

Maya Scenarios: Indian Stories In and Out of Contexts

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I was invited to talk about *Mayab Bejlae: Yucatan Today* because, I suppose, I am a Maya Indian. In this context of anthropology, I am the right person. Not only am I Maya, I am also an anthropologist. I have been asked to present here the paper that I “delivered” there, that is, to represent again those stories of being Maya. But in writing here, I will, like a good Indian, use only smoke signals to “tell” you what I said. Here, in this context of a smoking mirror, I want to dialogue with you stories of dialogues about Dialogical Anthropology and of dialogues with other Maya Indians. Maya Indians, however, who are not so “good”—that is, persons who are not such good examples of the proper and correct “Indian.” Maybe I am not such a “good” anthropologist, either. But this, I think, is a problem beyond my control, because Maya today—like the Maya in the colonial period—are, it seems, unruly and always threatening rebellion.

Gerald Vizenor wrote that Native American Indians are the stories of this continent and that their stories are the temporary instances of their presence. For him, the names *Native* and *American* express what he calls the historical creases or folds of cultures. *Indian* insinuates the obvious simulation and ruse of colonialism. He argues that “Indian is an occidental misnomer, an overseas enactment that has no referent to real native cultures or communities” (Vizenor 1999:i). Thus, the Good Indian is the one that feigns “death” within the colonialist portraits of Indianness. The Bad Indian, like Russell Means (Vizenor 1999), escapes, discards, and distorts those portraits.

Along the line of this crease, this article narrates a few stories of two *Maya-Yucatec Indians*. These two, however, do have referents in “real” communities that embody the inconstancy of Maya cultures and identities and their construction. These are communities over there in the stories of the dialogues that I signal by smoke here in this context of anthropology and ethnography.

While writing these stories, I began to question how is it that what appears to be so natural to me and other lifelong residents of Xocenpich Yucatan, including my friend Francisco, is actually quite accidental; and that what appears so fortuitous is actually quite motivated, shaped and determined by hidden reasons. The following stories are ethnographic accounts that express certain instances that appear to be segmented when narrated, but unfragmented when we keep our mind on them. This paper is also an attempt to understand the phenomenon of multiple identities through the dialogues between Francisco and I. Our conversations are more than verbal utterances that can be copied on paper as written “voices” and representations. They

constitute, as is indicated below, the sound of our own echoes and the reverberations of our own voices. This “ethnography” is a dialogue between Francisco and I, a conversation between us in which the Native Maya Indian is not the subject that is represented, but rather one that represents ethnography as the subject of itself.

In this context, I should explain my use of the English word “scenario.” I use it as the translation of the Spanish word *escenario*. This word has many meanings that I am referencing through its use. These include the ideas of social situation, social landscape, and context. It also invokes theatrical notions of stage, setting, staging, scene, action. In short, scenario is perhaps an incorrect translation of the Spanish *escenario* but it serves to situate, locate and contextualize dialogues in Maya in the context of the English language. And, as William Hanks (1990) has pointed out in his linguistic study of deixis, we Maya speakers always reference the discrete space and time of our conversations.

Momentarily Present

“My name is Francisco Cen Kú.... What did you say? I cannot hear you.... Oh, how old am I? I believe that I am 48 years old. I knew it well before, but the hurricane Gilbert (1988) stole me the age, the time and the roof of my home.... *Cotz* [my nickname in Xocenpich and that means: the tail of the rabbit] why do you ask me those things, if you already know who I am?”

The scenario in which the events described in this paper occur is Xocenpich, a small, rural community in the state of Yucatán, México. Francisco Cen Kú and I, Juan Castillo Cocom, do not perceive space, time or our lives as an “ethnographic field,” but rather as a locality where conversations, stories, memories, actions and interactions deny power, control, and victimization.

“After so much study are they going to graduate you as a *chismoso* [gossiper]?” Francisco asked me with an air of disbelief. “I thought that you would serve for something better in this town.” Francisco was putting in doubt the usefulness that I as an anthropologist might have in our community. He was also guessing, I presume, that our interaction during several months of fieldwork was converting our friendship into a relationship of anthropologist/other. Yet, I was expecting the opposite: that it would bolster our *amistad* [friendship.] I was hoping that my research was not going to be guided by the notion of “other” but instead by how cultural observations continuously retell a story about the dialectics of self and culture (Neumann 1996). Naively, I assumed that I was replacing the dialectics of “anthropologists/other” by the dialectics of “self/culture.”

Alternative Speeches: Construction and Deconstruction of Multiple Identities

My intention is to construct the idea of multiple identities in the cultural imaginary of Xocenpich by employing tools such as dialogical anthropology and the historical school of cultural analysis (Castañeda 1996). On the one hand, dialogues among actors empower their cosmovision as an alternative way to break the hegemony of social researchers such as anthropologists. On the other hand, dialogues reveal the perception that Xocenpicheños (inhabitants of Xocenpich) have of their community's own history. It shows the way in which they look upon their own past from an angle that contrasts the cartographic and the historiographic data founded in this research. Their memory does not include a list of its first inhabitants whose names are rolled up in a paper and put inside a bottle, by someone whose logic does not enter into anthropological knowledge, then buried into a wall of the old Catholic church of the town.

Our stories help me to think about the limitations of dialogical anthropology and to notice that anthropological dialogue is sometimes a conversation among voiceless and deaf actors, *un diálogo de sordomudos*. This situation excludes the possibility of trapping the magic reality that according to Gabriel García Márquez (1979) does not require another invention or utopia; it only requires the desire of being included in the true concert of voices.

Anthropological theories about the Maya, as well as other Indigenous groups throughout Latin America, have derived from premises of binary oppositions such as Maya versus *dzul*—roughly understood as ‘white male’ (Flores Torres 1997, Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993, Sullivan 1991, Quintal Martín 1990, Bartolomé 1988, Montalvo Ortega 1988, Paoli and Montalvo 1987, Farriss 1984, Favre 1984, Morley 1983, Gobierno del Estado Yucatán 1979, Bastarrachea Manzano 1978, Reed 1976, González Navarro 1970, Roys 1957, Redfield 1941.) Explanations, interpretations and analyses based on binary oppositions place indigenous people and non-indigenous people in different, exclusive, antagonistic and irreconcilable social structures. This is not to say that “both” social groups live in perfect harmony with each other. In fact, conflict has been always present between them.

Additionally, it is not to neglect the existence of these groups. Undoubtedly, they exist and are part of the social scenario, but it is one thing to acknowledge their existence and another to contend or to imply that each group is constituted by a homogenized mass of individuals. Furthermore, the bipolar conception maintains that each of these structures has a hierarchy of its own that determines their inter-social relationships. Hence from this perspective, “indigenous peoples” are only one “pole” opposing the “non-indigenous peoples” of the other “pole.” The question that presents itself is: Which indigenous peoples? Which non-indigenous peoples? This illustrates

the inherent dangers of homogenizing diverse and distinct indigenous or non-indigenous peoples.

It is difficult to continue talking about an indigenous México and a non-indigenous México. Nowadays, at least in the case of Yucatán, it would be very difficult to say who is Maya and who is not Maya. Even though Bonfíl Batalla (1994) talks about self-ascription to an ethnic group, no one can claim to be completely isolated from the influences of cultural and ethnic transformation. Which raises the question: to which group should I self-ascribe?

Ethnography and Dialogic Anthropology

Historically, the character of ethnographic writing has received very little attention. The assumption was that “writing up” research was relatively straightforward, a matter of general writing skills. This situation has changed dramatically. The narration and employment of ethnographic practices have been problematized by reflexive ethnographies written primarily in the last fifteen years under the epistemological and methodological pressures of phenomenology, critical theory, interpretivism, and particularly, postmodernism.

Interest in ethnographic rhetoric (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Atkinson 1983, 1990, 1992; Ellis and Bochner 1996) has often been associated with criticism of conventional forms of anthropological and sociological writing on philosophical and political grounds, and with the development of “experimental” forms (cf. Ellis and Bochner 1996; Crapanzano 1986). The focus should include the anthropological method, the “dialogical” relationship between ethnographer and informants (Tedlock 1995a), and not least the consequences of ethnographic fieldwork for the individual self of the anthropologist.

Mannheim and Tedlock (1995: 8-9) refer to the ontological sense of dialogue. They assert that linguistic and cultural patterns and social relations are not regenerated with every interaction; rather every interaction occurs within specific sociohistorical and institutional contexts. Mannheim and van Vleet (1998) differentiate between four levels of dialogism in Southern Quechua narrative: formal dialogue, embedded discourse, intertextual dialogue and participation format. (i) Formal dialogue is conversational narrative between participants, as distinct from monological narratives (which the authors claim to have fallen prey to in their original misinterpretation of Quechua conversation). (ii) Embedded discourse is directly related to Bakhtin’s (1981) notion of citation in relation to the written work of an author appropriating words as one’s own, but in the context of conversational and oral narrative. (iii) The term intertextual dialogue is borrowed from Julia Kristeva (1984, 1982). She maintains that all significations are composed of semiotic and symbolic elements, where intertextuality is used to designate the transposition of one or more systems of

signs on to another, accompanied by a new enunciative and denotative position. (iv) Finally, participation format is used to articulate a particular relationship between storytelling, the ethnographer and the intertextual network within which narrative is understood.

According to Tedlock (1991b), ethnographies are not the final product in themselves—as they are considered in analogical anthropology. For him, ethnography is more like a disclosure stemming from dialogues in which the re-invention of culture is done by both sides of a dialogue, namely the anthropologist and the one or ones who are not anthropologists. Ethnography then is no longer the anthropologist's sole interpretation, analysis, or reflection on the "object," but more the result of a dialogue among the parts involved. Nevertheless, Tedlock (1995c) points out the risk of dialogues becoming monologues, confessional, autobiographical, and authoritarian.

For Clifford (1986), when writing self-reflexive "fieldwork accounts" that he defines as a subgenre of ethnography, the observer becomes as much a part of the account as the observed, and vice versa. To him, this new form of ethnography has the characteristics of fiction, autobiography, ironic self-portraiture, and specific instances of discourse. It digresses from other ways of doing ethnography in that neither does it consider itself as a representation of sources from "informants," nor does it place itself in an authorial position. Its contribution is best considered as "fragments among fragments" (Clifford 1986:14). This "new ethnography" is contextually reciprocal, polyphonic, historical, and intersubjective. These interpersonal dialogues are between subjects that see and are seen, "evade and probe back" and, most of the time, are in relations of power.

Neumann (1996) points out that in alternative ethnographic writing there is an identification between the writer and the story that is being written. This form of writing breaks with authoritative models of ethnography. Its aim is to focus on "how cultural observations continuously retell a story about the dialectics of self and culture," (Neumann 1996) pointing out that conventional ethnography has looked in different directions guided by the notion of the "other." It aims to replace the dialectic of anthropologists/other with the dialectic of self/culture.

For Neumann, the trend in these alternative ethnographic writings is a rhetoric of desire which implicates the notion of "us" in "them" and the notion of "them" in "us"; it is an imaginative discourse. Everybody occupies a place in the stories, and I can imagine myself as part of their world too. The ethnographer is continuously reminding us that the border is always with us and within us. According to him, their accounts, compiled through the collection of artifacts and stories, show us how we mark and cross those lines as we seek to understand the dialectics of self and culture.

Sunday...Talking to Myself

“Juan, please could you take me to Chichén Itzá? I’m scared that I may die without ever visiting that place built by the *antiguos*” (in archeological terms: the Pre-Hispanic Maya people) Enriqueta asked me.

“Yes, I will take you there on Sunday”¹

Eight o’clock in the morning. Francisco and his wife, Enriqueta, their children, and I are waiting for the gate of the archaeological site of Chichén Itzá to open. Meanwhile, I start talking to myself. ‘It is ironic,’ I thought, ‘that she has never visited the archeological site; Xocenpich, is only five miles away... If her ancestors built the place why can she only visit it on Sundays?’ It is more ironic that I am in charge of explaining to them their “own history” [is it their own history or the one that was constructed over them?] simply because I am the “expert” on the topic. Me? An expert? Ja, ja, ja, ja (the sound of laugh in Spanish, in English I suppose is ha, ha, ha, ha.) Yes, I am the expert; I learned “the” history of the Maya in the canons of academia in a Mexican and an American University.

Nevertheless, I was aware that all the books about “The Maya” were written by non-Maya people. In a way, I thought, maybe this is better—I have seen books written by Maya scholars and I think that they are really bad translations of academic thought. Yet, I was about to narrate stories to Enriqueta and her family which, in the eyes of academia, were true, objective, analytical, reflexive, critical, subjective, intersubjective, translated and much more. I felt trapped in a dilemma: Should I tell them the truth? Should I have told them that what I knew was the interpretation of our others? Those who observe us, study us, and spend months doing their field-work among us; those who call themselves our “friends” while in our towns, and then depart to disappear forever? Disappear, as Ruth Behar (1997) says, into their offices, to compare and discipline what they call “data” with the theories and works of people like Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Bordieu or Foucault for the benefit of “others” still? Should I tell them the truth? I suppose I cannot, because I too am an observer, and a vulnerable one at that.

Is this a DIALOGUE? This paper is supposed to be one between Francisco and myself, with people of my town, but from whom I somehow feel I have become distanced. I guess they feel the same—after all this is a dialogue, is it not? In theory this writing is a dialogue about life, about the lives of two Maya Indigenous individuals who at times identify each other as Xocenpicheños. How? When we talk about Xocenpich while we drink Coca-Cola, while we laugh, while we cry, while we remain silent. And yet, sometimes it seems to us that we belong to many different worlds. All those ideas came to mind. Then, I heard a distant voice. The guard was

shouting in English, “Welcome to Chichén Itzá!” The gate was opened. At that precise moment the question of whether or not to tell them the truth came to mind again. Should I tell them the truth? It was too late.

While I choose to tell stories, Enriqueta spoke the truth out loud.

“**ma’ tin kimi... Ti’a’anen ti’ Chich’e’en Itzhá,**” which in Spanish means *no voy a morir...estoy en Chichén Itzá* (I am not going to die... I am in Chichén Itzá).

Inner Echoes

My favorite coffee shop in Mérida is called Café Express, a place with a cosmopolitan atmosphere where it is possible to meet and interact with people from all over the world. The clientele includes a mix of Germans, Italians, Americans, English, Mexicans, Yucatecans, and Mayas. For me to identify a Maya is far more difficult than to identify the nationality of a tourist. Some waiters at Café Express speak Maya but do not identify themselves as Maya. They call themselves Tixpehualéño, Akeleño, or Ichmuleño, people who came from the towns of Tixpehual, Aké, and Ichmul, Yucatán respectively. Their identity is based on a sense of belonging to their communities rather than an ethnic group. At the same time, they are aware of the other identities that make them multicultural.

Like them, I identify myself first as a Xocenpicheño because I grew up in Xocenpich, and secondly, I self-ascribe to a Maya identity. But my Maya identity is a western invention. By adopting that particular identity, as well as other identities, my ability to be/not be Maya is challenged (who are you vis-à-vis an “audience”?). The waiters of Café Express, Francisco, and I are challenging the notion that we are members of a compact and a homogeneous Mayan group.

As mentioned, analogical anthropology is highly criticized because of its authoritarianism, its emphasis on binary oppositions, and its notion of the “other.” In contrast, dialogical anthropology places great importance on the relationship between the individuals and the anthropologist. However, anthropologists seem to be more interested in “dialoguing” among themselves rather than with the people that they write about. Indigenous people are relegated; they are voiceless and, therefore, we keep treating them as “objects” and “voices,” not as individuals. This is ironic, precisely because it undermines the aim of dialogical discourse. In “our” ethnographies, people are voiceless, just another picture, a simple image, something that simply gives content to our ethnographies and opens the doors of academia for us. How vulnerable we are, how vulnerable we make them!

Awareness of self-identity or self-identities, the various ways in which both Francisco and I assume them within multicultural contexts, leads us along the road to

establishing communication. One dialogue between us was established in my childhood and then was interrupted when I went to study in Mérida, the capital of the Yucatán State. In this city I acquired other identities and had new forms of communication prescribed for me. In my eyes I became distanced from my former identity, almost as if I was ashamed of it. Was I? Meanwhile, Francisco, who stayed home, remained, I thought, the same. Did he? These last two questions, the rupture of communication and the reinstatement of the dialogue, constitute the main subjects of the following stories.

Subsequently, I would like to immerse myself in a dialogue with Francisco.

But is he willing to have a conversation with me? (I get serious.)

I would like to break the authoritative model of ethnography, but can I?

Which “model” does Francisco wants to break? (I laugh.)

I would like to replace the dialectics of anthropologist/other by the dialectics of self /culture, but can I?

What does he want to replace? (I feel ridiculous.)

Xocempich on a Plaque

In the center of the main square in Xocempich, Yucatán, México, there is a small monument with a plaque dated November 20th, 1968, which commemorates the date on which the park was built. It is dedicated not to a national hero, or even to a regional one, but to Dr. Theodore R. Finley and Frances N. Finley, two American missionaries. In front of this monument across from the highway, a Catholic church stands with another plaque embedded in its wall, dated December 8, 1815, marking the date of its construction. One date opposite another, and despite a difference of more than one hundred years between the two, both mark the presence of cultures different from that of the people who have lived in Xocempich since long before either date.

Ironically, it is rare for any visitor to take notice of these plaques. Instead, the visitor would more likely notice the three parabolic antennae on the northern side of the park, atop the roofs of the houses belonging to the wealthiest families in town, the Estrella Ek, and the Haas Mex. The antennae would not amaze anyone. Such items are no longer a source of awe since they are now part of the cultural landscape in Yucatán. The surprise is that there are no surprises because the dynamics of cultural imagery are in constant transformation. Material objects may not surprise visitors, but what might get their attention are the two North Americans buried in the local

cemetery, Dr. Frederick R. Passler and Dr. Norman Riedessel, both Presbyterian missionaries.²

Even though all of these commemoratives are visible plaques, they do not mark the events and people most remembered by the town. For Xocenpich the “plaques” that are remembered are those that commemorate the men and women who left an imprint upon the collective memory of the town. This memory is neither written on stone nor dated and, perhaps, because of this, is difficult to forget. Where are the plaques for Don Atalo Perera? Don Páblo Ek? Doña Domitila Cauich? Don Sabino and Doña Josefa Perera? Don Antonio Cupul? Doña Elsy Perera? Don Agapito Cen? Doña Tránsita Chan? Where are the plaques for so many others? On the tombs in which they rest one can only see small crosses, but no plaques.

I imagine Xocenpich as scenes of people and events that echo their cultures and stories. These represent the inter-connectivity between dissimilar cultures and historical moments. They are a testimony to the myriad unofficial histories that are registered neither in any anthropological study, nor in the ethnocentric interpretations of non-Indigenous writers. Subsequently, this scenario does not echo, does not find its resonance in the collective memory of the men, women, and children of Xocenpich.

Don Atalo Perera, Don Páblo Ek, Doña Domitila Cauich, Don Sabino and Doña Josefa Perera, Don Antonio Cupul, Doña Elsy Perera, Don Agapito Cen, Doña Tránsita Chan, and many others are still a part of the scene and events of Xocenpich. They still echo and find resonance in the collective memory of the people of Xocenpich. Although they have left us, paradoxically, they departed only to remain with us. Hence, in the daily life and imaginary of the townspeople of Xocenpich, they are still present. For example, if one walks slowly, as if distraught, or without spirit, they tell you: “you walk like Don Valuch,” [his real name was Don Valerio Aké]. A young man named Amadeo Cupul Chan, 5’ 9” tall, and 25 years old, was nicknamed, by the young fellows of Xocenpich, “*difunto* (late) Sabino,” in reference to his height and because he had married a very short woman—just as Don Sabino had done. The young fellow had never actually met Don Sabino, because the latter had died more than 30 years before, and yet had “encountered him” through the collective memory and cultural imagery of Xocenpich, not through its commemorative plaques.

Xocenpich in a Bottle

Xocenpich is one of a large number of towns that were destroyed or abandoned during the so-called Caste War during the 19th century. It was well within the area of conflict and suffered severe damage inflicted by the rebels, who destroyed part of the town and burned the Catholic church. It wasn’t until the beginning of the 20th century that the town was repopulated.

The narratives that I have heard through conversations with the oldest inhabitants of this town reinforce the idea that this town was abandoned in that war. Don Fidelio Hau Tun, 77 years old and sacristan of the Catholic church, invited me one afternoon to visit his church. He wanted to show me the exact place where he had buried, in the walls of the church, a bottle containing the names of the people who had helped to reconstruct the church many years ago.

“It is here,” he said.

I just saw a wall. I was expecting to see the bottle, and stupidly asked him if he could show it to me. He stared at me and I confirmed that I was, indeed, very stupid.

“Why do you want to see the bottle?” he asked me.

“Well, I am trying to write something about Xocenpich, and it is important to me to get those names so that I can write them down in my paper.”

“Again?” Don Fidelio replied, “Why? They are already written in the bottle! Why would you like to write their names again?”

I thought ‘True, why do I want to write their names again?’ I had no answers.

And, the bottle? I never saw it, but I saw something more meaningful: Don Fidelio smiling every time he told me, without having to break the walls of the church, the name of each person who had helped to rebuild the church! And what about the names inside the bottle? I didn’t write their names down, but I did learn who they were. Someday when my lost-other (another anthropologist) asks me the same question, I will smile as I repeat each name that is now in the bottle of my memory. I have to admit, Don Fidencio gave me a class in history and anthropology without a blackboard.

Conversations among Ourselves: The Reinstatement of the Dialogue

In Yucatán, one of the most important traditions, rivaling the daily *siesta time*, is to go to the *plaza* or main park of the town to chat, converse and gossip among friends. This social gathering generally happens during the late afternoon, after one has taken a shower and eaten dinner. In Xocenpich, this tradition is religiously observed. The plaza of the town is a mosaic that represents the inter-connectivity between different cultures. Francisco and I sometimes used the *Plaza* as a space for our conversations. At other times, we would converse while waiting under the beating sun for the bus, or while walking to the *tortillería* to buy fresh tortillas. The spaces

and places that constituted our conversations were not simply disposable locales, but ‘temporary’ sites embedded within the process of dialoging with each other while traveling through the experiences of everyday life.

All along these dialogues, Francisco and I were echoing each other, and reverberating events, circumstances, possibilities, actions, interactions, laughs, emotions, tears, sadness, fears, and feelings. Nevertheless, in the travel of quotidian life (as/when) inserted into a multicultural context, our perspectives and our identities were at times dissimilar, antagonistic, and contradictory. These actual circumstances, discourses, feedbacks and the various ways in which Francisco and I assumed our self-identities, lead us along the road to establishing, reestablishing, and continuing communication.

Our dialogue was interrupted during my childhood because I had gone away from my community and entered other “worlds.” In those social spheres I acquired other identities. Or, had I acquired them in Xocenpich, playing with the children of the missionaries, listening to the radio, reading the media? In my eyes I became distanced from my former identity. Had I? In the meantime, Francisco, who stayed in Xocenpich, remained, I thought, the same. Had he? These last two questions, the rupture of communication and the reinstatement of the dialogue, constitute the main subjects of this section. The following are excerpts of many conversations that Francisco and I have had since 1997. I am starting with my inner echoes.

Francisco: Rumors, Gossip And Imagination

October 1999

One way or another, Francisco has always fascinated me. When I was a little boy I was both wary and scared of him, influenced by the things that people were saying about him in Xocenpich, a town where rumor and gossip are as natural as the wind. For example, at the end of the 1960s, when electricity had not yet arrived in Xocenpich, the rumor was that every night, a masked-man, fully dressed in black, would wander around and hide in the town’s darkest corners. There, he waited for a victim not to assault, but rather to scare. The infamous masked-man, according to people, was Francisco. Of course, many children were frightened, including myself. Although I never saw the masked-man, with the mind’s eye of a 10-year-old boy I started seeing Francisco as the masked-man. Besides being wary of him, I completely disliked him because he was not Presbyterian, and that he drank too much alcohol.

Similarly, Francisco told me that he did not like me because I was a rich boy, son of the most respected *dzul* of the town, the Pastor of the Presbyterian church, and, above all, because I had a superiority complex in relation to the other children of

Xocenpich. In this context of mutual rejection, it never crossed my mind that someday we were going to develop a strange friendship. I did not think either that someday I was going to become an alcoholic myself. But, in spite of all, we became good friends. Such is life.

Francisco believes that he is 48 years old but does not know for sure, because he lost all of his identification papers when hurricane "Gilbert" struck the Yucatán Peninsula in 1988. His parents were Don Agapito Cen and Doña María Kú Campos. They had 6 children, Socórro Cen Kú, Genoveva Cen Kú, Filiberto Cen Kú, Candelaria Cen Kú, Francisco Cen Kú and Higinia Cen Kú. Francisco is the fifth child and is married to Enriqueta Chí Xoc.

I was 16 years old and Enriqueta was 14, when we decided to form a family. At that time we did not have enough money to celebrate a proper marriage and therefore decided to run away from our houses, without the permission of our parents. We planned it very carefully; we had to escape at night. We waited until everybody was sleeping in Xocenpich. I took my father's horse, put on his mount, and very quietly I went to her house.... and she was there waiting. Oh! I remember that night! *Había una lluvia que lloviznaba* [it was raining but it was only drizzling.] My heart was beating so fast that even the horse started getting nervous!

We both got on the horse and we escaped as fast as lightening. We ran and ran, and didn't stop until we arrived at X'lubché ['Fallen wood.' A small abandoned ranch, located 2 miles North of Xocenpich], and there, with no witnesses, we consummated our love...3 times.

Meanwhile, back in Xocenpich, there was a public commotion. The gossip reached incredible levels because of what Enriqueta and I had just done. Of course, our parents were very angry with us, as we had just embarrassed them very badly.

After a couple of days in X'lubché, we went back to Xocenpich. As soon as my mother-in-law saw Enriqueta she took a stick and beat her up so badly. I didn't get beat up myself, but my father called the police and I spent a couple of hours in the town jail. That was so embarrassing! After I was released, we built our house and started our own life.

But my mother-in-law was still upset at Enriqueta and kept beating her up, to the point that one day Enriqueta told me, crying: 'You see, Chol, I decided to escape with you, but my mother keeps beating me

up.’ I decided to go and talk to my mother-in-law. I told her: ‘Stop beating Enriqueta, because now she is my wife.’

‘I got to beat her up, so the anger that I feel will vanish,’ she replied.

‘I understand, but you already beat her up so much and so many times... What else do you want?’ I replied.

‘What else do I want? I want to beat you up as well!’ She screamed at me.

She didn’t hit me, but after that conversation with her, she stopped beating Enriqueta.

Nowadays, she is happy with us, and with the 5 grandchildren we gave her she becomes even happier: Inocenta Cen Xoc, Francisco de Asís Cen Xoc, Rosendo Cen Xoc, José Leonardo Cen Xoc and Juan Cen Xoc.

To See And To Be Seen

December 1998

In writing a self-reflexive fieldwork account, I, the observer, become as much a part of the account as the observed, and vice versa. This is to say, I am being observed as well. Hence, although Francisco is not my informant, although I attempted to avoid positioning myself in an authoritative position, I have to recognize that I failed. Nevertheless, our conversations were contextually reciprocal, polyphonic, historical, and intersubjective. We were dialoguing as subjects that see and are seen, evade and probe back, echo, and reverberate with each other.

“Stop asking stupid questions and hold the wheel of this bicycle that I am trying to repair!” Francisco yelled at me. I turned off my tape recorder and held the wheel.

“Francisco, I do not think that these are stupid questions. You know that this is not an interview, I am just recording our conversations,” I replied.

“Is that right? Then, how come I am not recording our conversations? How come, I am not holding a tape recorder myself? Who is holding that machine? Me or you?” Francisco asked me angrily.

"I'm sorry," I said.

"I'm sorry," Francisco said, "It is just that sometimes you treat me as if I was stupid. For example, a minute ago you were asking me to count the number of identities you think you have, and at the same time, you wanted me to tell you how many identities I think I have."

"No, Francisco, I didn't ask you to count them, I just commented that I think that I have many identities, and that you might as well..." I replied.

"Here you go again....!" Francisco said. "Let me be honest with you: You are either going crazy because of the number of books you have read, or, simply you are a hypocrite! I think that you are like the *Talco Dos Caras* [a brand of talcum powder that is fabricated in Mérida. It means 'Two Faces Talcum Powder'] because you don't show your real face, you only show faces that are not your faces. On the one hand you are telling me that you 'feel' Xocempicheño, and on the other, you say that you 'feel' North American. Other times, you 'feel' Yucatec or whatever.... And me? How many identities do I have? Can you count them? Do you think that I am like my hut that has only one room? Or do you think that I am like the Chac-Mol (Red Jaguar, a Maya deity sculpted in a single piece of rock and located in one chamber of the '*Castillo*' of Chichén Itzá)? Listen, Juan, I breathe, I walk, I talk, I repair bicycles, I make *Milpa*, I am a police officer, and I have a family! Are these identities?"

Seeing Ourselves as Xocempicheños

April 1998

Francisco and I have known each other for many years. Although during a period of our lives we did not like each other, we became friends around 25 years ago. Our friendship allows us to have intimate and imaginative conversations in which we both occupy a place in our stories. Our conversations are fragments of Xocempich, embedded in ourselves as we are entrenched in the walls of the historical bottle of "our" town. Yet sometimes we think that we are not welcome in such a vessel.

Sometimes I think that having many identities is an impediment to me fitting into that bottle, that it may cause me to lose sight of the fact that the bottle is itself inserted in the wall of a Spanish Catholic church, which is in and of itself another identity. This is to say, a Xocempicheño identity inserted in a European one.

Furthermore, these identities are at the same time encrusted in a mosaic of identities: the ones represented by plaques, antennas, and burials.

“Chol, do you consider me a Xocenpicheño?”

He looked at me, right to my eyes, and then he asked me, “Do you want the truth, or do you want me to please you?”

“The truth.”

“Well, you know, you’re not from here,” Francisco told me.

“What are you talking about?”

“Well, you were not born here. You were not born here! Are you?”

“That is true, I know that, but I’ve been living in this town for too many, many years.”

“Cotz, you could live an eternity in this town, but you will never be a Xocenpicheño. You must have to be born in this town to be one of us!”

When I am reminded of what my real “status” in Xocenpich is, I get upset and I do not know what to think. But one thing is for sure: it hurts—identity, sometimes, hurts. Many Xocenpicheños reject me, not as a person, but as a Xocenpicheño. I think that is ridiculous because I grew up there, I grew up with them: I speak the same languages, they were my friends, and still they are my friends.

Paradoxically, in Xocenpich I am highly respected, but it is the kind of respect that implies detachment, the kind of respect that hurts. For example, sometimes the oldest people in town, when they see me and before I say something, they salute me with a *Buenos Días* (Good Morning). On first glance, to an outsider this might be fine, but not to me, because I know that: (i) I am younger than them; therefore, I am the one that is supposed to greet them first, and (ii) Generally, they reserve the *Buenos Días* to salute a *dzul*, a white man. But when Xocenpicheños who are not *Dzulo’ob* themselves greet each other, they only say *Días* (without *Buenos*). Under those circumstances, I have to recognize, against my will, that I am *dzul*. Paradoxically, the *Dzulo’ob* are also Xocenpicheños.

A True Xocenpicheño Should Not Write Poetry

August 1998

In the social scene of Xocenpich, Francisco is a Xocenpicheño because he was born in that town, which is the prerequisite for acceptance in the community as one of “ours,” one of “us” and not one of “them.” Nevertheless, in the territory of the “us” he is considered one who is “in-between,” which implies that in the territory of “us” there is a spectrum . This is to say, even though Francisco was born in Xocenpich, paradoxically, he is not regarded as “us” all the time, in his own *pueblo*.

In this context, “our” dialogues are not just conversations between Francisco and I, because dialogues are not only between people but also through people. Hence we are having a conversation with the community of Xocenpich as well: a dialogue in a very fantastic and imaginative way. For example, in talking to an important member of the Presbyterian church and a *verdadera* Xocenpicheña, I mentioned to her that I was writing “something” about Xocenpich and that Francisco was at the center of my writings. She looked at me with incredulity:

Are you writing a book about Francisco? Why he and not someone that has left a positive imprint in this town as Dr. Finley did? Write something on the founding fathers of the Presbyterian church! Come on! You know that Francisco is not a “well-born” Xocenpicheño; I mean he is not an exemplary Xocenpicheño. In this town we all go to a Church, but he never goes to any, perhaps because he drinks too much; he doesn’t have good manners; he doesn’t know how to read and write; he is not truly *príista*; he doesn’t...well, he also behaves like a teenager, what is this thing about playing basketball everyday with people that could well be his grandchildren?

On top of all, he has strange ideas. For example, he told me that he is “half” American, because in the past there were American people living here and today the young people of Xocenpich are bringing in to town ideas that they copy from the American kids that they see in Cancun. Can you believe that he thinks that he is poet? Did you know that he is taping on his tape recorder ‘poems’ and stories that he himself invents? I think he is crazy.

En fin [in short] it is your decision if you want to write about him, but I think that you are making a big mistake. Why don’t you write a book about the Instituto Bíblico del Sureste?

Marlins or Dolphins, Maybe Fishes

March 2000

Dialogues are in and by themselves a fantastic and imaginative tour. They play a key role in the negotiations and renegotiations of identities in a world of multiple identities. When talking to Francisco, our multiple identities emerge as a direct or indirect interaction with people from other cultures, other realities, other voices, sounds, and images. Xocenpicheños like Francisco are not isolated from other worlds—they are part of them, they reinvent them, imagine them, and reproduce them in their quotidian life.

“When are you going to go to Miami?” Francisco asked me.

“In two weeks.”

“Do you like baseball?” he asked me.

“Not really.”

“What! Don’t you like baseball? You have been telling me, all these months that you are a Xocenpicheño, and now you tell me that you don’t like *El Rey de los Deportes* [The King of all Sports]? What kind of Xocenpicheño are you? If you are a Xocenpicheño you got to love baseball! Never mind. As a matter of interest, could you bring me a baseball-cap? I want one of the *Marlines de Miami* [Miami Marlins] because they were the Champions in 1997,” he asked me.

“What about if I bring you one of the *Delfines de Miami* [Miami Dolphins]?” I asked him

“Although, I am perfectly aware that both are fishes, I would rather have one of the Marlines. I don’t like *Futbol Americano* [American Football],” he said.

“No problem, I will bring you one.”

“So, when are you going to finish that thing that you are writing? I mean the book that you are writing about me,” he asked me.

“Very soon,” I replied.

“Hmmm, by the way, don’t you dare write *pendejadas* [In this

context, this term could be translated as trivialities, things with nonsense] when you write about me. Say everything, put all the words that came out of my mouth, including that I “robbed” my mother-in-law because, as you know, I nabbed Enriqueta from her!” Francisco told me.

Francisco said so while he was laughing. I start laughing myself. We both laughed out loud.

Consideraciones

Xocenpich is a metaphor. It is a place with endless dialogues among people and with the spirits of their ancestors who are more alive than dead. It is a space where the contrast between the mosaic of plaques, antennas, burials, and the echoes of the cultures and histories of the Xocenpicheños, is evasive and intangible—especially for those who believe that Xocenpich can be equated as a homogenized “Maya” “pole,” opposed to non-Maya or non-indigenous “pole.”

Dialogical anthropology might be a good way to start to bring back the issue of respect in our writings. This genre of anthropology places great importance on the relationship between the individual and the anthropologist. Such intimate relationships are based on dialogues, which create and establish identifications between the writer and the story that is being written. One inherent risk of a dialogue is that it might turn confessional, autobiographical, and authoritarian. But the major risk is that a dialogue might become a monologue.

In my opinion social scientists seem to be more interested in dialoguing among themselves than with the people about whom they write. In their dialogues, there is a pre-established agenda in which “data” must fit: these are pretend theoretical perspectives (Burawoy 1991:27). When people become “data” or when they become written words in our ethnographies, they become voiceless. One could argue, taking an opposite stand, that in reality we are giving back to them their voices. That is an act of arrogance: who are we “to give” them their own voices? The remnants of paternalism, objectification and authoritarianism are still present in such pretend dialogues. Hence, the dialogue between anthropologists and “their” absent or imaginary interlocutors is, sadly, what I call a “monologic dialogue.” It is a monological dialogue in at least four senses:

- (i) In the process of writing “our” papers, our interlocutors become silent. They become a sort of written record, in which their voice, although presented as “their” voice, is merely a representation of our voices. This representation is often not grounded in the questions “Who?”, “What?”,

“How?”, and “Why?” We, in “normal” circumstances, tend to avoid asking ourselves these elemental questions. Seldom, if ever, do we have the courage to ask ourselves: Am I representing myself? How? Furthermore, how are the people, “our” subjects, representing me? And what do they represent about me? Sadly, in our “fieldwork accounts,” we choose not to take these questions into consideration.

- (ii) In the process of dialoguing with our interlocutors there is a disparity in our relationship; we are still in a position of power. When Francisco requested I turn off my tape recorder and asked to me, “How come I am not recording our conversations?” He was indeed pointing out to me that I was taking the position of a stranger—not an *amigo*—and that his stance was merely to answer my questions. I was overpowering him.
- (iii) In the process of dialoguing we are still authoritarian. Arguing against this idea makes us even more authoritarian because in a true dialogue a degree of humbleness is always welcome. Here I am not referring to dialogues that we had during our fieldwork with our interlocutors but to what comes after the “work” is done. In our relationships with our interlocutors I believe that any anthropologist would put aside such pretenses, but when we interact with our fellow anthropologists, our audiences such as the general public, anthropological meetings, students, the media and friends, we become the authorities on “our” fields. We, as anthropologists, become “the” voice of so many “Franciscos.”
- (iv) It is a monological dialogue, because, as Jauss (1982; 1984) pointed out, dialogical models generally locate the interactive mediation of discourses, texts and traditions in terms of conventional language rather than using discrete imagery. Thus, when indigenous people are presented as and in discrete imagery, they start talking and we can hear them talking. We may even listen to them talking. But whose voices are they? Are not these voices the very smoke signals of good Indians constructed in the Ferris wheel of anthropology?

Now, as I finish my story—*la leña ya se está apagando* (“the firewood is almost finished”)—I want to tell you that as an anthropologist, I feel sympathetic to Enriqueta when she said, “Now I am not going to die... I am in Chichén Itzá.” **Ma’ tin kimi...Ti’a’anen ti’ Chich’e’en Itzhá.** Now that I am published in an anthropology journal, I am not going to die. Here then is my contribution to the historical bottle of Xocenpich.

As I finish this talk, I want to remember to ask you, are you a good listener? Have you read the smoke signals correctly?

Sorry, I have to run now, just like the ancient Maya messengers today.

Notes

¹ Sunday is the only day that it is free to enter. In 2006 it cost around \$10.00 US to visit the archeological site.

² Reverend Passler was a pilot of the Pioneer Mission Agency (PMA), which in Spanish was called *Alas de Socorro* (the Wings of Help), who died in an airplane accident between Progreso and Mérida, in November of 1962. The PMA used their airplanes to transport the Maya obreros (seminarists) to places that were inaccessible by land or by sea. Additionally, the PMA served to transport presbyterian physicians to provide medical services to the people that were living in the most remote rural communities, and, therefore, the PMA built over a hundred landing strips all over the Yucatán Peninsula. In the beginning of the 1960s, at the small airport of Xocenpich, sometimes there were three, or even four, small Cessna airplanes. Dr. Riedessel was a retired Presbyterian priest who arrived in Xocenpich in the 1970s and stayed there until his death in 1984.

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Mayab Bejlae: Yucatan Today

Guest Editors: Beatriz Reyes-Cortés and Timoteo Rodriguez

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