

anthropology of food, and social movements, and for those interested in GM foods.

A Return to Servitude. Maya Migration and the Tourist Trade in Cancún.

M. Bianet Castellanos, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010. 259 pp.

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The cover of *A Return to Servitude* portrays a young Maya woman in an ironed hotel uniform standing in front of a staircase while holding two small bags with her left hand. Her dark and curly hair is impeccably combed and her eyes blinded by the sun. Her shy smile suggests that she is posing for a familiar face. The woman constitutes a powerful embodiment of service, epitomizing the embodied dispositions of those migrants who have left their villages in Yucatan to cater for tourists in low-skilled jobs alongside the Caribbean coast of Mexico. There is, however, something in the way she stares at the camera that makes one suspect that there is something more underneath; some sort of complicity, of empowerment, of friction; a ghostly presence that hints at all the tensions addressed in Bianet Castellanos' compelling analysis. In my reading, these tensions turn on the ostensible antinomies of modernity and tradition, the rural and the urban, and between consuming and giving.

Organized into seven chapters bracketed by an introduction and a sharp epilogue, *A Return to Servitude* considers "the foundational roles indigenous peoples play in the development of tourism, transnational space and the modern nation-state" (xviii). It builds on Avery Gordons' notion of phantoms as "social

figures that help to connect social structures to personal experiences" by drawing attention to "cultural practices and histories that have been denied, suppressed or erased by modernity's violence" (xxi). The text offers a detailed ethnographic critique of Mexico's modernization projects by means of the exploration of those phantasmagoric experiences they bring forward. In doing so, Castellanos focuses on Mayan labor migration circuits linking a rural inland Yucatec community—described via the pseudonym of Kuchmil—to the tourist destination of Cancún, "a site engaged in the circulation of foreign bodies, global commodities and transnational capital" (xxxii).

Castellanos starts out by providing a historical context for the relationship between Mayan communities and the Mexican state. She traces the process of negotiation that has transformed and assimilated Maya cultural practices, bodies, and subjectivities into Mexico's vision of modernity (147). She then analyzes the 19th century Cast War, the Hacienda system, the agrarian reform of the "ejidos," and the educational role of Misiones Culturales, as interventions designed to incorporate and assimilate indigenous Mayan communities and peoples into the nation state through peonage, the titling of land process, and education (chapter 2). For Castellanos, this incorporation and assimilation culminates in the state-led construction of Cancún in the mid-1970s, which implemented tourism as the central economic development tool for the region and which has converted indigenous agrarian communities to a cash economy through their generalized incorporation into wage labor (chapter 3). Castellanos recounts vividly the stories of those Mayan migrants who describe tourism as "la nueva esclavitud,"

and for whom downward social and economic mobility has become in some cases the only possible survival strategy (72). Intertwining Ong's definition of discipline as "the effect of the exercise of power in the interests of capitalist production" (80) and Abu Lughod's notion of resistance as not always resulting in altering relations of power (105), Castellanos analyzes both the learning processes of gendered, indigenous performances in the service economy as well as the subversive uses that new technologies (e.g., ATM cards, credit systems, cell phones) have opened up for them (chapters 4 and 5).

Focusing on the consumption practices of those indigenous migrant workers who have recently joined the urban working class, Castellanos demonstrates the power of consumption as a methodological device for illuminating links between self-expression and communal obligations in indigenous communities. This is especially evident in the case of internal remittances, which the author argues serve to articulate new social relations and communal obligations and, even more importantly, to show the extent to which formal economy is premised upon the use of the informal sector in this region. Indeed, one of the most powerful arguments in the book is the study of how low-wage workers actively articulate and strengthen the nexus between the formal and informal sectors in service and developing economies. They do so via a combination of informal credit associations, social and kin networks.

Another contribution involves the use of the notion of "circuits"—something that emanates from the work of Roger Rouse in the 1990s—in an attempt to move away from linear and structural analyses of migration and explore the embod-

ied and subjective nature of migratory movements. Castellanos illustrates this subjective dimension by exploring how migrant workers creatively appropriate existing Mexican discourses, as that of *becoming chingón/a*—aggressive and astute—"as a way to survive in the new economy with a sense of dignity and agency" (141). As Castellanos contends, it is the refashioning of their identities around these discourses what has enabled these Mayan migrant workers to avoid the racial and economic discrimination toward indigenous peoples "without shedding the collective orientation promoted in rural life" (160).

The analysis concludes (chapter 7 and epilogue) by reflecting on the questionable sustainability of Cancun's mass tourism model, and therefore, of the region as a whole. Such precarious sustainability was revealed in all its crudity in the aftermath of Hurricane Wilma, in 2005 (chapter 7), when reconstruction efforts demonstrated the uneven and profoundly unjust nature of a development model that focused exclusively on the reconstruction of tourist infrastructures, while displacing, once again, migrant workers to that phantasmatic area in which their lives and rights are ignored, denied, and suppressed.

Castellanos' ethnography illustrates brilliantly the often invisible, yet crucial role that Mayan communities have played in the realization of Mexico's modernity project and the high costs that they have been forced to pay for it. As she demonstrates, the incorporation and assimilation of Maya peoples into modernity has forced many of them to migrate to places like Cancun, which has produced dramatic changes in their communities and families, as well as in their own subjective identities. Castellanos is particularly

insightful in pointing out how the incorporation of these migrants into the ideal of liberal citizens and consumers has required these low-skilled workers to acquire massive amounts of debt, what has transformed them into the most likely next “casualties of our current global fiscal crisis” (179).

A Return to Servitude is fully engaging from the very first pages. It is ethnographically rewarding and should be of interest to students, researchers, and specialists in Latin America, migration, tourism, development, and indigenous studies, as well as a must read for experts on Yucatec Maya communities. A translation into Spanish is needed and it would make this important book’s arguments available to a larger audience.

Revolutionary Parks: Conservation, Social Justice, and Mexico’s National Parks, 1910–1940. *Emily Wakild*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2011. 234 pp.

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Mexico’s Cardenista presidential administration (1934–40) is well-known for several things: the formation of a corporatist state, national patrimony as ideology, the expropriation of the oil industry from U.S. ownership and, perhaps most of all, the distribution of over 18 million hectares of land as part of the ejido collective land program stipulated in the Constitution of 1917. Yet, it has not been especially known for its enlightened environmental policies, forest stewardship, or national park programs.

Emily Wakild’s *Revolutionary Parks* tells this little-known story of forestry and park policy in early 20th century Mexico,

culminating in the formation of dozens of national parks in the Cardenista period. As a result of these efforts, Mexico had more national parks in 1940 than any other country in the world (1). This fact, and the history that goes along with it, makes Wakild’s study a significant contribution not only to Mexican history, but also to research on environmentalism, environmental justice, and science.

The specific trajectory of Mexican national parks did not follow the U.S. model of parks as pristine spaces to be kept safe from economic exploitation use other than leisurely contemplation. Drawing on detailed descriptions of four different parks, Wakild shows how federal managers operated (because they had to, often) with a more pragmatic and socially embedded understanding of how humans interact with their environment. Since Mexican park planning occurred within a populist revolutionary context, planners could not assume that parks should be kept free of all forms of exploitation. Because of this, argues Wakild, their understanding of parks and people had more in common with recent movements for sustainable environment politics than with earlier notions of parks as wildernesses for the middle class.

Furthermore, Wakild shows the often messy interactions of those living in or near the parks created in the 1930s. The diversity of responses in each case demonstrates that rural people and communities were not and are not essentially nature-loving, nor do they always act as responsible stewards of the forests on which they rely. Rural residents inhabit the same complex political and social universe as park planners, and respond in similarly complex ways to it.

These three insights: the role of the Cárdenas administration in forming