

Telling **Maya** Tales

Tzotz'il Identities in Modern **Mexico**



Gary H. Gossen

Telling Maya Tales

This page intentionally left blank

Telling Maya Tales

Tzotzil Identities in Modern Mexico

Gary H. Gossen



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 1999 by
Routledge

Published 2013 by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY, 10017, USA

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

Copyright © 1999 by Routledge

Text design by Debora Hilu

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system without permission in writing from the publishers.

Detail on cover photo: Portrait of a Chamula storyteller in front of his patio cross.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Gossen, Gary H.

Telling Maya tales : Tzotzil identities in modern Mexico / Gary Gossen.
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

1. Tzotzil Indians—Ethnic identity. 2. Tzotzil Indians—Social conditions. 3. Tzotzil Indians—Government relations. 4. Social change—Mexico—Chamula. 5. Chamula (Mexico)—Social conditions. 6. Chamula (Mexico)—Politics and government. 7. Chamula (Mexico)—Ethnic relations. I. Title.

F1221.T9G69 1999

305.897'415—dc 21

98-16529

CIP

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-91466-6 (hbk)

ISBN 13: 978-0-415-91467-3 (pbk)

*This book is dedicated to my beloved uncle
Dale David Hamilton —
Kansas iconoclast,
cowboy philosopher,
master storyteller,
all-weather friend.*



This page intentionally left blank

CONTENTS



| | |
|--|-----|
| LIST OF FIGURES | ix |
| PREFACE | |
| Telling Maya Tales | xi |
| <i>One</i> | |
| THE OTHER IN CHAMULA TZOTZIL COSMOLOGY AND HISTORY: REFLECTIONS OF A KANSAN IN CHIAPAS | 1 |
| <i>Two</i> | |
| TRUE ANCIENT WORDS | 31 |
| <i>Three</i> | |
| ON THE HUMAN CONDITION AND THE MORAL ORDER | 55 |
| <i>Four</i> | |
| LANGUAGE AND INDIANS' PLACE IN CHIAPAS | 77 |
| <i>Five</i> | |
| THE CHAMULA FESTIVAL OF GAMES: NATIVE MACROANALYSIS AND SOCIAL COMMENTARY IN A MAYA CARNIVAL | 105 |
| <i>Six</i> | |
| THE TOPOGRAPHY OF ANCIENT MAYA RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: A DIALOGUE WITH THE PRESENT | 159 |

Contents

Seven

| | |
|---|-----|
| INDIANS INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE MEXICAN NATIONAL IDEA: A CASE STUDY OF THE MODERN DIASPORA OF SAN JUAN CHAMULA | 189 |
|---|-----|

Eight

| | |
|---|-----|
| LIFE, DEATH, AND APOTHEOSIS OF A CHAMULA PROTESTANT LEADER: BIOGRAPHY AS SOCIAL HISTORY | 209 |
|---|-----|

Nine

| | |
|--|-----|
| FROM OLMECS TO ZAPATISTAS: A ONCE AND FUTURE HISTORY OF MAYA SOULS | 225 |
|--|-----|

Ten

| | |
|---|-----|
| MAYA ZAPATISTAS MOVE TO AN OPEN FUTURE | 247 |
|---|-----|

| | |
|-----------------------------|-----|
| PERMISSIONS ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | 267 |
|-----------------------------|-----|

| | |
|-------|-----|
| NOTES | 269 |
|-------|-----|

| | |
|------------|-----|
| REFERENCES | 281 |
|------------|-----|

| | |
|-------|-----|
| INDEX | 295 |
|-------|-----|

LIST OF FIGURES



1. p. 15 *A Solar Eclipse*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
2. p. 16 *A Deal with an Earth Lord and His Wife*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
3. p. 19 *The Demon Pukuj Gives a Sex Lesson*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
4. p. 22 *The “Place of the Calendar” (yav Kalindario)*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
5. p. 23 *A Blackman/Demon Making a Deal with a Chamula*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
6. p. 52 *San Juan Herding Magical Stones*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
7. p. 70 *First-Creation Utopia*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
8. p. 72 *The First People Receive Instruction in Domestic Tasks*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
9. p. 98 *Spaniard Soldier Branding an Indian*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
10. p. 113 *Temporal and Spatial Categories in Chamula Cosmology*
(Chart drawn by Ellen Cesarski)
11. p. 114 *Symbolic Associations in the Festival Cycle*
(Chart drawn by Ellen Cesarski)
12. p. 118 *Portrait of a Maya Lacandon Man/Woman*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
13. p. 119 *A Mexican Soldier Rapes a Chamula Woman*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)

List of Figures

14. p. 122 *A Person is Transformed into a Monkey*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
15. p. 136 *The Preparation of “Baby Tamales” in the Ancient Times*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
16. p. 147 *Chamula Ceremonial Center during Carnival*
(Map drawn by Ellen Cesarski)
17. p. 153 *What is Happening at Carnival?*
(Chart)
18. p. 169 *Augustina Gómez Chechev and Her Cult Followers*
(Drawing by Marián López Calixto)
19. p. 174 *Tzotzil Cosmological Categories and the Historical Process*
(Chart)
20. p. 175 *Toward a Tzotzil Maya Theory of History*
(Chart)
21. p. 230 *Jade Effigy Axe (the “Kunz Axe”) in the Olmec Style*
(Photograph by Rota. Courtesy Department Library Services, American Museum of Natural History.)
22. p. 232 *Lord Quetzalcóatl*
(Drawing by Pedro Díaz Infante, reprinted with permission from the Universidad Veracruzana.)
23. p. 233 *The Tuxtla Statuette*
24. p. 241 *The Logic of the Concrete: Chamula Animal Souls*
(Table)
25. p. 257 *The Way Glyph*
(Drawing by Ian Graham)

PREFACE

TELLING MAYA TALES



INDIANS IN MEXICO

No one who has witnessed the massive media coverage of the Maya Zapatista rebellion that began in Chiapas, Mexico, on January 1, 1994, nor anyone who has a passing acquaintance with Mexico's remarkable artistic and social achievements in the twentieth century, can fail to recognize two great and contradictory themes in that nation's soul. First: Indians, past and present, have provided enormous symbolic capital, in addition to their bodies and their labor, for the creation and articulation of Mexican national identity in the twentieth century; it is impossible to imagine modern Mexico without the biological and cultural legacy of native Mesoamerica. Second: In spite of their centrality to the Mexican national essence, "real" Indians have been systematically relegated, in both the colonial and modern periods, to the demographic, political, social, and economic margins of the nation. This paradox has, of course, not gone unobserved by the Indian community itself.

The Zapatista rebels demonstrated with poignant clarity that Mexico's Indians—in this case the Mayas and their Indian neighbors in the Mexican Southeast—are increasingly aware of their once and future "place" in the Mexican national idea. They know that they have been central actors in Mexico's past, and they are demanding a place in its future. Yet where exactly are they today? What will "Indian ethnicity" become in the twenty-first century? Chiapas serves as a useful setting for posing this question because it is one of several states in Mexico that have very large (30 percent to 40 percent) and diverse Indian populations. Furthermore, the ongoing Zapatista movement has placed Chiapas at the epicenter of the politics of ethnicity, as this subject is currently being debated as a national issue, both among Mexico's diverse Indian communities and within the nation as a whole.

The essays in this volume present a partial portrait of this ambivalence—that is, the condition of Indians' being both within and marginal to the

national idea—from the perspective of one Maya *municipio* (“township”), San Juan Chamula, which is located in Highland Chiapas. This Tzotzil (Maya)-speaking community itself has the largest population of any of the predominantly Indian *municipios* in the state. Chamula Tzotzils have also emigrated, during the last century or so, to dozens of new settlements throughout Chiapas, many of which retain the use of the Tzotzil language and other significant cultural features of their *municipio* of origin. Some Chamula Tzotzils, therefore, live in an ethnically homogeneous, culturally circumscribed center (San Juan); others live in various types of noncontiguous settlements that constitute a kind of diaspora. Together, the central community and its emigrant colonies have a population of approximately 150,000 at present, thus making them by far the largest and most influential nonmestizo ethnic group in Chiapas.

I have conducted almost five years of fieldwork (1965, 1967–69, and 1977–79, and 1985) in San Juan Chamula and several of its colonies and have maintained various forms of contact by means of brief visits and correspondence up to the present time. Throughout the past decade, I have been concerned with a set of issues that are familiar themes in social analysis in our time. In particular, I have grappled with the problem of how to place the subjects of my research—that is, Chamula as a local and a diaspora population, and Chamulas as individuals—within that matrix of outside forces that they believe to have some impact, constant or occasional, upon their lives. This multifaceted Other has many expressions, both imagined and tangible. Some of these extralocal forces are as abstract and enormous as the Mexican Nation, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the so-called neoliberalism of contemporary Mexican political and economic policies; or as mystical and potent as the cosmic and historical forces of their own heliocentric universe. The Other may be as concrete and structurally omnipresent in their daily lives as in the mestizo/Ladino culture that surrounds them and exploits them. The Other may be as concrete and bizarre as a foreign anthropologist living in their midst, or as odd as the occasional long-haired, white-robed Lacandon Maya who comes to San Cristóbal de las Casas to sell bows and arrows to the tourists. The Other may be as intimate and yet indeterminate as the animal soul companion that shares one’s destiny as a coessence. The Other also has the face of evil and destruction, as in the myriad spooks and malevolent forces of the universe, some latent, some erratically active, that could end life itself. Finally, the Other lives within the minds of individual actors as the memory of their own prehuman and non-Indian ancestors whose lives and deeds have shaped the contemporary world and continue to do so today.

Simply stated, Chamula social units and individuals are never alone or still, or much less autonomous, any more than we are. Furthermore, neither

the diverse settlements that make up the diaspora, nor the individuals who live in them, remain cognitively or politically passive in the ebb and flow of extrasomatic and extralocal forces that influence their lives. Chamulas are constantly engaged, as we are, in assessing both constraints and “windows of opportunity” in their daily lives.

Some of this give and take of coping with daily life has discernible, even predictable patterns; for many Chamula Tzotzils still live in a matrix of sacred cyclical time and related social practices that derive in part from their ancient Maya heritage. However, there are other aspects of modern Chamula experience—such as the recent wave of conversion to Protestantism, political expulsions and reprisals, sometimes chaotic resettlement, voluntary out-migration, partial acculturation, undocumented migration to the United States, experimentation with pan-Indian alliances, and participation in state- and national-level electoral politics—that resist easy interpretation as conventional ethnographic subjects. Stated in a slightly different way, Chamulas live in both an ethnically and linguistically circumscribed universe *and* in modern Mexico *and* in the porous borderland of Greater North America. Neither the existential conditions of their evolving “traditional” world nor, much less, their various experiences with the diaspora, permit a contemporary portrait that is as cohesive and internally consistent as the one I offered in an earlier work, *Chamulas in the World of the Sun: Time and Space in a Maya Oral Tradition* (1974b).

AN ETHNOGRAPHER ENCOUNTERS A CHANGING SUBJECT

Whether it is owing to San Juan Chamula itself, as it has evolved in the complex late-twentieth-century social landscape of modern Mexico, or to my own response to the epistemological doubts and challenges raised by the currents known as the reflexive mood or postmodern turn in social analysis—or perhaps owing to all of the above—I have thought and written about San Juan Chamula in very different ways in the past decade than I was inclined to do earlier in my career. I no longer feel competent to write a traditional monograph or “comprehensive” ethnography, for I believe that the appropriate subject—some culturally, spatially, and morally circumscribed community—of such an enterprise has become increasingly elusive as an easily isolable entity in our time. By this I mean to say that even the most circumscribed ethnic groups in Mexico—such as the one that is the subject of this book—have many expressions of vitality that form a rapidly changing and complex configuration in the late twentieth century. Each expression has a different arena of Others that surround the Maya self and

all expressions are, in reality, quite porous in terms of the people, things, and ideas that constitute them. These numerous manifestations of Chamula ethnicity range from the highly defensive, “traditional” municipal center that forcibly maintains a homogeneous community of Indian custom (which is, ironically, underwritten by close cooperation of the local oligarchy with the PRI [Institutional Revolutionary Party] and the Mexican state), to various exile colonies, voluntary agrarian colonies, and loosely organized alliances of displaced Tzotzils with pan-Maya political activists, such as the Zapatistas. This book, therefore, is not a “monograph” in the traditional sense, because it describes more than one space and time in the evolving lives of the Chamula Tzotzils.

I actually tell two tales in this book. First, I offer a multiscenario ethnographic portrait of the Chamula Tzotzils in the late twentieth century. This conservative Maya community now finds itself in the throes of unprecedented change, if not utter fragmentation. Their world mingles chaotically and sometimes violently with the social and political space of modern Mexico, most recently in the context of the Maya Zapatista movement of 1994, on which occasion the ruling oligarchy of San Juan placed the community on guard against this movement. While the forces behind this transformation are familiar Latin American themes—such as conversion to Protestantism, political radicalization, massive out-migration and urbanization—the Chamula “take” on all of this has been original, pragmatic, and multifaceted. Even as they have dispersed to the far corners of Chiapas, they remain the largest and most visible diaspora community in the region. It is, however, no longer (if it ever was) a unified diaspora community. I will tell small pieces of their multivocal tale.

I also tell a second tale: my own. I have observed the transformation of the Chamula Tzotzils over three decades. This period also spans two generations of anthropological thought and related approaches to the ethnographer’s craft. Whether it is owing to San Juan Chamula itself as it has evolved in the complex late-twentieth-century social landscape of modern Mexico, or to my own response to recent currents in social analysis, I have thought, written, and taught about the subject in very different ways in the past decade than I was inclined to do earlier in my career. This book, therefore, becomes my own story, just as it is the Tzotzils’ story; one that chronicles my own effort to move from “traditional approaches” to experiment with new forms of representation that seem more suited for representing the porous boundaries, contested spaces, and evolving ethnic affirmations that characterize modern Chiapas. The essays that make up this book—some of which have appeared in relatively obscure places, others only in Spanish, and others previously unpublished—were written during the period of 1986 to the present, although the data that are examined span the period of 1965 to the present. These essays reflect my own evolving approach to ethnographic

reporting during this period. The reader will find “something old” and “something new.” While the essays do not pretend to achieve a holistic or unitary portrait, they do possess a kind of unity that focuses on storytelling in the broadest sense that includes topics from oral narrative to the ritual and political expression of ethnic identity, to the writing of ethnography. In each case, these essays place the local Chamula subject in dialogue with a different set of outside forces that constrain it or condition it—ranging from myself as ethnographic interlocutor and translator to Presbyterian missionaries; from Mexican national ideology to NAFTA and the Zapatista rebels; from the traditional sun deity to individual soul companion/coessences.

Because I am trying to tell several tales that are thematically linked by common contemporary Maya ethnicity, but which nevertheless do not share the same cast of characters, point of view, place or time, the problem of voice—more particularly, of voices—becomes central to this book. I explore a number of alternatives with regard to placing my own authorial voice in relation to that of the Tzotzils—ranging from Gossen the “traditional” ethnographer/translator to Gossen the storyteller/biographer/speculative journalist. In one case (chapter 6), my voice mingles freely with that of my collaborator/coauthor, Richard Leventhal, an archaeologist. In other cases, the voices of Tzotzil narrators join my own voice to tell a multivocal tale.

All of these essays also address the problem of ethnographic truth. The title of this book, *Telling Maya Tales*, refers not only to the Tzotzil storyteller’s art and knowledge but also to my own evolving approach to creating ethnographic texts—my own telling of tales—about the Chamula Tzotzil social universe. In other words, telling a tale is also a telling tale, in the sense that getting something said in narrative form invariably reflects both a narrator’s conscious agenda and a subtext of conscious or unconscious omissions and distortions. This complex scenario casts all ethnographers as storytellers and also, perhaps, as unwitting prevaricators. But do we have any choice in the matter? Probably not.

In a recent discussion of postmodernism, Madan Sarup (1993) offers a synthesis of Fredric Jameson’s position (Jameson 1981) on narrative as an epistemological category:

he argues that it is hard to think of the world as it would exist outside narrative. Anything we try to substitute for a story is, on closer examination, likely to be another sort of story. Physicists, for example, “tell stories” about subatomic particles. Anything that presents itself as existing outside the boundaries of some story (a structure, a form, a category) can only do so through a kind of fiction. In Jameson’s view structures may be abundantly useful as conceptual fictions, but reality comes to us in the form of its stories. Narrative, just by being narrative, always demands interpretation, and so we must always be aware of the distinction between manifest meaning and latent content. Moreover, we should remember that every narrative simultaneously presents and represents a world,

Preface

that simultaneously creates or makes up a reality and asserts that it stands independent of the same reality. In other words, narrative seems at once to reveal or illuminate a world and to hide or distort it. (Sarup 1993: 178)

None but the most recalcitrant positivists would claim today that the stories we, as anthropologists, tell about the Other are cut from the whole cloth of truth (Rosaldo 1989). Whether the interference that produces the epistemological handicap that limits our capacity “to tell it like it is” be attributed to the languages we speak, to our scientific paradigms, to our own culture (like all cultures) as a form of local knowledge, to postmodern “wisdom,” to our personal idiosyncrasies, to the asymmetries of power between us and our subjects, or to the porosity of cultural boundaries in the post-Cold war era, the message is the same: an acknowledgment of humility and constraint and of inevitable distortion in our representations of the Other. We cannot know as much as we once presumed to know. Nor can we represent what we think we know with the degree of certainty that ethnographers used to claim by virtue of “being there” as a fieldworker (Geertz 1988).

Generic treatments of the so-called crisis of representation in the human sciences have become so abundant in the past decade (e.g., Marcus and Fischer 1986; Clifford and Marcus 1986; and Clifford 1988) that the “problem” must surely be well known to, if not acknowledged by, a significant subset of practicing anthropologists. Therefore, I don’t think that it serves any purpose to add one more recital of the issues to what is already a large chorus of angst and calls for remaking, rethinking, and reassessing our disciplinary agenda.

I do, however, hope that the present set of essays may provide a useful case study of how the reflexive mood and current postmodern cultural critique have played out in my own thinking and writing about the Chamula Tzotzils over the past decade. Although I hope to have organized this book in such a way that the chapters flow logically into one another, I have nevertheless dated each essay, either by date of original publication or, in cases of previously unpublished material, by date of composition. This dating may serve the reader as a rough index of where the composition lies in what for me has been an exciting period of discovery. Whether this chronology constitutes a guide to “the lies I tell” or to the emplotment strategies (read: theories and paradigms) that seem reasonable in a given era, or to the fast-changing world of my subject of inquiry, is a conundrum whose answer I don’t know.

So as to provide a context for the reader to comprehend the perhaps bizarre agenda of this book—a combination of intellectual autobiography and ethnographic portraits of Chamula Tzotzils in modern Mexico—I should like to provide a brief chronology of how I have “come of age”—several times.

HARVARD IN THE 1960S

I came to Harvard in 1964, firmly committed to the idea I would become empowered to understand the wonderfully diverse cultural landscape of Highland Chiapas through the lens of social science. I had glimpsed the remarkable scenario of ethnic diversity in northwestern Guatemala and Chiapas as I returned to the United States by bus from Costa Rica in 1962, where I had spent the year as an exchange student from the University of Kansas. In Costa Rica I took my first anthropology course, and realized that my experience in that benign and lovely country might provide the beginning of a lifelong escape from Kansas. I was “called” to anthropology as my vocation in Costa Rica as a late-adolescent realization that life was, at least then, more interesting abroad than it was “at home.” While Costa Rica was a supportive and comfortably pro-American scenario for this discovery, it was, nonetheless, powerful. However, even this illusion dimmed with time. I realized, somewhat sadly, that “white” Costa Rica (“The Switzerland of Central America” as it is celebrated in a popular song) was rather like the United States, in that we and they had created our respective national identities on the ruins of Native American societies that had been destroyed or marginalized in order to make room for ourselves.

My bus trip through Chiapas in 1962, en route home to Kansas, produced the spellbinding realization that there were, indeed, parts of the New World that remained profoundly, pervasively, Indian. Highland Chiapas was no “Switzerland,” but rather, a multifaceted living embodiment of an America that was and is. Mexico was different. Wildly exotic costumes, totally incomprehensible languages (not Spanish), unidentifiable foods, and weird smells (wood smoke, incense, and the ineffable essence of tortillas made on wood-fired griddles), fired my romantic imagination. This was where I wanted to be. It was neither Kansas nor Costa Rica.

I learned that Professor Evon Z. Vogt, of Harvard University, had launched in 1957 a long-term project on the subject of continuity and social change in the Indian communities of Highland Chiapas. Eager to be part of this, I found my way to Harvard, beginning graduate study there in 1964. I became one of hundreds of graduate and undergraduate students who eventually—between 1957 and 1990—participated as fieldworkers in Professor Vogt’s celebrated Harvard Chiapas Project (Vogt 1994). The intellectual and physical infrastructure of this project proved to be invaluable to me. Training in the Tzotzil language, access to information from dozens of colleagues whose fieldwork preceded and coincided with my own, in addition to the commodious offices and living quarters at the Harvard Ranch in San Cristóbal, provided both an initial orientation and an oasis of security and stimulation to which I could retreat when the physical difficulties and polit-

ical troubles of living in the Indian communities became acute.

However, despite the relative comforts of working within a well-organized project, the real task—almost five years of fieldwork in San Juan Chamula and its diaspora colonies—did not take shape easily. In particular, the issues of method, theory, mastery of the field language, and the creation of ethnographic texts did not come with the Harvard Chiapas Project nor with the Harvard Ranch. They came from and through me, as I tried to place myself in an “intellectual tradition” and to enable myself to say something about what I observed and experienced. Through what lenses would I analyze thousands of pages of texts and fieldnotes?

As is the case with all of us, my initial approach to this question was conditioned by what I perceived to be useful and current models of how to see, how to ask, how to record, and how to report. As I came of age at Harvard and in the field, three approaches came to my attention as plausible ways to proceed.

First, ethnoscience offered what we now know to be the naive notion that any cognitive domain could be elicited from our native consultants and laid out with its internal patterns of native “rationality” if we used the right “question frames” and stuck faithfully to “native categories of meaning.” This was a variant of the old functionalist assumption that any set of exotic beliefs, social classifications, and practices could be revealed by a good anthropologist to have its closet rationality. The task was simply to report this configuration in the chosen domain (e.g., religion, food, firewood, economic practices) and to reveal its inherent order and pattern of articulation with the cultural whole. The observer/ethnographer thus became the translator of the rational order of the Other. He or she labored as the clever Orientalist, in Edward Said’s sense of the term—a less-than-innocent, condescending, but nevertheless clever fly on the wall, a facilitator for revealing the truths of the Other, divested of the surface clutter of the culture bearers (Clifford 1998: 259–60).

I took this mandate quite seriously, believing that the large corpus of traditional narratives that I undertook to collect, transcribe, translate, and annotate could somehow be made to testify, with my help, to the Chamulas’ inner reality. To this end, I paid careful attention to native genre taxonomy, native conventions of oral poetics, and performance rules. I also prepared extensive ethnographic background notes, in consultation with storytellers during translation sessions, that might provide cultural information that was assumed but not overtly stated in dictated texts. The reader will find, in the early chapters of this book, narrative testimony that is cast in this style of ethnographic reporting.

A second analytical approach that captured my imagination was French structuralism. I am now aware that this movement crested and began its rather precipitous decline in the United States even as I was finishing my dissertation in the late 1960s. However, its seductive powers were great: one

Preface

more tool with which to reveal that beneath the surface chaos of ethnographic data there lay a deep structural template that was not only more or less stable and consistent in a given cultural context but also, if one bought into the full paradigm, a basic feature of mind, of the human spirit. My earlier analyses of Chamula ritual symbolism and ritual behavior relied heavily on a culturally specific application of this approach. It led me to such occasional sophomoric excesses as claiming to offer a “grammar” of Chamula ritual symbolism (Gossen 1971) and claiming to “present the oral tradition . . . as a complete information system” (Gossen 1974b: vii). While I do not disclaim this work, it seems, in hindsight, that I was overly eager to find underlying order and less than fully attentive to the irregularities in the data, inconsistencies from one performance to the next, and to disagreements among my field consultants. An essay that is cast in a modified—perhaps, better said, more circumspect and multivocal—structuralist voice, an analysis of the Chamula Festival of Games, appears as chapter five of this volume. The reader will see that I remain convinced that structural homologies exist that bind together on the ritual stage certain experiential and classificatory truths about diverse aspects of the Chamula social universe.

A third set of approaches that influenced my coming of age as an anthropologist in the 1960s was of course the work of Clifford Geertz and Victor Turner. Geertz’s vision of anthropology—not as a science in search of explanation but as a critical strategy for reaching credible interpretations of cultures-as-texts—was already, in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (1963), providing an alternative to the positivistic affirmations of the “great paradigms” and to the Procrustean-bed variant of structuralism. His work has informed and inspired me and given me the confidence to examine my own work critically with an eye to trying to find my own interpretive voice. If texts cannot speak for themselves, and if no overarching paradigm can do the job either, what is left but to place one’s own intellectual resources in dialogue with the thought and practices of one’s subjects?

In Victor Turner’s great Ndembu corpus, I also found respite from the apparent chaos that I sensed, with regard to anthropology’s mission, in his distinction between the different levels—exegetical, operational, and positional—at which one could examine symbolic behavior and related social practices. Just as I was impressed by Geertz’s bringing together of his empirical concern with the “hard surfaces of social life” and his gift for elegant qualitative analysis, I was taken with Turner’s insistence that our own analysis at the positional level must be informed by both native exegesis of practice and our empirical observation of practice.

These approaches that I have just described provided a beginning set of strategies for observation of Tzotzil life and for telling ethnographic tales about it. With them in mind, I went to the field for the first time in the late

1960s. There, Professor Vogt's Harvard Project embraced me—indeed hundreds of us over the next two decades—with his grand challenge to document continuity and change in the Maya communities of Highland Chiapas. In our introduction to the *Festschrift* volume that we edited in honor of Vogt, Victoria Bricker and I have commented on the almost Boasian scope of his vision of Chiapas Project and of his remarkable latitude in permitting, even encouraging, a wide diversity of approaches:

[We] believe that Vogt is perhaps most similar to Franz Boas [in that his] vision of a basic macro-Maya cultural persistence within Greater Mesoamerica, [led him] to create an ongoing ethnographic archive of culture change in the Chiapas highlands. This phenomenon of continuing cultural integrity that is nevertheless able to adapt to rapidly changing regional political and economic realities is to be understood through what he now calls a “phylogenetic model.” . . . Franz Boas had a similar agenda in mind as he organized the Jesup North Pacific Expedition, including the Siberian Coast.

In concept and scope, as well as in the large-scale funding and international cooperation necessary for its realization, there are even more similarities between Boas's role as the linchpin in the Jesup Expedition and Vogt's founding and sustaining role in the Harvard Chiapas Project. Along with the similarities in grandeur of conception and the vast production of ethnographic and linguistic archival material must be added the recruitment of “. . . a diverse staff . . .”

It was never a party-line endeavor, neither in theory, style of ethnography, nor mode of reporting. All of us were welcome to bring our own intellectual predispositions and skills to bear on the problems of continuity and change in Tzotzil and Tzeltal communities as these groups have dealt with the forces of accelerating change in the latter half of the twentieth century. We were asked only to work hard, preferably in the native languages, homes, and fields, and to make our field notes available to the general archive of the Harvard Project. (Gossen and Bricker 1989: 3-4)

TOWARD A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

The first two decades of my research in Chiapas involved one short field trip (summer of 1965), and two major field trips (1967–69, 1977–79). Throughout this time, I was aware that the field of anthropology, the craft of ethnography, indeed, the shape of social analysis itself, were in the throes of a major reassessment. I realized (as did a number of friends and professional critics of my work) that the community that I once studied and understood as a homogeneous, circumscribed community was, in some respects, porous and multifaceted, and that it was becoming more so by the day. In particular, it became clear to me that I could not pretend to understand continuity and change among the contemporary Chamula Tzotzils without undertaking both a historical and field study of out-migration from the home commu-

nity, a process that had begun in the nineteenth century. I began visiting and studying Chamula diaspora communities in my 1977-79 field season. After I moved to the University at Albany in 1979, Robert Carmack and I developed a project that would focus on intensive field study of diaspora communities. We began this project in 1983, with the assistance of a number of graduate students from the University at Albany. In the context of this project I made several visits to Chiapas, including one season of field study in the summer of 1985.

Crucial to this phase of my own work on the diaspora was a heightened awareness of the importance of a historical context that would make sense of the diverse processes that caused the out-migration to occur. I was also forced, albeit grudgingly at first, to realize that one could not comprehend modern Chamula without also attempting to reckon with regional processes in Chiapas and also with the Mexican national idea as it has evolved in the postrevolutionary era. These considerations involved political and economic issues well beyond Chamula—not only at the state and national levels but also at the global level.

The pertinence of global issues to the interpretation of local realities in Mexico did not enter easily into my research strategy and aesthetic sensibilities, for I had long thought of anthropology and its focus on the Other as a respite from what I found discordant and ugly in my own culture and in my own life history. However, it became clear as I began serious study of the diaspora in the early 1980s that cultural, economic, and political forces emanating from the United States, Europe, and urban Mexico, had profoundly to do, for example, with the rapid rise of Protestantism as an alternative lifestyle in Chiapas. Furthermore, it has been documented with convincing authority that the pattern of accelerated out-migration from Indian communities—beginning in the nineteenth century and accelerating rapidly in the late twentieth century—had directly to do with economic and political policies made far beyond the boundaries of Chiapas (Collier 1975 and Wasserstrom 1983). That this was incontestably true became obvious to the whole world with the sudden explosion of the Maya Zapatista movement on January 1, 1994, coinciding precisely with the date that the North American Free Trade Agreement went into effect. The lowland jungle of the Mexican Southeast—homeland of the insurrection—has been the destination of thousands of recently displaced individuals and voluntary immigrants, the majority of them being Indians of Maya ethnicity, some of them, Chamula Tzotzils (Collier and Quaratiello 1994).

Most of the essays in the latter half of this book, dating from approximately 1990 (chapters 6 to 10), reflect my attempt to consider Chamula Tzotzil experience against the historical backdrop of the region, the nation, and beyond.

MAYA CULTURAL AGENCY

In the process of raising my own consciousness about the importance of history and global forces in the understanding of the contemporary Tzotzil Mayas, I also came to a new appreciation of the power of local cultural forces as agents of change and adaptation. Tzotzil Mayas are not today, nor have they ever been, passive recipients of outside forces. They have always brought their own cultural constructs to bear on the course that social change would take, even when these outside forces have wielded—since well before the Spanish invasion of the sixteenth century—superior instruments of economic, political, and symbolic power (Hunt 1977 and Bricker 1981).

In attempting to identify durable features of Mesoamerican thought that might figure in the cultural constructs that the Maya have brought to almost a millenium of culture change—first in the shadow of the great empires of pre-Columbian Central Mexico, now as a peripheral region in what Wallerstein has called the World System—I have reexamined Maya religion and ideology from both the pre-Columbian and colonial eras. My brief synthesis of this premodern background appears as a chapter on religion in a recent textbook, *The Legacy of Mesoamerica*, of which I was a coeditor (Gossen 1996). Chapters 6 and 9 of the present book specifically address this deep historical background.

The Chiapas Highlands were marginal to the great seats of political power in the ancient Mesoamerican world system (Carmack 1996), just as Chiapas is today, by most indices of social statistics, peripheral to modern Mexico; it is the poorest, least democratically represented state in the Mexican nation and enjoys the least access to government social services (Ross 1994). It is often observed that Chiapas does not fit the publicly touted national profile of Mexico as an emerging First World nation; rather, Chiapas remains a Third World enclave in a nation that aspires to First World status. Neither the Wars of Independence of 1810–20, nor the Mexican Revolution of 1910–18, effectively changed the white-dominated political institutions and de facto ethnic segregation that were instruments of public policy during the colonial period.

However, in spite of, or perhaps because of, this marginality, Chiapas has been a major catalyst in the genesis of international Indian political activism and pan-Indian cooperation in the Americas in the post-Zapatista era. To cite but one example of this, the Zapatista-sponsored National Indigenous Forum met in January 1996, in San Cristóbal de las Casas, to formulate and promote a new agenda for Indian policy in Mexico. This important meeting was attended by representatives of most of the Indian communities of Mexico, as well as by hundreds of observers from North and South America and Europe. This forum has already produced formal Indian policy changes—though far from full implementation—on the part of the Mexican government (Nash

1997). Some have argued, as I shall in the final essay of this volume (chapter 10), that Maya Zapatistas, who enjoy almost no military strength by conventional measures of firepower, have nevertheless provided major catalysts—the ongoing threat of civil war in Chiapas, an articulate critique of Mexico’s neoliberal economic policies, and a steadfast insistence that they, too, are Mexicans—that brought major democratic reforms to the whole of the Mexican political process. We have witnessed this in the results of the municipal, state, and national delegate elections of July 1997; the PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party), which has dominated Mexico for three-quarters of this century, now must share power with an odd coalition of parties of the right and left, among them the PRD (Democratic Revolutionary Party), that had the strong support of the Maya Zapatistas.

In reflecting on the power of structurally oppressed groups to survive, adapt, and reconstitute—sometimes even to reinvent themselves and their oppressors—through their own agency, I have been influenced during the past decade by a major international project of coordinated research that I helped to organize in 1986 in anticipation of the Columbus quincentenary year of 1992. In collaboration with my colleagues, Manuel Gutiérrez Estévez of Spain, Miguel León-Portilla of Mexico, Manuel Marzal of Peru, and Jorge Klor de Alva, then my colleague at Albany, we launched a project initially entitled “De Palabra y Obra en el Nuevo Mundo” (“Of Word and Deed in the New World,” to become “Discourse and Practice in the New World” in the English edition of the seminar proceedings’ volumes). This project yielded five international conferences (three in Spain, two in Albany) on the subject of ethnicity, identity construction, and national ideas in the Americas since the Spanish invasion of 1492. (See Gutiérrez Estévez et al. 1992; León-Portilla et al. 1992; Gossen et al. 1993; and Klor de Alva et al. 1995). Held between 1988 and 1992, these week-long seminars eventually involved over seventy-five participants from South America, North America, Europe, and Israel. Included in our number were several representatives of Native American communities in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

The unifying theme that we sought to highlight throughout the seminar series was to document, from diverse corners of the Americas, sample encounters of Native American and African discourse and practice as these met—almost always in asymmetrical and violent ways—the constructs and practices of the Europeans. Although relatively simple in conception, the goal—to identify alternatives to traditional models of culture change and identity formation in the Americas—proved to be quite elusive. Although almost all presenters agreed that simple models of “hybrid syncretism” did not address the historical and political realities of the European invasion and colonization, neither were they satisfied with static functional interpretations or with conventional Marxist analyses that identified virtually all postcon-

Preface

tact New World cultural forms as “colonial creations” that were designed to facilitate exploitation of subject populations. Conspicuously absent also were contemporary or historical ethnographic cases of unfettered cultural continuity from Native American, African, or even European origins.

In essence, the only unanimity that emerged from scholarly examination of dozens of case studies ranging from Canada to southern Chile was the *absence* of any easily generalizable pattern of ethnic formation and expression, even among those communities—such as those of Highland Chiapas—that spoke dialects of the same language and were subject to the same state policies. In all cases, local knowledge, local politics, and local actors seem to have had the last word in determining the form and expression that “belonging to a group” and “acting in history” would assume. Even radical asymmetry of power between parties in situations of cultural contact—such as slavery and indentured servitude—did not strip subalterns of their power to adapt and create cultural forms that expressed compliance and resistance, as well as ethnic affirmation.

Although we did not conceive of this project as an orchestrated testimony to indigenous and subaltern cultural agency, that theme, above all others, emerged as the leitmotif of these five seminars. In a recent commentary on current trends in cultural anthropology, Bruce M. Knauff corroborates our impressions of the importance of this issue:

Equally important and much less emphasized are the ways in which indigenous people assert meaning, dignity, and resilience or resistance amid these problems. The fact that most people still spend most of their time cultivating their gardens should not be lost sight of. Indigenous practices and indigenous beliefs are far from dead; indeed, they resurface with creative regularity. More than a simple retention to custom, traditions are actively re-created as they are reproduced. The tensions and problems of postcolonialism are legion, but the practical ways in which people find continuities and creative spaces as they engage the possibilities and constraints of change—how they expand and elaborate their received senses of practice and agency—have only recently been opened to understanding and theorization by cultural anthropologists.

Contemporary configurations of practice and agency are thus both understudied and ripe for detailed investigation. This research may be stimulated by theoretical analysis or by programmatic critique but needs in the final instance to be engaged by substantive ethnography of actual social situations. (Knauff 1996: 133–34)

REFLEXIVITY

My telling of Maya tales in this book expresses my desire to offer a multifaceted ethnographic account of the expressive forms and thought of a resilient and self-conscious indigenous community in modern Mexico.

However, this book is also autobiographical, as I have noted above. It tells my own story at midlife. At this point it is appropriate to acknowledge that laying out the doubts, uncertainties, and changes—sometimes even the contradictions and mistakes—in my own thinking about my ethnographic subject, comes with some difficulty. After all, are we not charged, as social scientists, with telling it like it is? If we get it wrong, are we not lying in our representations and lying to our readers? If we don't get it right, then aren't we bad social scientists?

In searching for possible answers to these questions, I am reminded of the baseball umpire story that came to my attention two decades ago in the introductory essay to the *Reader in Symbolic Anthropology* (Dolgin, Kemnitzer, and Schneider 1977: 20). The editors tell the tale of three retired baseball umpires who were enjoying an after-the-game commentary over several beers. They came to reflect on the nature of the game itself, and in due course, perhaps in a mellow haze, each of the three offered an immodest summary of what the game was all about. The youngest of the three spoke first:

"Baseball. It ain't nothin' but balls and strikes and I calls 'em as they are."

Contradicting him, the second said, "Nope. You've got it wrong. Baseball, it ain't nothin' but balls and strikes, and I calls 'em as I see 'em."

The eldest responded, "Nope. You've both got it wrong. Baseball ain't nothin' but balls and strikes, all right, but they ain't nothin' 'til I calls 'em."

The implications of this story for thinking about what we do as social scientists are considerable. Although I am not a baseball fan, I have often reflected on which kind of worldview-of-the-game I would have if I were an umpire instead of an anthropologist. My thoughts on this matter have shifted over the years. Earlier, I would have sided with the first umpire, an earnest empiricist. I now find myself far more sympathetic with the second, for he acknowledges that, while all parties agree that there are ephemeral, "real" events called balls and strikes that are supposed to be subject to rules, each pitch is nevertheless judged and called by the eye, mind, and voice of the observer, the umpire. This scenario, I believe, more or less defines the constraints under which I observe and report as an ethnographer. What about the third umpire? If I were he, I would be a philosopher or a novelist, not an ethnographer.

To come full circle then, if, like the second umpire, I am constrained by my own life and times, but nevertheless wish to tell tales that are not merely fictions, what moves do I make in writing ethnographic accounts that acknowledge both myself and the Other? Many colleagues have addressed this question over the past two decades—obviously enjoying the liberation of what Marcus and Fischer have called an "experimental moment in the human sciences." As Barbara Tedlock and Dennis Tedlock have so elegantly

stated the case on numerous occasions, if all ethnographic knowledge derives from dialogue in the broadest sense, then why not place this dialogue in our ethnographic accounts? (See D. Tedlock 1983 and B. Tedlock 1991.) Writing such narrative ethnography typically involves rhetorical strategies for including multiple voices, including that of the ethnographer as a participant rather than as an omniscient fly on the wall. This experimental, multivocal mood has already produced several modern classics, such as Paul Rabinow's *Reflections on Field Work in Morocco* (1977), Dennis Tedlock's *Breath on the Mirror* (1993), Barbara Tedlock's *The Beautiful and the Dangerous* (1992), and Richard Price's *Alabi's World* (1990), recipient of the Staley Prize in 1993. Price's work is of particular interest here, in that he has pioneered rhetorical strategies for writing even historical ethnography in multiple voices.

As I attempt in this book as a whole, and in its several parts, to experiment with different voices, including my own, I realize that the task is not without risk, for it involves the revelation of uncertainties, mistakes, paths not taken, even some downright embarrassing moments. However, I am convinced that these dissonances and glitches contributed to my present understanding of my subject; hence, they become a part of the some of the tales I will tell in this book.

Bruce M. Knauff has recently written of similar feelings of ambivalence about "personalizing one's position" in the writing of ethnography:

Where do I, personally, stand? For whom do I speak? And why, for most anthropologists are such questions embarrassing? . . . The life one has built—the sum of past choices, constraints, triumphs, and mistakes—confronts one in the present as an externality. There is always tension between living within the confines of this received life and changing or transforming it. This is certainly not a resolvable problem; rather, it is one to be struggled with—a continuing war of position within oneself. Questions of efficacy, personal ability, pragmatic possibility, and paths unexplored are always present. But within this range of ambiguous and sometimes guilty possibilities, it is important not to disempower those eager to confront life's diversities and critique its inequalities, regardless of what racial or sexual or ethnic or class or national position they come from. It is useless to flagellate oneself for not being more of a victim. Paralysis or loss of nerve is not the answer. So, too, inescapable history does not disempower us from productive attempts in the present.

The goal, as I see it, is to appreciate diversity and critique inequality. These goals potentiate rather than preclude the dedication to objectivism as a tool of analysis. Ethnography is subversive because it provides the hard sharpening stone of empiricism through which our concepts are refined, our values engaged, and our unadmitted assumptions brought to light. (Knauff 1996: 276)

LOGIC AND SEQUENCE

The organization of this book has threads of development that seek to tell the several tales that I have promised above. I want to be explicit about this because the plot is fairly complex.

First, with the exception of chapter 1, which is a recent (1993b) reflexive essay about my fieldwork among the Chamulas, the organization moves generally from local (chapters 2 to 5) to regional settings (chapters 6 to 10) in which Chamula and Maya Tzotzil communities are found.

Second, for reasons that I have discussed above, this sequence from local to regional and national foci also represents a rough chronology of the order in which the ethnographic accounts were written. They move from a portfolio of indigenous narrative accounts of the origins of the universe and of the community in chapters 2 through 4, dating from the early 1980s, to a quasi-journalistic essay (chapter 10) on the Maya Zapatistas that was originally published in 1996; the postscript to chapter 10 is actually an editorial that I wrote in January 1998, in an attempt to explain local circumstances surrounding the tragic Christmas massacre of December 22, 1997.

The third logical thread which ties these essays together is historical (as distinct from chronology of composition, discussed above). The first half of the book (chapters 2 to 5) deals with mythical time; that is, local truths that are both time present and time past—timeless—as represented in sacred narrative and ritual drama. The second half of the book (chapters 6 to 10) deals with historical issues, in the Western secular sense, spanning the archaeological record of the Maya Preclassic to NAFTA.

The fourth strain in the plot development of this book is textual. By this I mean to say that the earliest chapters (chapters 2 through 4) depend heavily on the capacity of native texts to speak for themselves; subsequent chapters move progressively to include more voices in the construction of the narrative. This pattern of development expresses my current conviction that neither their discourses nor our discourses speak entirely for themselves. I attempt in chapter 2 to “let the texts speak for themselves,” with the help of ethnographic notes, specifically footnotes; in chapter 3, I add more contextual commentary by way of introducing a magnificent long text, retaining the ethnographic notes; in chapter 4, I construct an entire essay around and in response to a powerful native text, retaining all of the above, plus the original Tzotzil text and the narrator’s biography. I want to call particular attention to the fact that this section (chapters 2 through 4) includes accounts from five different native storytellers. In this section and throughout the book, I have made liberal use of native drawings as illustrations. I commissioned these drawings from a gifted Chamula artist, Marian López Calixto, who worked independently from me—using only transcribed Tzotzil texts

and his imagination to produce his illustrations. I hoped thereby to add a visual medium that might complement, as an aid to interpretation, the content of the narrative text and my ethnographic notes. Continuing the discussion of textual criticism, I embark in chapter five on an extensive discussion of the principal annual Chamula ritual drama of self-representation, the Festival of Games. This essay, originally published in 1986, is a fairly conventional ethnographic description and analysis of this remarkable event. It is amplified here with personal anecdotes (from four occasions of witnessing the festival) and with native texts that are implicit (i.e., known by participants but never articulated) in the text of the ritual.

As I present the second half of this book, native texts tend to disappear as lengthy segments of my own text. What is going on? Why should one abandon the bloodline of ethnographic truth? In fact, natives' and others' narratives share the space.

In chapter 6, I establish a dialogue with a Maya archaeologist, discussing the gendered symbolic space of the Ancient Maya world and of the modern Maya world with regard to religion, specifically the instrumental role of women in the Maya past and present.

Chapter 7, on the nature and history of the Chamula diaspora, is textually saturated with me and other Western scholars in an exercise of historical responsibility. Tzotzils return, however, in the conclusions, for it is argued that women, who control socialization and language use in the home, have fundamentally to do with the cultural continuities that are found in the diaspora communities. Ritual practices are also shown to have a central role in cultural continuity.

Chapter 8, which is an experiment in reconstructing the biography of a major Protestant leader, Miguel Kaxlán, whom I never knew. It depends heavily on a native text composed in Tzotzil by his son, from whom he, the son, was estranged. The entire present text is my own, although based primarily on the testimony of the son as an intermediary. I attempt here to write Miguel Kaxlán's biography against the turbulent backdrop of twentieth-century Chiapas and Mexican history. This implies the incorporation of many points of view, among them the perspectives of the missionaries themselves and those of their allies and adversaries. To this chapter I also add a postscript, a kind of detective story mode of offering an alternative ending to the tale; that Miguel Kaxlán, an antiestablishment radical, was in fact behaving as a traditional Tzotzil hero.

The final two chapters, 9 and 10, deal directly with ancient, colonial, and modern texts in the effort to place some aspects of the contemporary world of Highland Chiapas in historical perspective. In particular, the Zapatista movement, which is considered in both of these chapters, emerged so suddenly and with such an outburst of poetic communiqués and other excel-

lent media coverage, that it made sense for political, aesthetic, and practical reasons to take so-called ephemeral texts seriously as social documents.

A final thread in the development of this book that deserves mention because of its apparent omission and its actual presence, is the point of view of Tzotzil women. Because of the practical limitations of contact that is permitted between unrelated men and women in Tzotzil communities, I have not at any time in my fieldwork spoken freely with or worked at length with Tzotzil women. This has obviously limited my capacity to speak of ethnic identity from the female perspective. However, it will be apparent from early in the book (see chapter 2) that the primordial female presence came first in the order of all things in Chamula cosmology, in the person of Our Holy Mother Moon, who gave birth to Our Lord Sun/Christ. In essence, then, the primordial female power of the cosmos is inextricably linked to all of those discussions of mythical and ritual time that are discussed in the first half of the book. The instrumental role of females in cultural maintenance, cultural renewal, and ethnic continuity—also as victims of exploitation and violence in male machinations for power—is centrally important to the argument of several of the essays (chapters 6 through 8). It is also noted in chapters 9 and 10 that females have, through the Zapatista movement, moved into positions of public leadership; in fact, women's issues are prominent in the Zapatista agenda for social and economic reform. The reader is invited to consider two full-scale ethnographic studies of Tzotzil women's perspectives on their place in contemporary society (Rosenbaum 1993 and Eber 1995). These accounts offer detail and nuances on these issues that I have undoubtedly missed.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book came into being through dialogue. Not only the ethnographic data but also the impetus to present these essays as book, came to me through conversation.

I am particularly grateful to my colleagues in the Quincentenary Project: Manuel Gutiérrez Estévez, J. Jorge Klor de Alva, Miguel León-Portilla, and Manuel Marzal. My sustained, close contact with them as a group began in 1986 in the context of the planning and editing process related to our multiple seminar series, in addition to the seminars themselves. We spent hundreds of hours together in the Convento de la Coria, in Trujillo, Spain, as guests of the Xavier de Salas Foundation and the Government of the Autonomous Region of Extremadura. In this restored sixteenth-century convent—now the seat of the Salas Foundation, we were constantly aware of the irony of the place. This lovely town was the home of Francisco Pizarro—astute and bloody

plunderer of the Inca Empire—and of Francisco de Orellana, discoverer of the Amazon. Vasco Núñez de Balboa, discoverer of the Pacific Ocean, came from another Extremeño town nearby. Indeed, Extremadura proudly touts itself in tourist literature as being the “Cradle of the Conquistadors.” (They are revising this, for it did not “play well” during the Quincentenary observance.) To the sobering irony of staging a major project on the processes of postcontact ethnic and national formation in the Americas from this setting was added the counterirony that the taxpayers of Extremadura contributed generously to all stages of this undertaking, including publication of results. As our principal patron, the Extremeño Ministry of Culture—even we, ourselves—came to regard this endeavor as a kind of academic penance in the present for what Bartolomé de las Casas dubbed “the Black legend,” referring to the atrocities committed by Spaniards against the Amerindians in the sixteenth century. Indeed, the Spanish title of the project, “De Palabra y Obra en el Nuevo Mundo” is borrowed from the Roman Catholic prayer associated with the sacrament of confession: “My Father, I have sinned against thee in thought, word, and deed. . . .”

Although this backdrop of guilt and atonement may sound maudlin, perhaps even foolish—particularly so in an academic setting—the leitmotif of establishing an understanding and dialogue, via scholarly inquiry, with a few representatives of America’s historically oppressed populations, consistently emerged in our discussions and seminars as an ethically and academically responsible strategy for understanding ethnic identities in the Americas. Our central concern came to be the quest for the means of empowering subaltern groups to speak as active agents in witnessing and constructing their own destinies, even as they lived and live today under various circumstances of structural inequality. That we found virtual unanimity among ourselves and among seminar participants on these issues—anthropology as cultural critique and documentation of cultural agency as an active force in social change—may come as no surprise, for one of the mainstreams of cultural anthropology as a whole has focused on these problems in the past few decades. However, the five of us came to this consensus from very different national traditions and intellectual formations—Spanish, Mexican, Peruvian, and North American. I learned much from reflecting on the evolution and expression of our convergence of opinion on this matter. I thank them for reading and critiquing virtually all of the essays in this volume. I also express my deep gratitude to the people of Extremadura, and to Jaime de Salas, secretary of the Salas Foundation, for providing the setting and the means for me to engage in over a decade of sustained international discussion of the subject matter of this book.

The field research and translations that are reported in this book have been generously supported by a fellowship from the John Simon Guggenheim

Preface

Foundation (1977–78), and by grants from the National Institutes of Health (1977–79; 1983–85) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (1989–91). I gratefully acknowledge this assistance, knowing that other countries in the world would not have been so generous in support of a project that is, on the surface of it, so far from their “national interest.” I hope to have shown in this book that an understanding and appreciation of Mexico, an old and close friend of the United States—now bound to us ever more intimately through NAFTA and through our shared cultural and historical heritage—can never be far from our interests and sensibilities as a nation.

Other significant support for various stages in my research and related conferences and conference presentations has come from the University at Albany, the Institute for Mesoamerican Studies at the University at Albany, the University at Albany Foundation, The Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, and from the Plumssock Foundation. This support is gratefully acknowledged.

I have also obtained valuable help from my colleagues at the University at Albany. I specifically thank Edna Acosta-Belén, Richard Bleu, Louise Burkhart, Robert M. Carmack, James P. Collins, Helen Elam, Liliana Goldin, Gail Landsman, Lee Bickmore, and Richard G. Wilkinson, for reading and commenting on drafts of a number of the essays in this volume. During the same period, I received invaluable feedback and inspiration from a number of graduate students at Albany in the context of seminars in which I presented several of the present essays as working papers. I am particularly grateful to Quetzil Castaneda, Duncan Earle, Antonella Fabri, Estuardo Galdámez, Gwynne Jenkins, Brent Metz, Pedro Pitarch, and Alice Re Cruz, for their assistance and encouragement at various stages of this project. All of them have contributed as much to my education as I hope to have contributed to theirs.

I also express special thanks to Sally and Richard Price and Barbara and Dennis Tedlock, and June Nash, Linda Schele, and Evon Z. Vogt, all of whom have provided me with inspiration through their own highly innovative works and through their encouragement to experiment with my own ethnographic voice.

I also owe a special debt of gratitude to my former colleague Richard Leventhal for many years of friendship and education in Maya archaeology and for his kind permission to allow our coauthored essay to be reprinted here. To my colleague Brenda Rosenbaum goes my deep gratitude, not only for helping to monitor my translations and notes for consistency and accuracy, but also for contributing heroic editorial labors to my larger project of publishing my full corpus of Tzotzil narrative texts.

I express my sincere thanks to former editor Marley Wasserman of Routledge Press for encouraging me to undertake this project, and to the

present Publishing Director, Bill Germano, for his patience, encouragement, and understanding in seeing this project to completion.

The last word in gratitude must go to my family. My wife Eleanor, who has been at my side at all stages of this project, provided invaluable bibliographic, technical, and editorial assistance. Without her, this whole project would have languished. I also thank my children—Andrew, Molly, and Nicholas—who read parts of the manuscript with a critical eye for excessive jargon and academese, which they loathe. I hope that they will see the fruit of their demand for clarity.

ORTHOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Aside from a very few colonial sources (Gossen 1985), the modern history of Tzotzil as a written language and literature is very recent, dating from about 1960. Therefore, orthography has not yet been standardized. There are two common modern notions: column 1 is closer to the conventions of the International Phonetic Alphabet; column 2 acquiesces to the realities of available typeface and broader intelligibility to both English and Spanish speakers, and is also closer to the orthography used in older Tzotzil/Spanish—Spanish/Tzotzil manuscripts. Equivalences of consonant notations are generally as follows. Some manuscripts and published texts use a combination of both orthographies, as I shall in this book. All Tzotzil textual extracts in this book have been standardized to use the symbols printed in **boldface** below.

I am using a combination of both notations for these consonants (bold-face characters in columns 1 and 2) so as to represent the correct Tzotzil sound value together with simplicity of notation. Other Tzotzil consonants in my orthography are pronounced with their I. P. A. sound values.

| (1) | | (2) |
|----------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| ʔ (glottal stop) as in | = | ʔ or ' or ʔ as in |
| ʔon 'avocado' | = | ʔon or 'on or ʔon |
| h as in hmeʔ 'my mother' | = | j as in jmeʔ |
| š (sh) as in ši 'he or she said' | = | x as in xi |
| s as in sik 'cold' | = | z as in zik |
| č (ch) as in čiʔ 'sweet' | = | ch as in chiʔ |

Preface

č as in *čič* ‘chile’ = *ch*’ as in *čich*’

(glottalization on a consonant is consistently represented by an apostrophe following the consonant)

č as in *čeb* ‘girl’ = *tz* or *ts* as in *tzeb* or *tseb*

č as in *č’i?* ‘dog’ = *tz’* or *ts’* as in *tz’i?* or *ts’i?*

k as in *kom* ‘to remain’ = *c* as in *com*

k’ as in *k’an* ‘to want’ = *c*’ as in *c’an*

b (glottalized) as in *nab* ‘lake’ = *m* as in *nam*

Tzotzil vowels have these sound values:

- a* [a] as in *father*
- e* [ɛ] as in *bet*
- i* [i] as in *beet*
- o* [o] as in *boat*
- u* [u] as in *Luke*

EDITORIAL NOTE

As I noted earlier in this preface, I have dated each of the essays either with its date of original publication in Spanish or English, or, in cases of unpublished texts, the date of composition. This information, in addition to the setting and circumstances of the composition, is incorporated into brief headnotes for each chapter. In the case of published material, I have deliberately limited my editing to the deletion of redundant material and correction of factual errors. Both the dating and editing decisions are related to the particular goals of this book.

This page intentionally left blank