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mission statement: the journal of latin american anthropology is designed to create a forum for the international exchange of scholarship on the theoretical and political issues facing residents and scholars of the western hemisphere. the journal will publish articles on anthropological research in mexico, central and south americas as well as the caribbean, and it will publish work on peoples who move within this hemisphere by crossing national and/or cultural borders. the editor invites and will actively recruit contributions from latin american and caribbean intellectuals, as well as from north american anthropologists coordinate with this plan, the editor will publish articles in spanish as well as english.

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introduction
Foreign visitors who arrive in Scandinavia will soon encounter one of the numerous Viking activities. Men and women wear the clothes of the Viking era with no signs of modernity. Modern clothes, shoes, jewelry, watches, cellular telephones, and hot dog stands are removed from the activities to guarantee a cultural experience as authentic as possible. Fights take place with ancient weapons and the boats are akin to those that mastered the seas of Europe 1000 years ago. The boat-building techniques are as ancient as the monarchy that link the contemporary Margrethe directly the Second to Gorm the Old of the 10th century. The activities repeat themselves year after year when thousands of Vikings come alive next to the ruins of fortifications and other buildings, only to be watched by even more spectators from every corner of the world.

Some contemporary Vikings have read the Futhark—the ancient writing system—that preceded the Christian era of the 10th century. Individual letters sell well to both Vikings and tourists. They bring lasting support and protect the owner against evil spells. In the pre-Christian Viking world, this was necessary, since the only way to eternal life was through dying in battle while fighting for the Gods. These ancient Nordic Gods such as Thor and Freya have given names to the day names. Thursday (tordag in Danish) is “Thors” day. Friday is “Freya’s” day (fredag in Danish). Guides tell visitors that the classic Viking era came to an abrupt halt when a Christian missionary converted Harald Bluetooth—the last Viking ruler and the second king in the world’s oldest monarchy.

Visitors who seek additional insight from talk with contemporary “Vikings” would—if they asked me as informant—be told that I was born into a poor peasant family, living in thatched roof house with no running water, and only recently installed electricity. And I would tell them that this was not unusual in the late fifties and early sixties in rural Denmark.

Some of the foreign commentators participating in the Viking rallies, I anticipate that most readers will agree it would be mean-

abstract
National Geographic magazine uses mystery as a narrative device to enhance the exotic character, hence the desirability of cultural “others” to its customers. Such popular constructions of “The Maya” shared a great deal with scholarship on Yucatán that emphasized cultural continuity as part of a project of building authority and authenticity through the attempt to determine historical origins. Such scholarship refuted daily practices and remained blind to the lived experience of contemporary Maya people. This paper argues that only through a critical approach to popular and academic representations of “Maya culture” can we accommodate intra-cultural diversity, agency, and self-identification in ethnographic analysis and writing.

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resumen
La revista National Geographic utiliza el misterio como un mecanismo narrativo que aumenta el carácter exótico, y así la desabilidad, de “otros” culturales para sus lectores. Estas construcciones populares de “los Maya” comparten bastante con trabajos académicos sobre el Yucatán que enfatizan la continuidad cultural como parte de un proyecto de aumento de autoridad y autenticidad durante el intento para determinar orígenes históricos. Este tipo de trabajo costituye prácticas cotidianas y se mantiene clieante ante la experiencia vivida de los Maya contemporáneos. Este trabajo sostiene que solo con un enfoque crítico hacia las representaciones populares y académicas de “la cultura Maya” podemos ocomodar diversidad intracultural, agencia e identificación personal en análisis y escritura etnográfica.
ingless, if not absurd, to understand the cultural identity and social activities of contemporary Danes, Norwegians, Finns, and Swedes as meaningful in relation to the era of the Vikings. Indeed, hardly anyone does represent contemporary reconstructions of ancient ways as signs of cultural continuity.

When we speak of the Maya of Yucatán, it is different. Tropes of cultural continuity dominate to an exceptional degree. Why is the notion of cultural continuity or "survival" so widespread in talk about the Mayans and not about Scandinavian Vikings? Taken-for-granted as it is, by popular consciousness and in scholarly works, the Mayan past has become an existing reality that gives meaning and depth to contemporary beliefs and practices.

My quick answer lies embedded in the opening contrast with the Vikings. Another people of roughly the same period with at least some similar traits, such as the spiritual conquest, writing system, contemporary revitalization, and scores of interested spectators. The clue to explain the difference between the uses of the ancient past is, I believe, that Scandinavia is considered a highly industrial place while Mexico is regarded as a poverty-stricken third world country lying in the backyard of the powerful USA. The Maya is the object of a different kind of interest and different relations of power. Yucatán's landscape is dotted with marks of the ancient civilization and the site of massive tourist interest and archaeological fascination, but where the population is considered non-Western and therefore not expected to yield to the tourist experience of the exotic Maya enigma. In contrast, the Vikings are considered part of the "our" "western" world unlike the third world country Mexico. The Scandinavians are free time Viking rally practitioners or informed experts who are ready to contribute with their acquired knowledge about the past. But there is no cultural continuity automatically evoked, for instance, when it comes to the practice of beer-drinking in the 1990s, which after all was equally celebrated by the 10th century Vikings.

The purpose of this article is to examine a site of essentialist Maya culture production whose products are based on the notion of cultural continuity. From this site "Mysterious Mayas" are produced as discursive subjects that become resources or cultural artifacts for thinking about the Maya. These sources of knowledge embed taken-for-granted relationships between Mayans and Americans, Westerners and non-Westerners, Americans and non-Americans and so on. Most of the time knowledge of the Maya is produced and passed on in ways unknown to the readers. In this article, I will explore how the notion of Maya cultural continuity informs middle class America and (or including) Mayanist scholars. Accordingly, I hope the article will contribute to the current debate on cultural continuity that has surfaced in Mayan studies in the 1990s particularly outspoken at the Annual Meetings of the American Anthropological Association.

If it is true that the Maya are approached in popular and scholarly works through tropes and beliefs of continuity, the site of the construction of cultural continuity lies outside of Meso-America. Our anthropological approach to the "Mysterious Maya" study should reflect this assertion as its premise.

A single magazine stands out as a key source of American, popular knowledge about people in the third world the "produces" this particular image of the Maya. Though scores of magazines, booklets, travel sections in newspapers, travel guides, not to mention the thousands of internet entries with advanced tourist information about the Maya of Yucatán, most readers will probably agree that the National Geographic Magazine is one particularly important, mainstream, information-guide to people in all corners of the globe including the Maya of Mexico and Central America. The magazine is a source of popular image building that to a large extent also reflects the world the way the middle class of America wishes to see it (see Lutz and Collins 1993, Gero and Root 1990, and Blakey 1990). More than this, the National Geographic Society is a giant when it comes to financing archaeological projects among the Maya of Mexico and Central America.

My analysis of National Geographic Society's discourse of the Maya is inspired by a European "critical discourse analysis" (see Fairclough 1995, Van Dijk 1993, and Wodak 1996) and a production focus from cultural studies in Britain and the American ethnographic oriented version (see for instance Johnson 1986/87 and Lutz and Collins 1993). Critical discourse analysis sees

the use of language in speech and writing as a form of 'social practice'. Describing discourse as social practice implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation, institution and social structure that frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them. That is, discourse is socially constituted, as well as socially conditioned—it constitutes situations, objects of knowledge and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people. It is socially constituted, and socially conditioned. (Wodak 1996:15).

This linkage of discourse to institutions is also present in cultural studies as embedded by the circuit of cultural production presented in a seminal article by Richard Johnson (1986/87). His moments or stages of the cultural
process include the production process in its institutional and historical context, the product, the consumption or reading, and the re-appropriation (or internalization) of messages into lived experience. The circuit helps us see the ongoing struggle between producers and receivers of mass media messages as different phases of the same process (Hervvik 1998, 1999, Johnson 1986/87, Lutz and Collins 1993, and Traube 1992). The hundreds of deliberate choices in the visual and textual production of magazine, National Geographic, are parts of the National Geographic Society’s discourse of the Maya. The discursive positioning of the Maya, the readers, the National Geographic Institution, the producers of each article, and the embedded unequal relations of power and privilege are imposed upon readers and eventually reflected in their habitus, i.e., available in the form of unreflective common sense and habit that orientates and naturalizes action (Hanks 1990:7). Habit is “the product of the embodiment of the imminent regularities and tendencies of the world, it contains within itself an anticipation of these tendencies and regularities, that is, a nonethe less reference to a future inscribed in the immediacy of the present” (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:138). Thus embodied, it will have consequences for how readers treat the Mayas in the Yucatán and how scholars position themselves in relation to the living Maya.

In this article, I will not deal with the readers’ internalization of National Geographic discourse, but instead identify the discursive portrayal of the Maya and then move on to investigate how similar ways of portraying and understanding the Maya and their famous past informs the texts of Mayanist scholars. The popular consciousness and the academic research, I see related in what Giddens has called the “double hermeneutic process” which theorizes the flow of ideas from lay people to scholars. Giddens has pointed out that social science scholars enter the field of research as a world which is already constituted as meaningful (Giddens 1984). Therefore, popular ways of thinking about the Maya will be reflected in the scholarly way of thinking about the Mayas.

Cultural understandings and social constructions of the non-Western Other are communicated between scholars and lay people in direct communication and indirectly through the media. The double hermeneutic process leads us to uncover the cultural continuity notion in both Meso-American ethnography and in popular forms such as the National Geographic. One of these embedded strategies that are present in popular and academic renderings of the Maya is the downplaying or silencing the Maya whereby the need for mediating specialists such as the ethnographer, the archaeologist, the National Geographic writer, and photographer can step in and bridge the gap between the traditional Maya and the Modern Americans.

I have picked out four articles on the Maya (Garrett 1989, La Fay 1975, Morley 1936 and 1925) which, in my opinion captures the magazine’s general approach to the Maya people. The questions, I wish to address for this purpose concern how the Maya are portrayed in the photographs, picture captions, and text. What is their role, what type of people are they, what kinds of things are they doing, and do they have a voice? What is the role of pre-Hispanic Maya in the magazine articles? How are contemporary Mayas related to the builders of the civilization? How are past and present constructed? What is the role of Westerners in the magazine? For what ends, do the discourses on the Mayas serve?

Though many ethnographers and Latin Americanists have told me about the mismatch they experienced between the field site, their place of upbringing, and these sites as they appeared in National Geographic descriptions, the purpose is not to examine the accuracy of the photo series or the scholarly validity of the article texts or picture captions. They are produced not so much with an eye to truth, but with an eye to existing understandings and the audience that will consume them. Thus, they are constructed about not by the Maya. Instead, I will discuss the articles from the perspective of the social space where they are produced, circulated, and consumed. But before, turning to the magazine, we need to turn briefly to the Society behind the magazine.

national geographic society

The National Geographic Society emerged in the last decades of the 19th century when evolutionist scholars were busy explaining new reports about cultures and peoples emerging from distant places into the popular Western world view. Although photographs have always been important in the construction of cultural difference, they have never more as important as now where television, film, and mass circulation of photographs have superseded text as the main educator (Lutz and Collins 1993:4). Today, National Geographic is one of the primary means by which middle class North Americans receive information and images of the world outside their borders (Lutz and Collins 1993:1). Most of the readers or viewers do not read the text. Instead, they give in to seductive photographs and limit their reading to the picture captions. Perhaps as many as 37 million people turn the pages of the National Geographic either made available through indi-


industrial subscriptions or in public waiting rooms where they serve as the middle class's marker of good taste (Lutz and Collins 1993:9).

Lutz and Collins concluded from an analysis of more than 600 randomly selected photographs in copies of National Geographic that non-Western people "are portrayed as exotic; they are idealized; they are naturalized and taken out of all but a single historical narrative; and they are sexualized" (Lutz and Collins 1993:89). The historical narrative is evolutionary with only two worlds: the traditional and the modern. "The world before 'the West' and its technological and social progress came to 'the rest' and the world after" (Lutz and Collins 1993:111). People out there are evolving slowly into the modern world. The cultures of the non-Western world stand on different steps of the evolutionary ladder and can be portrayed as close-to-nature, exotic, classless, and poor, while the presence of Westerners does not cause conflict, since they possess the postcultural scientific means to influence the evolutionary advancement of other peoples to democracy and market economies (Lutz and Collins 1993:109). Instead, the Western presence can be seen as the potential of a gentle therapeutical push toward a Western model of modernity, when the evolutionary warranty of progress finally secures the triumph of rationality over instinct (Lutz and Collins 1993:19). In short, National Geographic is a commercial mass-circulated cultural product that does not wish to bring disorder into the world view of middle class Americans, therefore it avoids controversial personalities, violence and poverty. This has been the explicit policy since the beginning of the century (Lutz and Collins 1993:26-27, 164-165).

The pictures in a given article are not the result of a single photographer, but the combined effort of a story team: a writer, one or more photographers, and a picture editor (Lutz and Collins 1993:54) with additional staff being brought in later. "The story is built, they say, on the strength of the pictures, and the pictures must tell a story in their own right which is worked out beforehand (Lutz and Collins 1993:55). Photographs have no intrinsic meaning but are empty vessels waiting for audiences to pour meanings into them; the discourse beneath the image is crucial and accordingly decided before the first of the thousands of pictures are shot in the field. When magazine articles, picture captions, and photographs finally appear, they are the outcome of a long complicated treatment and hundreds of decisions that make up the discourse of National Geographic Society (Lutz and Collins 1993:55-56). While these stories can be read directly, the underlying discourse promoted by the Society is triggered by the readers' shared cultural knowledge. With this institutional background, we will now examine how the National Geographic has decided to present the Maya. What are the common features of its representation of the Maya?

the mysterious maya

The Maya of Central America are a favorite topic in the magazine. The birth of the Mayan mystery is created by two National Geographic authors:

Like other archaeologists, I have always been skeptical of the term "lost" for cities or civilizations. In general, even the most remote ruins are well known to the people living nearby. Not so with many of the Classic Maya cities, for in the end they were reclaimed by the very jungle that had sheltered them. Classic Maya civilization was truly lost until the beginning of the 19th century, when brief notices of crumbling jungle cities began to appear in obscure publications. Thus was born the aura of mystery that ever seems to attend things Maya. (Stuart 1977:40)

In Quetzil Casañeda's analysis of this quotation, it becomes clear that the idea of mystery is understood exclusively from the vantage point of Western civilization in disguise of the USA speaking to itself about its Others. "The Stuarts promote the anglophobe discovery of lost ruins [...] thus their comments implicitly condemn the Latin nations to a less than scientific and less than fully civilized stage of social evolution" (Casaneda 1996:133-134). The mystery idea and application is a National Geographic remedy. Moreover, it creates a demand for cultural mediators such as the National Geographic experts.

The most recent issue treated here is the October 1989 article "La Ruta Maya" written by the editor in charge Wilbur E. Garrett, and photographed by his son, Kenneth Garrett. In the 50 years following 1925 National Geographic Society has sponsored 68 archeological projects and brought more than three dozen articles on the Mayas (La Fay 1975:732). Consequently, the Society has always been an institution whom you would want to be on good terms with. Without doubt the combined effort of the National Geographic Society and the Carnegie Institution of Washington has boosted archeology's position as the prima donna of regional disciplines in the Yucatán (Farriss 1983:2-3). From archeology the interest in the ancient Mayas spread into ethnohistory "functioning as a handmaiden to archeology, defining its task as the culling from historical documents of information that will help illuminate the area's pre-Columbian past" (Farriss 1983).

"La Ruta Maya" belongs to the travel genre. Garrett launched the idea of establishing a tourist route through Central America, "the realm of
the ancient Maya” where the tourist “passes within easy reach of thousands of Maya ruins as well as eight international airports” (Garrett 1989:435). Behind the invitation lies a concern for the environmental destruction of rain forest and a wish to share the mystery of the magnificent Maya ruins with the readers within a national tropical park.

“Children of Time” from December 1975 is written by Howard La Fay. This piece presents the archaeological accomplishments and compares features of the ancient civilization explicitly with today’s Maya. The Maya are not given a voice in the presentations perhaps since “the glory is gone,” even if the “ways of the past still guide their descendants’ lives” (La Fay 1975:729).

In 1925 and in 1936 Sylvanus Morley wrote “Chichen Itzá, an Ancient American Mecca” and “Yucatán, Home of the Gifted Maya.” Both articles deal with the recent excavations and first hypotheses about the life of the ancient Maya. Despite the different external institutional circumstances and conditions for being in the Yucatán, there are still many common features Garrett’s, La Fay’s, and Morley’s representations of the Maya of Yucatán.

One of the features that I have found common to all National Geographic articles on the Maya is that the authors employ a specific archeological concept of culture referring to a specific area and period of time defined by a specific set of traits and material objects. In this perspective, stemming from the early massive involvement of archaeologists and ethnohistorians, the Maya culture spans from the present and 3,000 years back in history and the area now covered by five modern nation-states, Mexico, Honduras, Belize, Guatemala and El Salvador with a peak of development in the classic era 300-800 A.D. According to this notion of culture, discovery is a key concept which contrasts significantly with the recent emphasis in social anthropology on culture as knowledge shared to various degrees, continually revised, and questioned by motivated reflexive agents and constrained by history and experience (see for example Holland and Skinner 1995, Quinn and Strauss 1997).

The modern and the ancient Maya are indiscriminately and uncritically mixed in photographs, texts, and captions. Particularly in the two recent articles (La Fay 1975 and Garrett 1989). Examples of where the past and present collapse into a single timeless framework are numerous and a dominating rhetorical feature of the two articles. They can be observed in the sequence of pictures (oscillating between people and ruins or people and nature), the size of the photographs, and in their relation to previous and subsequent pictures. One crude illustration can be found in “The Maya, Children of Time” (La Fay 1975), where one page expounds a portrait of an elder Maya male from Guatemala. On the opposite page, we find a similar size stela. The caption makes no effort in being diplomatic about its message.

Living face and countenance of stone share the strength of a common heritage. The Oriental cast of their features bespeaks the Asian forebears of all American Indians. At Copan in Honduras, a bearded ruler (right) still flushes red with paint that once covered his stela, erected in 782. Leaders may have held the allegiance of their people by granting prestigious ceremonial tasks. A system of rotating religious duties prevails today in the highlands, home of this straw-hatted Guatemalan elder of San Juan Atitlan (above). Men win honor doing voluntary service. (La Fay 1975:758)

In the articles, Garrett and La Fay make a strong effort to dissolve the time span into a single timeless Mayan world. A common way to write is, “As his ancestors had done for centuries, Maya farmer Bernabé Pop had burned and cleared a patch of forest to support his family” (Garrett 1989:434), “In the manner of the ancient priests, Susana had fasted.” (La Fay 1975:739). After a picture caption introduced a folk healer from Mni, La Fay writes “Among the ancient Maya, healers belonged to a hierarchy of priests and astrologers. Of the old elite, only the healer remains, still respected, still sought after” (La Fay 1975:746). An interview begins, according to the author, “If you could go back to a Maya city of the Classic Period, would you understand them” (La Fay 1975:749), which underscores where the “real” Maya culture is most densely represented and source of “real” authenticity.

Elsewhere, the principle is applied in housebuilding which has made little progress.“Even the ‘Yucatán houses’ are monotonously similar. An elongated shape with a steep thatched roof, they remain basically unchanged from the pre-Columbian houses depicted on a ninth-century wall carving at Uxmal” (Garrett 1989:447). The examples are numerous, “Maya guerrillas have held out for 450 years or so, and there are still towns outsiders should leave before dark” (Garrett 1989:463) while another caption grieves for the use of high heels among the Maya people, “High heels and jeans may be gaining popularity in the highlands of Guatemala, but they pale beside the ancient patterns of Maya clothing. Village-bound women usually dress more traditionally than men” (Garrett 1989:465). Again and again the magazine reinforces the reader’s time-space frame, “Columbus met Maya boatmen
in larger seagoing versions of this cayuco, carved by a boatbuilder along Guatemala's Rio Dulce. Maya trade routes stretched as far as Panama” (Garrett 1989:469). Or even worse, “Could it have been much different when Columbus sailed by” “Yes, in two nights we didn't see a single turtle.” “Yellow buses’ dropping their passengers into villages little changed in hundreds of years (Garrett 1989:471).

The approach is consistent with earlier issues on the Maya. Fourteen years earlier, La Fay wrote:

My stay in Xcobenhaltun introduced me to the rhythm of life in an isolated Maya village. Given the innate conservatism of farming societies--and of the Maya, above all--there is little reason to believe that rural life today differs radically from that of the distant past. The families of Xcobenhaltun, live in houses similar to those of their ancestors. (1975:741-2)

A photograph of a Maya woman baking tortillas in her kitchen is juxtaposed with a clay figure. The caption goes, “Mirror image of a sister in clay created some 1,200 years ago.” (La Fay 1975:743). Other Maya people travel to the market as they have always done, “Many travel at night in order to be open for business at dawn. Within the packs ride products that have gone to market since pre-Columbian times; tomatoes, avocados, sweet potatoes, high-backed sandals, and small turkeys.” (La Fay 1975:752).

The informed reader would perhaps ask if the National Geographic writer encountered prominent Maya in Oxkutzcab, such as the Xi-Xiu family. The answer is affirmative. La Fay met with José Xiu--his full name is José Agapito Xiu Xiu. José Xiu sat “At the Queen’s Table” implying that this was the night of the visits of English Queen Elizabeth II (La Fay 1975:763). In the by now familiar National Geographic style, La Fay writes, “I found him in his house, and old man with white hair and a face that could have come from a Maya stela (La Fay 1975).

As one of the few Mayas, José Xiu was given a voice explaining that he visit Uxmal:

... and the other ruins as well. When I see them, I am very proud to be Maya.

But we Maya do not look only to the past. Education is changing our lives. Today we are chemists, physicists, artists. We will be as great in the future as we were in the past. (La Fay 1975:764)

Few other Maya people in José Xiu’s town of Oxkutzcab visit ruins (Hervik 1992). Garrett cites José Xiu but reserves the final word to himself and tacitly hints an explanation for José Xiu’s visits to the ruins, “When I left, Señor Xiu returned to his work--a peculiarly Maya undertaking. He was preparing an article for the newspaper, Diario de Yucatán, on the names of the stars” (Hervik 1992). He must, I would argue, “connect” to the ruins to live up to the image expected from him (see also Hervik 1998b).

In the text of a fold-out photograph, the time factor collapses into a spatial remoteness. In the photo, a number of highland Maya seem to have a great time watching a celebration behind barbed wire, but the caption underscores a total remoteness in time and space.

Six hours by dirt road from the nearest city, villagers of remote San Mateo in Guatemala blend ancient beliefs with [new] Roman Catholicism as they celebrate Good Friday. Conquered and converted by Spaniards 400 years ago, the isolated Maya remain culturally distinct. (Garrett 1989:426).

Notice how many words are used to construct and guarantee that these Mayas are isolated and unspoiled. “Six hours beyond the nearest city,” “remote,” “isolated” and remain “distinct.” Not a single tourist or non-local individual can be spotted. The tourists are guaranteed an authentic unspoiled, genuine, pristine, untouched and traditional cultural experience (Handler 1986:2). In the caption, Roman Catholicism becomes the new element added to the ancient world; “ancient” there means more than 500 years ago. Later, the same location is used in a scene where a couple of boys play basketball. The caption gently makes certain that we view the photo according to the general plot.

The soul of the Maya finds expression in all they touch, even things borrowed from other cultures. In San Mateo Ixtatan, a basketball backboard and Catholic icons are colored by a distinctively Maya hand. By promoting limited cultural interaction, La Ruta Maya aims to ease the burdens of poverty and isolation while keeping the true Maya colors from fading away (Garrett 1989:478-479).

Garrett seems to suggest that Catholicism and basketball cannot be Maya nor for that matter, Mexican. This essentialist categorical claim makes sense only in relation to the arena where the magazine is produced, for
away from Guatemala and Mexico. Few people in Mexico would deny that to be a good Mexican is also to be a Catholic, thus underscoring that Catholicism has been appropriated and internalized as Mexican cultural identity. This can be seen, for instance, in the rhetoric of alleged intrusions by foreign sects into Mexico arguing that they threaten the national cultural identity and Catholic prevalence (Hervik 1991).

Early articles such as Morley (1925, 1936) and the more recent ones by La Fay (1975) and Garrett (1989) differ in that they make far less of an effort to establish the connection between the ancient and the modern Mayas, although there are a number of occasions where Morley writes that “Many customs unchanged for the last 2,000 years,” “like their ancestors,” “from times immemorial” (Morley 1936). As mentioned, Morley conveys clearly that we cannot learn anything from the Mayas, instead he focuses on the ruins that are being excavated by the Carnegie specialists. On the other hand, La Fay and Garrett, in collaboration with picture editors and caption writers, expend much energy in creating a connection between contemporary Mayas and the ruins in a timeless, ahistoric framework that could boost tourism. An explanation of why Morley uses less energy to tie the present and past arises directly from the different circumstances and conditions for being in Mexico. Garrett and La Fay promoted tourism in 1975 and in 1989 and opted for selling archaeology and promoting safe tourism, thereby supporting the National Geographic sponsored excavation projects which again feeds back on productions of articles and documentaries. In contrast, Morley had conducted espionage as an officer in the Naval Intelligence working

to counter the effects of anti-American sentiments where he found them. He deployed good will and his reputation as a scholar and scientist, for this end, for example, to assure the Governor of Quintana Roo that President Woodrow Wilson would not yield to those influential Americans who openly advocated seizing the Mexican oil fields around Tampico and sisal-growing plantations in Yucatán, whose products were strategically important to the United States. (Sullivan 1989:133)

In other words, the relationship between Yucatán and the United States were considerably different in the two periods. Besides, no massive tourism was present in the 1920s and 1930s. The American middle class had not begun to appropriate with their own bodies the soils of the backyard, the Yucatán.

The uncritical mixing of ancient and modern Maya that we have wit-

nessed in this section, relates clearly to the magazine’s close ties to the archaeological discovery of Mayan ruins. As we will see in the following, this mutual engagement between National Geographic Society and archaeology has implications for how the magazine represents Mayans and archaeological work in the Yucatán.

arheology as dramatic discovery and conquest

Selected among thousands of shots, the catchy first page picture shows a young wet naked male with a glimpse of an ancient ruin in the background. The man, who is Maya, gazes upward into the camera with little obvious expression. He is no more than 20 years of age. His body seems to tell us that he is taking a break from hard work, since he is perspiring heavily. The perspiration and the fact that the young man shows no “cultural” emblems in the form of clothes, ornaments, hairstyle or other cultural signifiers highlight his “classic, natural figures” which again is supported by his anonymity.

Equally crafted is the small photo that accompanies the index of the October issue. A young Maya with long hair and a white dress is gazing upwards, presumably looking at a large ruin. We are not told so, but it is clearly a Lacandon Maya looking at the pyramid in Palenque.

Picture captions play a crucial role in the National Geographic since 53% of its readers read only the captions and look at the photographs (Lutz and Collins 1993:76). The number of possible interpretations of the photographs can be severely limited by the picture captions that serve to fix or rationalize the potential readings of what could be a critical provocative image. This piece of text tends to guide the reader to the ‘proper’ level of perception and understanding that can contribute to the story that the pictures are intended to tell (Lutz and Collins 1993:76-77).

The picture caption accompanying the first photo reads, “Stepping out of time, a young Maya bears the classic features of his forefathers. Though decimated by the war and disease, Maya still outnumber European descendants in much of their homeland” (Garrett 1989:423).

The two photographs of single Maya men in front of ancient ruins stress, in Lutz and Collins’ words the “random moment” rather than the “decisive moment.” “Such photographs highlight timelessness rather than history; inhere rather than contingency; and enduring human values rather than current human actions” (1993:59). It is not the young Maya himself who
Yum Kin, Lord of the Sun. Space and time is played upon to the extreme when he writes that Yum Kin has "remote eyes" and that "his eyes seemed to focus on something far ways (La Fay 1975:739).

The effort to present individuals with personality and emotions prevails in descriptions of every individual whom the author meets in his quest for knowledge. Thus, Merle Green Robertson becomes a "White-haired, incredibly energetic" scholar (La Fay 1975:755), Alfredo Barrera is a "white-haired man with a swift smile" (La Fay 1975:746), and a Maya jnem (shaman) appears as "a small, frail man with coal-black hair" (La Fay 1975:739).

La Fay does not spare any opportunity to evoke mysteries in the contemporary world. The jnem at the ch’a chaak ceremony had told the reporter how he had brought peace to a violent village. To underscore his power, the reporter observes that "the sky darkened. Lightning bolts—the spears of Chac [Chaak in the newest alphabet]—flashed and cracked through the leaden air. Finally the heavens opened to pour life-giving rain on the parched fields of Yucatán" (La Fay 1975:739). After all, rain was what the ceremony was about. As if this was not enough, elsewhere in the same article, rain was noticed to hit Yucatán by surprise in the middle of the dry season on the very day when Queen Elizabeth II arrived for a visit (La Fay 1975:763).

We may now ask more generally, can the living Maya contribute with their knowledge to solve the archaeological enigma?

**friendly folks, but ignorant**

In his article on Chichen Itza, Morley makes certain that no knowledge can be gained from contemporary Mayas. A perception that prevails in recent articles. In an candid caption called "Past and Present" the spirit of the magazine’s overall approach to contemporary Mayas is squarely illustrated.

*Two hundred thousand Maya till for foreign masters to-day in the henequen fields of Yucatán, all memory of their former magnificence gone as completely as if it had never been. Their wants are few and easily filled: simple food—tortillas, black beans, squash, chile—and tobacco: cotton stuff to make the shirts and pantaloons for himself and his son and for the huipils of his wife and daughter: ancient by way of a*
celebration on feast days, and he is as happy as he can be under master not wholly of his own blood. But, with such a glorious past, it would seem as though his future might be made of even greater promise than this. With proper educational facilities, with fair agricultural opportunities, with intelligent help over the rough places in the road, he must travel from his own simple past to the complicated world of to-day, and there is every reason to expect that he may again fashion for himself a destiny worthy of his splendid ancestry (Morley 1925:86).

This text underscores the picture’s allusion to a hidden connection of present and ancient Maya from the perspective of racial continuity. Despite this persisting racial continuity, cultural discontinuity is not a part of the story told. In the caption, Morley allows himself to reason about the intellectual stage and psychological traits of the contemporary Maya people. They do not have anything to contribute, but may have their hidden past reconstructed through education. The “authentic” Maya culture is that of the pre-Columbian days (Morley 1925:86).

In the National Geographic article that appeared eleven years later, Morley went even further and stated “To a present-day Maya, the reliefs sculptured by his ancestors on the Temple of the Wall Panels would be virtually meaningless unless explained by an archeologist” (Morley 1936:612). Elsewhere, he portrays the Mayas as “fundamentally conservative and unprogressive” (Morley and Brainerd 1946:1983:27). Yet, they are “friendly folk”: “The modern Maya, who still comprise probably half the population of the peninsula, are cheerful, friendly folk, endowed, in my opinion, with more likeable qualities than any other Indian people” (Morley 1936:641).

An aura of friendliness but pervasive ignorance dominates portrayals of the Maya in the photographs, thus confirming the principles put forward by Blakey, according to which specialists and experts in the magazine are American, intellectual, powerful, donors while native people are passive recipients close to nature and emotional (Blakey 1990:44). None of the Maya people portrayed are archaeologists, tour guides, whereas Western specialists equipped with the newest technologies discover and communicate about the past.

If the insight of contemporary Mayans is presented as insufficient for understanding their own past directly, the magazine may be interested in the practice of making milpa (corn garden). Despite some adjustments this important practice with its immense ecological knowledge has persisted since the peak of the Mayan civilization. How is this modern practice treated by the National Geographic?

According to the magazine’s view of the Maya as traditional and short of being fully developed, it would be a surprise if the magazine found any contribution from this practice. Unfortunately, there is no surprise. The making of milpa is challenged by Wilbur E. Garrett. He argues that this technology exhausts the soil and threatens the proposed biosphere of five million acres which could provide protection for wildlife and hundreds of ancient Maya cities (Garrett 1989). This seemingly destructive practice of Maya peasants comes under attack in the picture caption in “La Ruta Maya.” A photograph shows a wildfire while the caption energetically attempts to restrain the viewing of the photo. We come to understand that the picture is an illustration of how Maya milperos (milpa farmers) destroy the rainforest with their slash-and-burn technique:

... In a tragic cycle of destruction, farmers slash and burn the rain forest for field crops and pastureland. The blazing Honduran rain forest above will yield only three years of corn before a two-thirds drop in productivity drives farmers to destroy a new patch of forest. Such fires, burning out of control leveled 2.5 million acres of rain forest in Mexico Quintana Roo state this year. (Garrett 1989:438-439)

In the more recent issue of November 1992, George Stuart writes about the destruction of the forest and observes in his treatment of “traditional Maya farming that "A simplified and shortsighted milpa system has survived" (1992:96). The consumption of firewood a problem also (Stuart 1992:103). The discourse on milpa making of the Mayas as a threat to the national environment is enduring in National Geographic. The same argument is also launched in both of Sylvanus Morley’s two early articles.

The agricultural practices in vogue among the ancient Maya were such as gradually to exhaust the productivity of the land available for cultivation. Planting eventually became impossible, as the repeated burnings which alone served to clear the ground in the absence of tools and work animals, permitted such a thick sod to grow that no cereal could force its way up through it (Morley 1925:64)

In 1936, he expanded the argument claiming,
If these repeated burnings are continued long enough, a point is eventually reached where the process of resor- tation is retarded, and instead of woody growth returning to the abandoned cornfields, they become overgrown with grass. When this stage was reached, agriculture, as practice by the ancient Maya, was at an end. (Morley 1936:64)

For anyone who has a rudimentary knowledge of the milpa system, these statements are truly amazing. The slash-and-burn technique is not a primitive destructive form of agriculture, but an ecologically balanced method to cultivate the stony, hilly plots of lands in Mesoamerica. The knowledge and skills exercised in the burning of milpa land is truly astonishing in its sophistication and follow the principle that the land used for milpa is borrowed from the “owners” (dueños of the milpa).2

The national and international media presented the wildfire as an ecocide, since many species became extinct because of the milpa making that includes burning patches for cultivation. However, as mentioned earlier, the clue to understanding this presentation in National Geographic, should be found at home in middle America where Julia Murphy has reminded us, proper use of land does not include wildfires. Smokey the Bear has taught generations of Americans and Canadians their civic duty to “Help Prevent Wildfire.” Forest fires are destructive but for the son of a Maya farmer, burning a milpa is a complex skill to be learned. Besides the technique involved, proper rituals to express gratitude to the “milpa owners” must be learned. Moreover, the burning of a forest patch is what makes possible the rebirth of milpa plants such as corn, squash, and tomatoes (Murphy 1993). In the discourse of National Geographic photographs and texts, Maya farmers then have a long way to go before they can comprehend the common-sense knowledge of the American middle class that insists that starting a fire is haphazard and should be avoided.3

Local people have no voice in the articles. Needless to say, Garrett himself also refrained from talking to the Mayas themselves about these development plans, but instead discussed their presence with Guatemala’s president Marco Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo.

In the National Geographic presentations ruins are clearly associated with Western specialists, who do the digging and understanding while the Maya belong to the villages. Occasionally, they are hauled into the ruins as laborers for the research expeditions and archaeology teams and occasionally because some Maya people make attractive motifs next to headforms carved on the ruins. Besides those already mentioned, Morley’s caption writer emphasizes the relationship, “Posed beside a hollowed stone fire pot or incense burner on the Caracol... this modern Maya in profile shows that his race has retained the strong aquiline nose, drooping eyelids, and rounded head that old sculptures depict” (Morley 1936:11). The contemporary Maya are not real bearers of the ancient Maya culture. But they can serve as anonymous actors in bringing life and drama to archaeology. They are not interesting in themselves for what they have to tell, but only to the extent that their racial features are used as evidence of an unconscious, cultural continuity. Their skills can aid the Western specialists who do the real work and for the tourists they exemplify the past as the source of authenticity from where “real” Mayan identity springs. The notion of culture in play is one which transcends the individual, a technical category that exists apart from the individual.

Nora Haenn has gone farther than the National Geographic and studied how contemporary Mayas are appropriated in other sources, such as individual travel books, Newsweek, Time and others (Haenn n.d.). She concludes that living Yucatec Maya are portrayed as intrinsically archaeologi- cal, there by pre-empting any local claims to self-identity. In the travel introduc- tions, she found that:

Maya appear as a trinket sellers or maids, to be gazed upon from a distance and wondered at the remarkable similarity of their features to archaeological reproductions in guide books... For the outsider people are either too tied to the past, or not tied enough, i.e., lacking their “true” historical roots, to have a say in the modern world. (Haenn n.d.:5)

Readers are led to believe that Maya are somehow deeply rooted in the past in a way similar to genetic inheritance, while travellers to the area tell us that the Mayas have no sense of history. “Of the mysterious race which build them [the ruins] there remain only a few thousand Indians ignorant of their glorious past” (Mason in Haenn n.d.). Outsiders or brokers must step in and establish their identity for them.

The effect of establishing modern Maya know nothing of their past is the creation of an imaginary space where tourists, magazine-readers, or scholars can step in and create an identity of the modern Maya. The Maya themselves are considered inept at this. To take the timeless world of the Mayas where the past and present are collapsed, history is marked by the presence of outsiders who struggle heroically to interpret the enigma of Maya culture and to which local people can do little but provide transportation and
food (cf. Haenn n.d.).

"La Ruta Maya" and "The Maya, Children of Time" are pregnant with hidden literary and discursive strategies or stories that do not build on or make sense in the world of the Mayas themselves. The magazine is better seen as arena for the cultural production of the Maya. The historization of the magazine and the National Geographic Society has revealed how the magazine consolidates social order by its ahistorical generalizations (Lutz and Collins 1993, Gero and Root 1990), its use of an archeological concept of culture, and an evolutionary strategy to naturalize cultural differences between the United States and people of the non-Western countries. The depiction of highly industrialized Western countries surrounded by other sets of principles that guarantee the reader an undisturbed view of the world as a nice place.

The magazine offers a perspective on non-Western people which shapes the minds of readers and visitors. The example of how the Mayas are depicted has been cursory, but it nevertheless clearly shows the commodified world of mysterious Mayas to be consumed for the American middle class which has little in its experience to contradict the information and paternalistic historicizing biases behind the article (Lutz and Collins 1993:110).

the mysterious mayas in western anthropology

Let us now turn to the scholarly world--to specialists of the Maya. My claim is that both in fieldwork encounters and in subsequent dissertations and publications, many Mayanist scholars falls remarkable close to replicate the time collapse present in the National Geographie. I do not claim that anthropologists and Mayanists from other discipline exert the same range of distorted representations of the Maya, but rather that many scholars use similar representations based on the criticized notion of cultural continuity, while they maintain that we should avoid essentializing and rectifying cultural identity in anthropology. The point is that an essentialized notion of culture with its exaggerations of differences is expedient and a prerequisite for claims of cultural continuity.

Although, I will touch only upon a few examples in individual presentations, the same representations and routine ways of perceiving the Maya in the popular media are also present in many Maya conference invitations. Here, I will quote from a professional Maya conference called "Theorizing the Past." Before the event took place the organizer circulated a statement, which bears such striking similarities to the National Geographic articles:

We seek to find a balance between scholarly research and the ideological implications resulting from this specialized research for pre-Columbian and modern Latin American cultural studies, modern literary theory, and alternative strategies of narrative lying outside the written word, Bringing "voices" from the past forward to today and discussing their relevance for the art and literature of the contemporary cultures of Latin America. (Mignolo, Rector, and Reents-Budet 1994)

In the same statement the organizers use a "Zapatista discourse" to make the conference appealing and contemporary. The Chiapas events are important for two reasons:

these events are taking place in what was Mesoamerica and today is southern Mexico, and (2) because all interpretations of the events must negotiate recent transnational treatises about Amerindian life which cut across the colonial and national periods in Mexican history. It is as if one can hear the rumors, like echoes of a thunderstorm, coming from pre-Columbian and colonial narratives now re-emerging as part of the continuum of a long struggle of resistances, and adaptations..... What elements of pre-Columbian narratives and their colonial transformations are present in, and thus relevant to, these political processes? (Mignolo et al. 1994)

A Maya monograph from Guatemala (Tedlock 1982) focuses, according to the author Barbara Tedlock, on human subjectivity and the social interaction which is institutionalized into the author's apprenticeship to a Maya shaman. Nevertheless, some of the ethnographic details and the principles of shamanistic practice are still presented with a heavy rhetorical emphasis on cultural continuity. The author employs a conventional entry outlining the extent to which contemporary Mayas can contribute to our understanding of the virtues of ancient Mayas. "It is among the Highland Maya rather than among their Lowland cousins that time continues to this day to be calculated and given meaning according to ancient methods" (Tedlock 1982:1). The research focus is on the past and the contemporary
Mayas are the resource that can contribute to the reading of the books of Chilam Balam as well as the hieroglyphic writing. Unlike, National Geographic Tedlock regard contemporary Maya as agents who respond the surrounding world and their past.

Quiché resistance to the replacement of old customs with new ones is based, in part, on Quiché conceptions of time. As in other matters, thought proceeds dialectical rather than analytically which means that no given time, whether past, present, or future, can ever be totally isolated from the segments of time that precede or follow it. This does not mean that innovations must be resisted but that they should be added to older things rather than replacing them. My own teacher, in addition to employing traditional agricultural techniques and rituals in his milpa, unhesitatingly used insecticides and commercial fertilizers (1982:176).

Tedlock allows the Maya to actively maintain the cyclic conception of time, whereby innovations are simply added to the old customs and to incorporate new practices. Unfortunately, the unhesitant use of chemicals in agricultural work is not explained or given any space in her book. Evidently it is not important.

According to a Danish anthropologist, Lisanne Wilken, the idea of cultural continuity serves as a way to conceive and order the world, in a way that makes certain that meaning in the Maya culture remains unchanged. This notion, she argues, ranges from those who claim, such as Richard Laxton (1981), James Gifford (1978), and Kenneth Pearce (1984) that nothing changed at all, to relatively undisturbed Evon Vogt (1978) and Villa Rojas (1979), to those who argue that European culture gave the Mayas a potential for development but in accordance with pre-Columbian world view Tedlock (1982, 1992) and Burns (1983). To search for cultural continuity, whether as explicit research strategy or taken-for-granted ways of thinking about the Maya, it is search for pre-Columbian models hidden behind colonial, Catholic symbols, rituals, and images. In the encounter with a new world, religion is often not interpreted as a cultural or religious disjunction, (Helms 1975, Tedlock 1982, 1992, Burns 1983, Pearce 1984, Wilken 1988, 1989) but rather an integration of some of the new ideas into the existing system of cultural understanding.

Another example of the cultural continuity discourse contains a mega-sweep.

It is their system of thought that has sustained the Maya from their migration into the area in the first millennium before Christ, through the building of the elaborate ceremonial centers of Tikal, Uxmal, and Palenque, through the conquest of the New World in the sixteenth century, and into the petroleum age of today. Like ... they have remained true to their traditional way of life and way of looking at and understand the universe. (Burns 1983:4).

At times, meaning at the level of deep structure is applied in efforts to bring the Maya people together over at least a 3,000 year period.

These three works (León-Portilla 1973, Eva Hunt (1977) and Reifler Bricker (1981)) suggest that Mesoamerican thought, ancient and contemporary, "savage" and domesticated via Western Christendom, central Mexican, and Maya- is an old, still resilient, remarkably unified body of shared understandings about the nature of a sacred cosmos and of humanity’s role in it. (Gossen 1986:ix)

These quotes originate in the 1970s and early 1980s and must be understood in relation to the current debates, trends, and conventions in anthropology at the time. During these years, nates became celebrated and romanticized in claims of truth speaking native voices. Often, as the case is with Laxton and Tedlock, the contemporary native Mayas hold the secrets to the ancient knowledge of the hieroglyphic writings. Fortunately, the lucky inaugurated anthropologists whether in the Mexican prison or the war-torn highlands of Guatemala were initiated in the esoteric knowledge, which they loyalty sought to convey in their publications. Only later, we should note, did the postmodern critique flourish with new emphasis on self-reflexive anthropology that deconstructed the social positioning of the fieldworker in the field and in their books.

The focus on cultural continuity is still a widespread research strategy in the 1990s, although it appears either as more generous and careful, or it is an explicit strategy of Mayan cultural revitalization efforts.

In the course of my treatment, I have continuously examined discursive aspects of the cultural continuity notion, but without looking at the notion itself and its hidden implications.
cultural continuity

One of the "irregularities of the world" that is present in the National Geographic and embodied in the habitus of the magazine's readers and Mayanists ethnographers is the belief of cultural continuity. It is "irregular" in the sense that it is based on an unequal, asymmetric division of "us," the modern, and "they," the traditional Other, that seems to exist out of time. The notion of cultural continuity has at least to sides to it. One is the meta-narrative where Mayan ethnic identity is explained as the continuity of pre-Hispanic meanings surviving in spite of Colonialism and history more generally. The cultural continuity narrative claims that persistence occurs in spite of history and assets that the alternative "anti-racism" narrative, is unable to explain the impressive survival of pre-Columbian elements against all odds. A celebrated example is the persistence of the Maya language. Downplaying the importance of history further implies that the destruction of the environment, economic change, impact of modern technology and other forms of "modernization" are, if not ignored, then relegated to secondary importance. The premise of the narrative is that persistence is good while cultural loss is bad and therefore mourned. A second side to the notion of cultural continuity relates its status of being a taken for granted way of thinking about the Maya. Such thinking that forms part of the habitus, will inevitably and instrumentally connect the Maya with the "Mysterious Maya" of the ancient, glorified and enigmatic past and lend to astonishment or disappointment when confronted with living Maya of today.

Cultural continuity as a taken for granted way of thinking and a meta-narrative embeds a captivating image of an enduring timeless continuity. Practices, physical items, religious beliefs and so on are explained as "survivals" of some immediate or distant authentic past. In this scheme the indigenized Mayan past is the authentic source while the contemporary is made up of "survivals" in the modernized, post-modern, globalized world. In such an ahistorical view the traditional past is unquestionable and enduring since it is defined in opposition to the modern.

The cultural continuity of the Maya has yielded a group of timeless, essentialized Maya. Mayan practices and discourses then are not analyzed or represented in real time, but filtered through a qualitative division between past and present, authentic and unauthentic, traditional and modern, developed and less than developed. Whatever it takes to bridge the divisions is irrelevant as the division is construed to maintain a qualitative difference.

Much effort has been put into deconstruction the essentialist bogey, yet the production of essentialism goes on in society as a means to organize people for any purpose. This article has sought to contribute to an understanding of how essentialism as a key feature of cultural continuity is reproduced at different sites. It built on the assumption that essentialism, or the construction of essentialism, or the essentialist concept of culture, in literary strategies will not make the phenomenon go away regardless of how many times we repeat the criticism, as long as essentialist thinking about other people dominates our thoughts.

concluding remarks

Some readers may claim that it hardly comes as a surprise that Mayanist scholars echo some of the dominant trends in representations of the Maya in the National Geographic, since the magazine to begin with lends authority from anthropology to validate popular conceptions of the Maya people. To that I would argue, that I certainly expect a more critical ethnographic stand which can identify photographic and literary conventions as one way traffic of communication to an uncritical middle class audience and where the Maya individuals--in the name of popular education--are deprived of any active role.

I started with an image of Viking activities in contemporary Scandinavia stressing the absurdity of bringing contemporary Viking modes of thought into the analysis the historical or ancient Vikings. We may now ask how the National Geographic would portray Scandinavia? It so happens, that Howard La Fay who was the author on the 1975 article on the Children out of time, five years earlier wrote an article called "The Vikings."

In this article, La Fay clearly distinguishes between different phases of history (1970:496). Contemporary Viking activities are always re-constructions, often with boys scouts borrowing original objects from museums. Even the appeal to a continuity which is present and played with but immediately punctuated by the introduction of activities such as Museum visits. One photograph portrays a Norwegian woman who "kneads dough in a wooden bowl strikingly like one found in the Oseberg ship" (La Fay 1970:506). It is perfectly obvious, that the time collapse is forced. Elsewhere in the text and referring to somewhere on the rugged Norwegian coastline, La Fay found an old boat builder..."some men still shape lites and handsome craft in the old fashion." Now only one boatbuilder remains alive, "Mr. Sovik, compact, gray-haired, well into his sixties," with tools of which "all could have come
from a Viking burial mound" (La Fay 1970:501-2). In sum, the treatment of past and present in the same article relatively clearly distinguished between past accomplishments, cultural preservation and contemporary every day life.

This imagined kinship places the Vikings within history on a linear scale that leads directly from the past to the present without any confusion between the two. It allows La Fay to maintain a relatively clear distinction between cultural continuity and modern preservation in his treatment of the Viking past and present. There is no search for pre-Christian models or modes of thought behind contemporary practices and beliefs. But when it comes to his article on the Maya, his approach is different and part of the cultural continuity narrative.

The cultural continuity perspective on the Maya construct and freeze the position of the Maya in the past without allowing contemporary Mayas any active role as caretakers of their own destiny or a present as a source for their identity formation. Mayas are not allowed respond to their own situations. Or, worse, the native voices speak within the anthropologists' discourse of uncritical past present rhetoric. Phrased in the rhetoric of Maya social change, contemporary Mayas are seen either on the verge of collapse or already collapsed.

The readings or interpretations of the Maya—in National Geographic, in tourist brochures, in newspapers—may become resources for thinking about the Mayas in a certain way, or ways to evoke particular feelings that determine the interaction between readers/viewers and the living Mayas.

notes
1. The author is a Dane, a "contemporary descendant" of the Vikings. Also, the author is a social anthropologist who did dissertation fieldwork among the Yucatecans, some of which are "contemporary descendants" of the ancient Mayas, and others descendants of other long distant but less celebrated pasts.
2. It was a surprise to many Yucatecans to learn from a leading newspaper that 30 specially trained federal police agents had succeeded in capturing 11 "nilpo-farmers" guilty of reckless handling of fire. The actual cause(s) of the wildfire turned out to lie somewhere between unskilled electricians who were hired to keep the vegetation away from blocking the electric lines and agents hired by hotel owners in Cancun to clear patches of land near the coast where they wanted to build. Instead of days of hard work chopping wood under the wires, "they" decided to let fire do the work for them. And so it did (Phillipsen 1991:16-17).
3. I became aware only recently of an article in the magazine of September 1996 which dealt explicitly with forest management including how to prevent wildfires. Obviously, this article would be useful for gaining a proper perspective on the magazine's writings about rain forest destruction in the Mexico. If Tedlock had decided to place her fieldwork within the context of brutal repressions of Maya people then, it would be hard to maintain the image of a timeless Maya culture, since virtually all Maya families suffered directly from the repression (see for example Green 1994, Warren 1992, 1993, Wilson 1995, and Zau 1998).
4. The discussant, William F. Hanks, of the AAA session where this article was first presented, argued that the focus on cultural continuity reveals a search for historical traditions which becomes the source of authenticity, while the modern consists of the impinging, exogenous factors of the outside world. In this approach the present becomes unauthentic, the site of emotional struggles of preservation, or it serves to provide bridges for the visitors to the time when Mayan identity was unquestionable.
5. The connection of ruins of a glorious civilization and the not-so-glorious living people in the area was not made when the first discoveries took place in the 18th century at Palenque. Answers to questions such as who build the stone houses, how big the population was and why there is no more people, did not include the Maya population living in the area. It was only 100 years after the discovery of ruins, that they became associated with the Mayas. Stephens wrote: "It was strange and almost incredible that, with these extraordinary monuments before their eyes, the Indians never bestowed upon them one passing thought. The question, who built them? never by any accident crossed their minds." (Stephens 1843:1196-1198)

However, he asserted that the great Maya civilization had been build by distant forefathers. But the contemporary Mayas could not contribute to our understanding of the ancient Maya. He concluded an investigation of Mani documents by stating that the Maya national character of the aboriginal inhabitants had been destroyed forever (Stephens 1900:1196-1198).

Unlike Tedlock (1982), the notion of cultural continuity is relatively unimportant in Burns.
6. For instance, we would ask which dreams of initiation allowed Tedlock to be an apprentice, which after all is of vital importance for being a shaman.
7. This is not saying that the idea of continuity derives solely from the magazine's articles on the Maya or that it is simply copied from descriptive presentations in the public into the private minds of the readers or viewers.
8. Various strategies to bypass the problem of essentializing the Other have been put forward. One is the constructivist stress on "the contingent, fractured, ambivalent and reflexive nature of culture and identity as these are played out in the context of power and domination" (Wetherbee 1997). Another is the concept of culture as used in cultural studies as an arena for struggle over meaning (culture being a construction or a product and therefore not innate and essentializable). A third strategy is embedded in the practice turn of anthropology, where individual actors, interpretations, events, and narratives are on, regarded as constrained and enabled by history and experience became the point of departure for analysis. A fourth strategy is the kind of reflexive anthropology that involves an ongoing scrutiny of the relations in the field, includes native reflexivity and interactive reflexivity in both the field and potentially in the text (see Hastrop and Hervik 1994, Hervik 1999).
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