

blurs the boundaries between “words and flesh” (219). This section of the book is particularly exciting and signals the appearance of a fresh and powerful voice with a novel approach to the field of performance studies from squarely within anthropology.

Ultimately, “Queen for a Day” is a consideration of some of the most salient contradictions of contemporary Venezuelan society. Ochoa effectively renders an image of Venezuelan national identity that is predicated on female bodies as the evidentiary repositories of modernity, for both conservative and socially progressive projects. How feminized subjects negotiate, transact, and mobilize the cultural meanings and economic implications of embodiment speaks to the complex and even paradoxical realities of the Venezuelan revolutionary project. Ochoa in this regard is particularly adept at “staying with the trouble” (as Donna Haraway would have it), such that the regimes of embodiment and labor that are embedded in both revolutionary ideology and standards of beauty become visible through her queer ethnographic lens. The book represents a major contribution to anthropology, queer theory, feminism, scholarship on sex work, media studies, transnational culture, urban ethnography, leftist history, and Latin American studies.

Elusive Unity: Factionalism and the Limits of Identity Politics in Yucatán.
Fernando Armstrong-Fumero, Boulder: University of Colorado Press, 2013. 203 pp.

Paul M. Worley
Western Carolina University

Riding the tensions along and between essentialist and constructivist formations of

identity, Cultural and Areas Studies would seem to stake uneasy claims as fields of knowledge attached to the territories their names delineate. Meanwhile, and taking for granted the ontological unity of the regions, persons, and cultures they describe, fields with names such as “American Studies” or “Latin American Studies” capably acknowledge diverse, even contradictory manifestations of identity among the actors within them. This also means claiming these actors and their cultural production *ipso facto*, regardless of whether or not actors would themselves agree with such inclusion. That is, in many cases these fields may enact an imagined kind of unity of limited relevance to the people they “study.” In many ways, counterpoints to these academic formations—or so-called minority studies fields such as Latin@ Studies, LGBTQ Studies, African-American Studies, Native American Studies, and Indigenous Studies—highlight the intellectual sleights of hand of these disciplinary operations. “Whose American/Latin American Studies?” thus initiates a powerful line of questioning that contests such assumed unities.

And yet, as Fernando Armstrong-Fumero’s *Elusive Unity: Factionalism and the Limits of Identity Politics in Yucatán* amply demonstrates, in a similar fashion the unities that academic, political, and cultural discourses articulate with regard to a field like Indigenous Studies are no less fraught than those of larger disciplinary constructs as these unifying characteristic may similarly dissolve upon closer inspection and engagement with indigenous actors. With regard to Maya identity in Yucatán, Mexico, for example, he notes that “the concept of ‘Maya Indian’ has no simple cognate in maya t’áan” (i.e., the Yucatec Maya language), going on to describe how the Maya terms frequently used to

construct the indigenous/nonindigenous binary in many academic settings, *máasewal* and *ts'ul*, in fact paint a more complex picture as they also con-note poverty and those “who have cultivated urban habits and speech,” respectively (7). Further complicating matters is the fact that *mestizo*, which in most of Mexico refers to a mixed-race subject, in Yucatán refers to people who in most other contexts would be seen as indigenous. These disjunctures are felt acutely in regions like those where Armstrong-Fumero’s study takes place, the Eastern part of Yucatán state, or Oriente. There, local, regional, national, and international discourses on identity overlap in a dizzyingly ambiguous field where, as Armstrong-Fumero convincingly articulates, notions of belonging are perpetually open to negotiation.

The most appealing, challenging arguments that unify *Elusive Unity*’s eight chapters involve the assertion that identity politics is far muddier than often portrayed in academic literature, and that markers of ethnic identity in one part of the Maya area (Yucatán, Chiapas, Guatemala, Belize, Honduras) may not, indeed, have sway elsewhere. The author’s perspective therefore contributes to and complicates a good deal of academic and activist literature on the transnational Maya movement. To relate but one example of these different markers, Armstrong-Fumero notes how Tzotzil speakers in Zinacantán and San Juan Chamula, Chiapas, construct cycles that link community members, the landscape, and local shrines “to events that took place at the time of creation” (33). Conversely, when asked about times of creation in Yucatán, his informants “almost inevitably refer to the creation of new settlements in the early

twentieth century, the granting of collective title to ejido lands, and the foundation of schools” (33). Beyond mere regional variation, this key difference in local narratives highlights the role that states often play in constructions of identity. In the case of Yucatán specifically there has been a shift from interpellating these actors as “peasants” during land reforms beginning in the 1920s (23) to “Mayas” during the era of neoliberal multiculturalism (162). As Armstrong-Fumero makes clear, the class tensions that emerged and presented challenges to class solidarity almost one hundred years ago are reconfigured at present, as “the everyday politics of Maya culture in rural Oriente seems to be reproducing the ambivalence of earlier collective labels” (162).

Of note here are the uneven material outcomes of neoliberal multiculturalism itself (163), as well as the extent to which those recognized by the state as “Maya” potentially exclude other iterations of Mayanness. Two examples of this would be the uneasy relationship some local communities have with state-sanctioned events and language policies (168) and how Maya entrepreneurs are seen as incapable of “embody[ing] the markers of ‘authentic’ indigeneity” (173). This is not a matter of discrediting those Maya who work with the state nor of blindly celebrating those who do not. Rather, Armstrong-Fumero’s work calls upon us to examine in closer detail the relationships that indigenous communities have with their respective states and to do a better job of hearing indigenous histories rather than reframing them according to our own expectations.

In short, *Elusive Unity* offers a focused, nuanced account of how people in eastern Yucatán have negotiated and

continue to negotiate notions of identity with local, national, and international actors. The adoption of this nonessentialist lens allows Armstrong-Fumero to explore the contradictions and ruptures present among a group of people to whom many outsiders, from tourists to academics, casually apply the term “Maya.” As this would suggest, the book’s basic thesis underscores the difficulties inherent in subaltern representation, whether this takes place in popular media, academic work, or other forms authored by subaltern actors themselves as the articulation of such unities entails the privileging of certain cultural elements over others and the obfuscation of ongoing conflicts within the group itself.

Overall, Armstrong-Fumero’s ethnography is an important, welcome addition to the work of other anthropologists and ethnographers such as Quetzil Castañeda, Juan Castillo Cocom, Shannan Mattiace, and Wolfgang Gabbert, whose groundbreaking work on Yucatán and Yucatec Maya communities challenges and complicates how academics think about indigenous actors and construct their fields of study. While *Elusive Unity* may be seen as aimed at specialists, its engagement with indigenous terms of identity and its grounding in Yucatec Maya material realities cuts across disciplines and should prove valuable to a wide range of readers concerned with indigeneity, identity politics, and community formation.

Paper Cadavers: The Archives of Dictatorship in Guatemala. *Kirsten Weld*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2014. 352 pp.

Oscar Pedraza Vargas
CUNY Graduate Center

Human rights organizations throughout Latin America seem obsessed with

archives. For such groups, archival information typically stands as a treasured resource in the struggle against impunity and a pivotal tool for justice and transformation. However, the particular role that archives play in human rights struggles has not necessarily been of interest for scholars in Latin America; and this is precisely the reason why *Paper Cadavers* is such a relevant work.

By focusing on the Police Archive uncovered in 2005 in Guatemala City—a fortuitous finding in the midst of trials and public debates around political violence, Kirsten Weld resists the standard temptation to study the impressive amount of data contained in the documents themselves as possible proof for justice in a postconflict scenario. Instead, she treats the archive as a site of uncertainty, conflict, drama, knowledge production, capacity-building, political debates, dreams, remembrance, hope, and the haunting presence of death and failure. For Weld, the archive unfolds into the life of Guatemala, extending its force to link in contentious ways different groups from across the political spectrum, national and international institutions involved in the debates about the country’s political violence.

Weld’s account revolves around more than the fear or expectation regarding the data that may be uncovered. She maps instead a war of positions in which the different actors related to the Guatemalan war struggle to assert in the life of the country-specific narratives about the past and the future, as well as the political alternatives that the archive might bring. Weld thus follows closely the meditations around history and memory by scholars such as Trouillot and Stoler, emphasizing the importance of the political uses of history, and the interests embedded in the