



Elusive unity: factionalism and the limits of identity politics in Yucatán, Mexico

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their primary commodity production (coffee roasting, cocoa processing, etc.) would generate much higher economic returns. Effective regulation of labor practices and provision of social welfare by Southern states, and reregulation of global commodity markets, would be far more effective modes of transferring wealth to Southern nations and producers than labeled Fairtrade.

Many readers will find Sylla's provocative book revealing, if disillusioning. Yet some may also justifiably ask whether what is revealed is in fact a scandal, or merely a familiar parable of the profound limits to achieving social and economic justice through the marketplace. Surely the larger scandal is that all non-market solutions to extreme inequality are ruled off the table in a neoliberal era.

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Elusive unity: factionalism and the limits of identity politics in Yucatán, Mexico, by Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, Boulder, University Press of Colorado, 2014, xv + 203 pp., US\$55.00 (hardcover), ISBN 978-1-60732-238-1

Why has identity politics been tepidly received by the Yucatecan Maya, while it has thrived among the Maya in neighboring Chiapas and Guatemala? Armstrong-Fumero's fine first monograph examines its limited appeal in Yucatan's oft-studied *oriente* (eastern reaches) using original archival research, insights culled from a decade of ethnographic field work and an admirable command of the abundant ethnography of Yucatan.

Chapters 2 to 5 focus on the formative postrevolutionary period (c. 1920–1940), when the Partido Socialista del Sureste (the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution's regional franchise since 1928) organizers, agrarian engineers and federal teachers sought to spread Western notions of urbanism, citizenship, work and recreation through education and land reform. The revolutionary project's reception was uneven. The state's agrarian reform did 'invoke a series of concepts [among the Maya] that resonated with the modernizing project of Revolutionary Mexico', above all the imperative 'to foment' (Yucatec Maya *póomentar*) land by clearing forest and farming it (33). Land reform gave the post-revolutionary state a lasting if fragmented base of support by instilling a corporatist indigenous identity.

At the same time, postrevolutionary state formation provoked divisions within and among Maya peasant communities, and this legacy of factionalization helps explain why forging a monolithic Yucatec Maya identity has proved to be so difficult up to the

present day. Two violent events epitomize widespread conflicts during the Age of Politics (*U epoca le políticao*) (35): the 1921 Burning of Yaxcabá by Socialists, and the assassination of federal teacher Felipe Alcocer in June 1933 in Xcalakdonot. Heroic socialist (and white) leader Felipe Carrillo Puerto (governor, 1922–1923) promised to wage a class war against the rich, but the Battle of Yaxcabá actually pitted poor Maya peasants against each other. In fact, some Maya leaders who led the assault were later accused of being predatory petty bosses. Similarly, Armstrong-Fumero's research reveals that official accounts distorted the murder of Alcocer. The young educator was not a hero martyred by backwards peasants. Instead, he lost his life in a skirmish provoked by his imposition of a labor draft to support his school following national mandates.

To explore why identity politics has floundered in Yucatan even as it flourished elsewhere in Latin America in the last two decades, the book's final three chapters focus on the widening cultural gap between a dwindling peasantry largely ignored by a neoliberal state and the growing, prosperous middle class of Pisté – owners of the restaurants, stores, hotels and souvenir workshops servicing the steady stream of international tourists ferried to neighboring Chichén Itzá from Cancun. This self-confident bourgeoisie values elements of Mayaness, and does not need to Hispanicize to rise socially. However, as 'postpeasants' they lack the *milperos*' 'vernacular knowledge' (26, 34–35, 39) of landscapes and agriculture often considered essential to Maya identity. In Chapter 7, Armstrong-Fumero explores this divergence by carefully examining three distinct discourses of 'culture': agrarian corporatist, which was fostered by land reform and the extension of federal education into small communities in the 1920s and 1930s; progressive, which equates indigeneity with a lack of formal education and manners (and long predates the Revolution); and patrimonialist, which anticipates the multiculturalist (and tourist industry's) notion of an essentialized cultural heritage. Plurinationalism, he argues, fails to reckon with the quotidian presence of all three.

In Chapter 8, Armstrong-Fumero explores the ironies displayed at the Second Linguistic and Cultural Encounter of the Mayan People. His description of New Age h-men (Maya ritual practitioners) blessing corn porridge with purified water (166) for the convenience of visiting dignitaries recalls the irreverent and perceptive ethnographic research of Quetzil Castañeda and Juan Castillo Cocom. His sympathetic portrayal of Maya vendors often derided as spoiling Chichén Itzá contrasts sharply with his telling analysis of the elite Barbacho family, which has long dominated commerce surrounding the archaeological zone yet maintained a favorable reputation through philanthropy and shrewd marketing (rebranding an upscale hotel an 'eco-resort', 164).

Armstrong-Fumero's excellent book merits a careful reading by students of the modern Maya for several other reasons. Like Paul Eiss's *In the name of the Pueblo*, it reveals the value of combining archival research with ethnography. This compound methodology allows the author to show that the muted reception of pan-Maya and plurinationalist activism in Yucatán is due in no small part to a discourse of corporatist indigeneity shared by politicians and Maya peasants for almost a century. Moreover, rather than studying just one community, Armstrong-Fumero conducted field work in at least seven sites in the *oriente*, which captured the fissioning and flow of populations in the 1920s and 1930s, as well as the wide impact of tourism along the Chichén Itzá–Cancun axis in the neoliberal era. The concept of the *oriente* is a productive one, but as an historian of the 1920s and 1930s I would argue that inter- and intra-communal conflicts in that era were often driven by divisions within the Socialist Party and the regional political economies of corn and alcohol centered on Valladolid. That said, this is a minor concern. Armstrong-

Fumero has given Mayanists significant new ways of understanding the slippery subject of modern Maya identity, and scholars of plurinationalism quite a lot to think about.

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Commerce and the countryside. The rural population's involvement in the commodity market in Flanders, 1750–1910, by Wouter Ronsijn, Ghent, Academia Press, 2014, 359 pp., €40 (paperback), ISBN 978-90-382-2103-8

The rural history of the former country of Flanders (Belgium) has been intensively studied, in the last few decades especially by Ghent professors Erik Thoen and Eric Vanhaute and their collaborators, resulting in an impressive series of journal articles and monographs. A recent addition to that series is Wouter Ronsijn's book, which is mostly based on his 2011 Ghent PhD thesis. Ronsijn focuses on the sandy inland part of Flanders, of which the rural economy has been described by Erik Thoen as a 'commercial survival economy', characterised by a predominance of small-scale farming on units that were in most cases too small to guarantee the peasant family's survival. In order to survive, peasants therefore needed additional income, which they gained through wage labour or from proto-industry, especially linen production (Thoen 2001).

Peasants in the commercial survival economy of inland Flanders had to get involved in forms of exchange, and Ronsijn's monograph explores the implications of what this meant. A central question is whether peasants were involved in commodity markets (not markets in the theoretical meaning of the meeting place of supply and demand, but real, 'open markets', a physical marketplace where goods were offered for sale) and, if so, how? Ronsijn answers this by comparing the catchment areas of two small cities in inland Flanders – Oudenaarde and Sint-Niklaas – in the period 1750–1910. Concentrating on these small areas permits him to analyse market involvement thoroughly using the rich archives of the area as well as sources like newspapers. In this sense, *Commerce and the countryside* is a typical product of the 'Ghent school', theoretically well informed but also especially based on thorough and impeccable empirical research.

Ronsijn's book shows how valuable a comparative approach in historic research can be, even though he only compares two small areas within a region that might seem homogeneous to outsiders. A closer look, however, reveals considerable variation: at the market of Oudenaarde, only a tiny part of the harvest of its catchment area was sold, whereas at the Sint-Niklaas market a large part of the harvest was traded. This variation can be explained, as Ronsijn demonstrates, by subtle but significant differences in the social structure of the two regions. In the Oudenaarde area, as in most of inland Flanders, most of the land was cultivated by peasants with small to very small holdings of 0.5 to 5