of a few modifications, a sign of subordinate status was transformed into a symbol of Yucatecan identity.

The reevaluation of regional custom has also been stimulated by a shift in the attitude of federal agencies such as the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) and the Secretaría de Educación Pública (SEP) toward indigenous communities. Although the overriding concern of such agencies is still to foster economic growth and promote assimilation, vigorous debates within Mexican anthropology in the early 1970s and charges of ethnocide¹⁵ have modified the ideology and practice of such institutions. Indeed, *rescate cultural*, or the preservation of indigenous culture, is now seen as one of the most important functions of entities such as INI and SEP.¹⁶

It is hardly surprising, then, that the k'ub pol and the jarana have gained the attention of cultural workers interested in celebrating and preserving local custom. Although one can still see raucous performances of the k'ub pol in San Bernardo, San Fernando, and other former plantations, this colorful performance has, for the most part, been appropriated by Yucatán's nostalgic middle class.

In Maxcanu, a town of 12,000 that serves as the provincial capital, the task of preserving regional culture has fallen to Don Ponso, a merchant who owns a small café in the center of town and who is one of Maxcanu's leading folk dancers (*jaraneros*). Don Ponso is also a proud descendant of a *mestizo fino* (fine mestizo) family, an intermediate social strata composed primarily of craftsmen and merchants and known for the elegant folk costumes they wore up until the 1960s. At closing time each night, Don Ponso would remove the tables from his café, pull out a tape player and provide dance lessons—interspersed with stories of the unusual places he had performed—to anyone who cared to learn.

Learning from Don Ponso was no easy task, because he was a perfectionist. He was, however, a well-respected teacher, and when word got out that he was going to open the fiesta of Guadalupe with a choreographed version of the k'ub pol (*el baile del cochino*), hundreds of people attended.

Performance: Maxcanu's Baile del Cochino (Field notes: Maxcanu, December 1989)

Around 9:30 P.M. Víctor Soberanis's orchestra, one of the most popular and most expensive jarana orchestras in Yucatán, gave the musical prompt and Don Ponso's

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entourage entered the dance floor. In the first position was Don Ponso, elegantly dressed in thick-soled white alpargatas,¹⁷ a brilliant, long-sleeved *filipina* with gold buttons, freshly creased, white linen pants with a large, red and white handkerchief hanging carefully from his right front pocket, and a new, white, derby-style hat made from *hipil* (a soft flexible fiber which contrasts with the course straw hats formerly worn by Maya peasants).

Standing on either side of Don Ponso was an attractive young woman, dressed in a finely embroidered *terno*,¹⁸ a long, silk scarf (*rebozo*), white high-heel shoes, and liberal quantities of facial makeup. Behind each of the women was a column of six dancers in which men, dressed exactly like Don Ponso, alternated with females dressed in brightly colored ternos. Finally, in the center, several paces behind Don Ponso, was a young man balancing a large platter on his head. The platter contained a roasted pig's head decorated with large tomatoes, several loaves of white bread, a number of brightly colored streamers, and a half-dozen green, white, and red pennants.

As the dancers moved through the hall, each of them retained one of the colored streamers connected to the pig's head. At the end of the hall the dance troupe stopped, and the performers danced in place for several moments, executing graceful pirouettes and demonstrating stylistic variations on the basic jarana dance step. Next the dancers circled the pig bearer, moving first in a clockwise and, then, a counterclockwise direction. After completing several circuits, the dancers stopped, exchanged places with their partners, and began to circle the pig bearer in opposite directions, weaving their streamers into a tight braid, and transforming the man in the center into a human maypole. Finally, with equal grace and solemnity, the dancers reversed positions and unwound the braid. The performance was considered a smashing success and was rewarded by enthusiastic applause from the crowd.

The irony of this event, at least at first glance, is that Don Ponso does everything to minimize his own creative genius. Despite his carefully choreographed entrance and the extensive labor he and his assistants put into their costumes, *el baile del cochino* was, in Don Ponso's view, more an act of cultural *preservation* than an act of artistic *interpretation*, a point he underscored repeatedly by noting his dependence on the cruder, less-refined performances of the hacienda. In retrospect, however, Don Ponso's comments appear to be less an example of false modesty than an acknowledgment that the authenticity and value of his performance depend upon its acceptance as a faithful representation of performances found in more remote, autochthonous Maya villages.

Despite the emphasis on preservation, however, the *baile del cochino* transforms the *k'ub pol* in several obvious and profound ways. For one thing, it transforms ritual (irreverent as it may be) into a form of theatre. Although the audience is clearly incidental in the case of the former (for example, an anthropologist and some adventurous tourists), the *baile del cochino* was created specifically for an audience. Chairs were set up around the perimeter of the open-air pavillion where Don Ponso performed, and printed programs were distributed to the guests. By charging admission to the performance, the *baile* also transformed the *cuch* (and *k'ub pol*) into a commodity. Unlike tropical or salsa dances, fiesta organizers have traditionally covered the cost of the jarana through the sale of alcohol, the fees they charge concessionaires, or the

profits they make on other dances. Much to the chagrin of Maxcanu residents, however, fiesta organizers had begun charging admission to the Friday night jarana by the late 1980s.¹⁹

The baile also surreptitiously transformed the *cuch* (and *k'ub pol*) into a symbol of Mexican nationalism by substituting one set of decorations for another. As noted above, the pig used in the *k'ub pol* contained several icons of hacienda life—effigies of the hacienda owner and his wife—as well as numerous luxury goods found in the *cuch* (e.g., cigarettes). Though most of these culinary artifacts are missing in the baile del cochino, one new element appears—green, white, and red pennants in emulation of the Mexican tricolor. Like the *cuch* that Redfield described, el baile del cochino was a solemn event, quietly and respectfully observed by the audience; however, it was by no means a religious event. It was a secular ritual honoring México's national patrimony and the state that seeks to preserve it.²⁰

Most importantly, the genteel baile transforms the *k'ub pol* into a performance acceptable to the middle-class aesthete and the foreign tourist by removing the coarse language, grotesque movements, and overt sexual humor found in the latter. It is a transformation in no way different from the aesthetic transformation of carnival described by Bakhtin in *Rablais and his World*, a bourgeois reinterpretation in which the coarse humor of the French peasantry was reduced to bare mockery by Voltaire and eventually sanitized by pious French Abbés.

The influence of carnival forms, themes and symbols on eighteenth-century literature is considerable. But this influence is formalized; carnival is merely an artistic means made to serve aesthetic aims. . . . Voltaire uses carnival forms for satire which still preserve its universality and its philosophy, laughter is reduced to bare mockery. Such is precisely the famous “laughter of Voltaire”; its force is almost entirely deprived of the regenerating and renewing element. . . . In his *Modernized Rabelais* the Abbe Marsy not only stripped the novel's language of its dialect and archaic forms, but also mitigated the book's indecencies. The Abbe Perraud went even further when he published in 1752 . . . the *Oeuvres Choiesies*. All that was . . . indecent was removed from this selection. (Bakhtin 1984:118–9)

Indeed, current attempts to cleanse the *k'ub pol* can be seen as a continuation of a more general effort to tame religious celebrations throughout the peninsula. Summarizing the work of Oliver de Casares, Rugeley notes that in the early part of the nineteenth century religious festivals still contained a great deal of trenchant, political humor. Processions included “*gigatonas* . . . giant two-man costumes associated with the Carnival of Vera-Cruz,” which were sometimes used to poke fun at hypocrites within the church.²¹ As Rugeley adds, however, “the real stars . . . were the *diabetes* [devils], the virtually naked men who painted themselves from head to toe in black and yellow paint, wore horns and carried large whips. These pranced their way through the parade gyrating, leering, leaping and pouncing, and dealing out whiplashes to anyone who appeared insufficiently reverent” (2001b:90). Within a few decades, however, most of these figures had disappeared. The *gigatonas* reportedly disappeared in 1812, the *diabetes* were not seen after 1827, and the Maya dancers departed a couple of years later.

Thus, in the final analysis, whatever else the baile is—an act of preservation, a form of artistic expression, good, clean entertainment, or a boon to local commerce—

through the performer's attempts to cleanse the k'ub pol, it becomes the most recent attempt, conscious or unconscious, to bolster the colonial-era distinction between a primitive, untamed Maya hinterland (San Bernardo) and a civilized, semiurban mestizo community (Maxcanu). It is also an expression of power and control. As Bauman and Briggs note, the "decontextualization and reconstruction of performed discourse bear upon the political economy of texts and power. Performance is a mode of social production . . . To decontextualize and recontextualize a text is thus an act of control" (1990:76)

Conclusion

Interpreting the *cuch* and its transformations is a complex task, but one that provides several lessons in ethnographic interpretation as well as a better understanding of the annual *fiesta* and its place in regional politics. The first lesson, obvious to some, but one that bears repeating, is that the performance itself is an act of interpretation, one that receives close public scrutiny and, thus, provides an opportunity for demonstrating conformity or making provocative statements, not to mention making money. The annual *fiesta* is the mass media of the poor.

The second lesson concerns the complications introduced by the second-line interpreter, the ethnographer or folklorist, especially when he or she essentializes a particular performance or becomes aligned with a particular group of performers. While Redfield clearly favored the more sober, "Catholic" interpretation of the *cuch* in Chan Kom, folklorists such as Pérez Sabido maintained that bawdy, heterodox performances of the k'ub pol are among Yucatán's most "traditional" performances. Neither writer, unfortunately, recognized the potential for political satire, a third option illustrated in accounts left by Villa Rojas and Pacheco Cruz.

Through these latter texts, we begin to recognize the dialectical relationship between different performances. Rablesian laughter is the overwhelming sentiment at many village *fiestas*. It is, however, by no means universal. Were it not for the more stolid, religious performances described by Redfield and others, the rich parody that characterizes the San Bernardo and Tusik performances would be difficult to sustain. Parody would be reduced to simple burlesque. By the same token, it would be wrong to view the more aesthetically pleasing *baile del cochino* as a completely distinct form, or as the end product of an evolutionary trend toward commercial culture. This enactment or entextualization, found primarily in large towns and cities, ultimately depends on the crude, peasant humor of the rural *hacienda*, because the authenticity and value of the *baile* is based on the assumption—sometimes stated, sometimes not—that it is a faithful reproduction of the k'ub pol.

Notes

1. In Yucatán, *cofradías* are generally referred to as *gremios* (guilds), reflecting the fact that these lay religious organizations were originally organized according to occupation or profession.

2. The *jarana* is a folk dance that was popular among Yucatán's creole population in late colonial times and continues to play a prominent role in the village *fiesta*. In the peninsula, the *jarana* has two common

variants, a slow waltz choreographed in 3/4 time similar to the *Jota Argonesa* and a livelier dance in 6/8 time that descends from the fandango of Andalusia. Although the jarana clearly derives from the Spanish *jota*, Yucatecan writers have been quick to note that the dance contains several aboriginal traits. The rigid vertical position of the torso, the relative absence of arm movements, and the marked hieratism of the dance are all said to distinguish the former from the latter. The musical accompaniments, appropriately known as “mestizo sonnets” (*sones mestizos*), show even more aboriginal influence. In fact, according to Pérez Sabido (1983), none of the instruments that originally accompanied the *jota*—guitar, violin, castanets, cymbals—are used by contemporary *jaranero* musicians. Nowadays, a typical ensemble contains two trombones, two clarinets, two trumpets, a tenor saxophone, a bass, and a *huero* (a native percussion instrument made of corrugated wood and scraped with a stick). Other native percussion instruments, such as the *rascabuche* and *zacatan*, are also sometimes used. The thematic content of the mestizo son also demonstrates Maya influence, especially the indigenous love of wildlife. Among Yucatán's more popular jaranas, one finds titles such as “*El Chom*” (the vulture), “*El Pichito*” (the blackbird), “*La Xk'uluch*” (the cockroach), and “*El Xulub*” (the ant).

3. See also Bent's more recent study, “Three Green-Eyed Monsters: Acting as Applied Criticism in Shakespeare's *Othello*” (1998).

4. Although it remains a pervasive feature of Meso-American ethnography, the idea of a fixed distinction between the sacred and the profane has been widely criticized. For example, in *Of Wonders and Wise Men*, Terry Rugeley argues that it is no “simple matter to pick apart the sacred from the secular. Terms like ‘sacred’ and ‘secular’ present a false duality here. . . . It is not hard to see a joyous worldliness in the pious traditions of old México” (2001b:96). For a similar analysis see Enrique Gil Calvo (1991).

5. In the San Bernardo performance, they were effigies of the hacienda owner and his wife.

6. Although the capital-intensive henequén plantation of northwest Yucatán is properly distinguished from the less capital-intensive corn and cattle hacienda of the colonial era (and other regions in the contemporary era), I have used the two terms interchangeably in referring to the Las Palmas Hacienda of San Bernardo. Although Las Palmas was most recently a large henequén plantation, locals have always referred to it as a hacienda. Moreover, the term “hacienda” is used to designate the juridical status of a community, as well as a type of agricultural enterprise. Whereas *pueblos* and *villas* (villages and towns) are autonomous, self-governing units, settlements categorized as haciendas are not. San Bernardo, much to the chagrin of its inhabitants, remains a hacienda in the latter sense.

7. Here I should note that my observation of the San Bernardo k'ub pol was not a chance occurrence. San Bernardo is a mere five kilometers from Maxcanu, my primary field site, and several of the participants as well as many of the fiesta goers live or have close relatives in Maxcanu. Therefore, I was made aware of the fiesta early on and discussed the performance with many Maxcanu residents, including some erstwhile performers, before making the trek to San Bernardo. I also visited the San Bernardo museum on at least one occasion prior to attending the k'ub pol. Although the k'ub pol is a spectacle worthy of attention in its own right, I was initially drawn to the performance because of a more general interest in popular religion and the often contentious relationship between the clergy and lay religious organizations (e.g., *cofradías* or *gremios*). The exchange about my sexual interest in the pig provides a good taste of the teasing and joking that surround preparations for the event. It was also, undoubtedly, a test of my linguistic prowess. My reputation as a good Maya speaker generally preceded my arrival at a new location, and, invariably, someone was curious to know how much I actually knew. In fact, Yucatecans, as other Mexicans, often refer to linguistic competence as the “ability to defend oneself.” Moreover, because many of the gringos who roam the backwaters of Yucatán are Christian missionaries, the sexual jest may have been an attempt to figure out what species of gringo I was. The “*evangelicos*,” as they are called, generally do not like to engage in such crass discussions.

8. The practice of inviting a priest to say mass but limiting his role has, according to Terry Rugeley, a long tradition in Yucatán: “Peasants occasionally used priests to sanctify the icons, but still succeeded in keeping them at arm's distance . . . his [the priest's] role extended no further than saying an hour of mass while the full range of cult activities extended over whole days and nights” (2001b:131–2). The clergy, for their part, have been wary of the *cuch* for more than a century. “The *kuuch* [sic] ceremony was troubling to the religious authorities, both for its excess of drinking and its resistance to elite control . . . The

cura of Chancernote found kuuches particularly bothersome during the constitutional crisis [of 1812?], when Maya peasants shed all inhibitions in the observance of these ceremonies" (Rugeley 2001b:126).

9. As Redfield and Villa Rojas note, "A *noox* is a smaller fowl put with a larger one to complete the offering. Such a pair often makes up the gift to the gods. Generally, *noox* is something supplied to support or complete another larger than itself, in order that the other might not fall or fail. A piece of stone or wood set under the leg of a table to keep it from toppling, is *noox* . . . The Governor does not fail because he has many *noox*" (1990 [1934]:131).

10. This enduring hatred is, perhaps, best captured in Santiago Pacheco Cruz's popular drama, *Justicia Proletaria* (1936), in which the hacienda foremen, or *mayokol*, are forced to take refuge in the main house of the plantation while an angry mob calls for their blood. Written at the height of the Cardenist agrarian reform, these dramas were not only intended to entertain Maya villagers, but to remind them of the things about the old plantation system they most disliked, so they would be more inclined to support Cardenist political initiatives.

11. Pacheco Cruz writes, "It ran something as follows. A group of hacienda residents, for example, *which is where the ritual was done*, elected as 'deputies' a patron or matron to appropriately carry out the fiesta; and from the home of the chief deputy, they carried out the head in procession to the main house i.e., the house of the hacienda's owner" (in Rugeley 2001a:189; emphasis added).

12. *Balche* is a type of beer made from the bark of the *Lonchocarpus* tree and is used in a variety of Maya healing and propitiatory rites.

13. See Irwin Press's study of Pustunich, Yucatán, for more discussion of priestly abuses during the height of the henequén era (1977).

14. In the *Diccionario Maya Cordemex*, the term *che' che'* is defined as "something raw, neither roasted, nor boiled, nor fried, nor stewed" (Barrera Vasquez 1980:86). The adjective is also used to describe fruit that is not fully mature.

15. In a report published by the International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs in November 1973 (Document 15), Alicia Barabas and Miguel Bartolomé charged the Mexican government with ethnocide for their role in the development of a hydroelectric power plant in Oaxaca and the relocation of the Chinantec. In the report, the two Argentine anthropologists state, "The aim of this report is to call attention to a program of ethnocide which is being applied to ethnic minorities in México as part of a policy of capitalist development being carried out by the Mexican government through regional development agencies. It can be shown that ethnocidal policies of these agencies have an intimate relationship with the broad economic and political goals" (1979:3). For a different view, see Aguirre Beltran's article entitled "Etnocidio en México: Una Denuncia Irresponsable" (1975).

16. In 1987, for example, the National Institute for Adult Education (Instituto Nacional para la Educación Adulto, or INEA), a subdivision of SEP, published a colorful, 340-page textbook for teaching reading and writing in Maya, something that would have been unheard of just a generation ago. Similarly, in recent years, the Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI) has made a concerted effort to revalidate indigenous medicine, especially herbal cures, despite strong opposition from certain sectors of the medical profession. In addition to setting up an herb garden in front of the INI outpost near Maxcanu, the local office organized a forum in which healers were encouraged to present their most effective herbal remedies. To emphasize the official character of the forum, a panel of dignitaries—which included Governor Manzanilla Schafer, municipal presidents from several nearby towns, and a number of high-ranking INI officials—were invited to address the audience. Doctors from all the nearby social security clinics were obligated to attend.

17. An *alpargata* is a thick-soled, white sandal that is worn on special occasions throughout the Yucatán. The thickness of the heel was formerly a measure of one's social standing.

18. Literally "three," the term *terno* refers to a traditional dress with three rows of embroidery, one at the collar, a second at the ankles, and a third on a cloth inlay that crosses the hips.

19. In his chapter "Voices In and About Popular Religion: The Competing Constructions of Participants and 'Authorities,'" Hervik provides a similar example of how the *k'ub pol* or *okostah pol* has been appropriated and recontextualized by the local bourgeoisie. Although there are many different enactments of the *k'ub pol* in Oxkutzcab, the performance Hervik describes has been controlled for decades by one patron, the widow of "an extremely powerful businessman and . . . one of the richest people in Oxkutzcab"

(1999:141). In fact, according to Hervik, poor residents of Oxkutzcab now feel excluded from this event: "Several poor families told me that they participated in the past . . . but the Okosta Pol now carried on by Doña María is perceived to be exclusively for those who have money, or who are her personal friends and family. Moreover, these families argue that the fact that the image of the child Jesús is adorned with golden jewelry and that the participants wait until the next day before they eat the pig's heads are signs that show an exclusive celebration of rich people and this has altered the nature of the celebration to the point that they no longer care to participate" (143–4). More importantly, though, like Don Ponso of Maxcanu, Dzul Ek, a school principal from Mani and the son-in-law of the patron, has helped transform the k'ub pol from a ritual performance to a theatrical production worthy of Oxkutzcab's middle-class social clubs. As Hervik writes, "I first experienced this decontextualization at the annual party of one of Oxkutzcab's social clubs [Sociedades, or Clubes de Coreografico], the Bella Epoca. On this occasion, Ek mobilized part of the local Maya theatre group to perform a small portion of the *Okosta Pol* to a large audience. It took place in a confined area of the park and, thus, was open to spectators while sheltering club members. . . . In all these cases, however, the *Okosta Pol* is no longer a traditional practice as it is separated from its original context and recreated in a condensed version in theatrical productions" (148–9).

20. In their study of the annual fiesta of Hunucma, Fernandez Repetto and Negroe Sierra make a similar observation about the incorporation of nationalist icons in popular religious observances. In addition to noting the presence of colored flags that "reproduce the colors and the disposition" of the Mexican flag, the two authors note the presence of the ubiquitous Mariachi band, and ironically, perhaps, locals decked out in Aztec dress. Having contemporary Maya dress up like pre-Columbian Aztecs may seem like an odd way of bolstering the modern nation-state, yet it makes sense if one remembers that the Aztecs inhabited the center of political power while the Maya have subsisted at the periphery of a succession of precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial states (1997). For a discussion of the mariachi band as a national symbol, see Napolitano's recent ethnography, *Migrants, Mujercitas, and Medicine Men* (2002).

21. Rugeley notes that one of the gigatonnes was the heretic Ecolompadio, a Swiss theologian named Johann Hausschien, 1482–1531, who spoke out of "both sides of his mouth." When speaking with Catholics, he led them to think he was Catholic, and when dealing with Protestants, he pretended he was one of them (2001b:90).

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