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The Chamula Rebellion, 1867–70: A Maya “Caste War” Revisited (Köhler's *Der ChamulaAufstand in Chiapas, Mexiko* )

Der ChamulaAufstand in Chiapas, Mexiko: Aus der Sicht heutiger Indianer und Ladinos by Ulrich Khler

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## The Chamula Rebellion, 1867–70: A Maya “Caste War” Revisited

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*Der Chamula-Aufstand in Chiapas, Mexiko: Aus  
der Sicht heutiger Indianer und Ladinos.* By Ulrich  
Köhler. Münster: Lit Verlag, 1999. 529 pp.

The frequency and magnitude of indigenous rebellions in the Maya area—the “Caste War of Yucatán” (1847–1901) probably being the best-known among them—have for centuries intrigued government officials, kept soldiers busy, inspired public debate among contemporary politicians and intellectuals, and, increasingly, captured the interest of scholars. The most recent incident in a long series, the Ejército Zapatista de Liberación Nacional (EZLN) uprising of January 1994, spurred this interest to the extent that Chiapas became synonymous with a new paradigm in social struggles for autonomy and self-determination of indigenous people worldwide.

Ulrich Köhler writes about a less well-known religious movement centered upon the cult of a new *santo* (a deity whose name is derived from that of a Catholic saint). This cult first developed peacefully in Chamula, a Tzotzil Maya community in highland Chiapas, in 1867 but later led to a series of armed confrontations between Mayan Mexicans from Chamula and government forces for the most part consisting of Ladinos (i.e., non-Mayan Mexicans) before the movement was defeated in 1870. Between 1970 and 1982 Köhler collected 22 accounts of these events from present-day Tzotzil-speakers living in Chamula and neighboring communities. He tape-recorded these narratives and transcribed them word for word, thus preserving their local Tzotzil idioms. The good news here is that, whereas Köhler’s concern is mainly with the historical content, linguists may find the material useful as well. Less fortunate, however, is the fact that, although some of the translations have probably gone through a Spanish stage, they are rendered only in German. Only two additional narratives, collected from Ladino residents of San Cristóbal Las Casas (the former government seat and today Chiapas’s most important highland town), appear in both German and Spanish. The 24 accounts, reproduced together with

helpful comments in chapter 4, take up 60% of the book. In addition, the book contains several annexes (including detailed name and place indexes), 24 photographs and drawings, and six instructive maps.

Köhler uses these narratives in conjunction with the available sources and scholarly accounts to illuminate and reconstruct the course of the rebellion. After a brief general introduction, he lists and discusses the written contemporary sources and interpretations—including monographs by Vicente Pineda (1888) and Cristóbal Molina (1934), reports in periodicals, and literary works—in chapter 2. He also reproduces color copies of a series of eight lithographs by José Martínez representing important events of the rebellion. Chapter 3 is an annotated list of the 14 present-day Tzotzil narratives recorded and published by other scholars.

In chapter 5 Köhler engages in a meticulous review—reminiscent of courtroom cross-examinations—of virtually all the known details of the rebellion. Among the contemporary accounts, Köhler favors Molina for its historical accuracy and credibility. None of the more recent studies gets off lightly, but he feels more comfortable with those of Victoria Bricker (1981) and Jan Rus (1983) than he does, for example, with those of Henri Favre (1971) and Antonio García de León (1985), whose interpretations he dismisses as “embellished with creations of [a] vivid imagination” (p. 27).<sup>2</sup>

Most contemporary Ladino commentators wrote about the events in terms of a “caste war,” a battle between “civilization” and “barbarism” caused by the Maya’s hatred for all except their own kind. More recent studies try to tell the Maya’s side of the story and focus on the religious motivation of the rebellion. Bricker, for example, reads the conflict as an initial “revitalization movement” that only later turned violent. She calls the movement the “War of St. Rose in Chamula,” which she claims to be the appropriate Indian name (1981: 119). Rus argues that no caste war took place, at least not on the Indian side; the events were rather the result of intense conflict within Ladino society. In particular, the competition—articulated on local and national levels—between lowland liberals and highland conservatives led to a progressive impoverishment of Maya Mexicans and concomitant social unrest. Rus’s “caste war” therefore comes with quotation marks.

In line with previous readings of the events, Köhler offers with his “Chamula rebellion” a new label to replace both the Ladino-biased 19th-century usage and Bricker’s label, which in Köhler’s view is “false [because] it is mentioned in none of the Indian texts” (p. 2). His label is appropriate because most people involved in the rebellion came from Chamula but, as Köhler clearly

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2. This and the following translations from German are mine.

states, should not blind us to the fact that many Chamulans decidedly opposed the rebellion and some even joined the Ladino forces dispatched to overpower it.

In the course of his analysis, Köhler provides a host of new details and insights. Only a few can be mentioned in a short review such as this. For example, he found no evidence at all for an alleged crucifixion of a young Chamulan during Easter 1869, an episode that figures as the centerpiece of Bricker's historical-structuralist study. Moreover, his sources allow a reconstruction of what happened to the movement after it was militarily defeated and its members were forced to take refuge in various places outside Chamula territory. As mentioned above, the rebellion did not simply pit Indians against Ladinos but generated opposing parties whose ethnic composition was much more complex.

Köhler is a renowned expert on Chiapas's Tzotzil communities, and his expertise and commitment are reflected in his book. Especially clarifying is his insistence on working out the variations in the course of the movement with time and place. His listing and critical assessment of virtually every available archival and oral source are timely and helpful, not least for future research. One might therefore agree with his claim to have produced "the first comprehensive monograph on the Chamula rebellion" (p. 2). However, those who are looking for more than the minutiae of the rebellion and expect historical studies to have a sound historiographic foundation and relevance to the larger field may be disappointed, because Köhler does not really place his findings in a larger historical context. While some of the complexities of the production and distribution of historical knowledge about the rebellion are given attention in chapters 6 and 7, the similarly complex ways in which such knowledge is received and reworked by different audiences remain largely untouched. These limitations aside, the corpus of narratives in Köhler's book opens an important window on highland Chiapas oral traditions. This itself is an important contribution to scholarship on Mesoamerica.

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## Pastured Landscapes

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*Calling the Station Home: Place and Identity in New Zealand's High Country*. By Michèle Dominy. Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001. 306 pp. \$79.00 cloth, 27.95 paper

In *Calling the Station Home*, Michèle Dominy looks at the way in which the owners of vast sheep farms in the high country of New Zealand's South Island construct their "country" and the way in which that construction affects their sense of identity. New Zealand's mountain-scapes verge on the sublime and are among its most telling icons not just for tourists but for the islanders themselves. High-country lands make up 22% (6 million hectares) of the country's area. Approximately 48% (2.45 million hectares) of the South Island's high country is held as crown pastoral leases by 341 leaseholders, carrying about 2.8 million stock units. These leases, once held primarily by absentee leaseholders, are now held by pastoralists (many of them descendants of the absentee leaseholders) of Anglo-Celtic origin. An extremely tight-knit group, these runholders (a ranch or station is also called a "run" in New Zealand) are reputed for their aloofness, snobbery, and elitism. Though, as a result of a long-term downward trend in the wool market, they do not have the wealth they once had, they are resented both by the Maori, who have made claim to their land, and by New Zealanders of European extraction (*pakehas*, as they are called not without derogation) who live in the low country and believe the leases to favor economically—indeed, to subsidize—the high-country runholders. They give the impression, Dominy says, of being "the last preserve" of New Zealand's colonial past. Given the Maori claims, real and proposed changes in leasing, fluctuating market conditions, new attitudes toward conservation, and the effects of erosion, the farmers find their way of life threatened.

Dominy's primary interest is in the sociopolitical construction of place, particularly the increasing "peripheralization, erasure, and commodification" of the rural. Following Creed and Ching (1997), she notes that identity politics have eclipsed the rural/urban axis. She ar-

gues that we must shift attention from “place as locale to place as conceptual category and site for cultural identity negotiation” (p. 2). Her concern, then, is with physical space invested with economic value, cultural meaning, sentiment, and a sense of historical (at least familial) depth—with what Heidegger would call *Heimlichkeit*. Given the changing situation of the runholders, Dominy focuses on “the ambivalent sentiments and varying meanings attached to public lands by competing constituencies.” Such competition (doubtless along with the ethnographer’s insistent questioning) brings to the fore the runholders’ relationship not only to their land but to their identity as New Zealanders and Pacific Islanders. As they stress their material interests, it would be easy to see their concern for the land as simply one of economic self-interest. Indeed, these pastoralists are keen businessmen who have learned to manipulate the law (particularly with regard to inheritance) to their and their families’ benefit. (Sons rather than daughters generally inherit the land and manage it.) But, as Dominy insists, it would be a mistake to reduce their construction of—and attachment to—the land to economic factors alone. They are not immune to the beauty of the landscape, to the knowledge that they have accrued over the years in working their runs, and to the labor that they and their forebears have put into their holdings. They have in a very real and not just symbolic way constructed their “country.” Though they are a practical people, some of them at least are romantics. Those who leave the high for the low country miss it with an intensity that transcends self-interest. One woman expressed it this way: “It is a physical rather than a mental feeling. . . . I have the need to go back. I wasn’t weaned. I see this now in terms of real dependency” (p. 120). They are caught between the demands of production and the need for conserving the landscape.

The runholders are ambivalent about modernism but not about the technology that modernization brings. Roads, Land Rovers, electricity, telephones, planes, and, no doubt, the computer and the Internet have transformed their landscape—opened it up, made it easier to master. Many acknowledge that they have lost something: the challenge of pioneering life, an intense sense of community, particularly during the mustering and shearing of sheep, a “mystique,” Dominy calls it. One woman put it this way: “But there’s something, it’s lost, it’s gone for me that feeling when I was first married and when I used to come up, that mystery. It was down at the heel. . . . There was a mystery about it, it’s all been cut down, tidied up, and fenced” (p. 57). The nostalgia—the idealization—is familiar. I heard it in “white” South Africa, my wife in Texas. It tones the landscape, giving it, I would say, a somewhat eerie temporality: a depth that is greater sentimentally than it is chronologically. As Dominy puts it, (historical) narrative is inscribed in the landscape, family history in the station house. The inscriptions, the naming, can be cloying. I remember meeting a New Zealand student from the high country in Greece. She said: “What a relief it is to be here where no one cares much about the past, the ruins;

they’re just part of the landscape. Back home, every little bump where something happened is an historical monument.” The runholders are conscious of their family history, if only (but not only) because, like other farmers, they struggle (against taxes, the allure of the city, etc.) to keep the land in the family. Family and land are inextricably bound up with each other. Modern life is an encroachment.

As one reads *Calling the Station Home*, one has the feeling that something significant is missing. It is the Maori. With the exception of the chapter—the most interesting one—in which Dominy discusses Maori land claims and the runholders’ reaction, the Maori are simply not there. Even in this one chapter, little personal detail is given to the Maori position. The runholders justify their presence on all sorts of grounds—legal, historical, the desire for continuity, their knowledge of the country, their ability to conserve it, their “indigeneity.” “We feel as though we are the indigenous people of the high country,” one wrote to Dominy (p. 216). One claimant, a non-high-country farmer who represented a federation of farmers, went so far as to appropriate Maori symbols in his court submission, referring to the pastoralists as *tangata whenua* (people of a given place), to mana, and even to the canoe. Perhaps the most revealing evidence of the relationship between the runholders and the Maori claimants is a photo in which a runholder and a Maori sit next to each other, the runholder gazing out beyond the camera, the Maori looking suspiciously at him.

## Closer to the Ground

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*The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone.* By Mariane C. Ferme. London and Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001. 287 pp.

Mariane Ferme’s *The Underneath of Things* is that rare anthropology text that invites one to travel. Chapter 1 tells of roads that nature has recaptured, abandoned mining enclaves, dismantled railroads, the landscapes and footpaths of the bush. Chapter 2 reveals the materiality of the construction of genders through the culturally prescribed uses of objects as, inversely, the constant invention of tradition. Chapter 3 stresses the continuity of traditional dependencies and shows that matrimonial politics has transformed slaves into cousins. Chapter 4 explores what the objects and spaces of coresidence say about social relations. Here her extensive fieldwork al-

lows Ferme to conclude that neither the patrilineal unit of Kenneth Little nor the “seasonal ‘economic’ subdivision” of Paul Richard (p. 146) is capable of translating a shifting and diverse reality. The domestic cycle is better clarified by examining the strategies of individual actors. Chapter 5 examines the social construction of “big people,” showing that discursive and spatial expansion serves as a re-presentation of personal power. Consumption is a suitable metaphor for this dynamic of incorporation—consumption of living space (p. 144), of wealth and resources, and even of dependents through witchcraft and ritual murders (p. 183). Chapter 6 treats the Mende representation of children and addresses the idea of the double as a mediator. In the manner of a musical composition with recurring motifs, three interludes articulate certain chapters: one describes the social life of cotton and the symbolic centrality of local textiles as social cement; a second discusses the way in which kola signifies the intention of establishing a long-lasting relationship as do the shells of the kula, and a third deals briefly with initiations through clay and oil.

Ferme seeks to present the elements of a Mende cultural logic without suggesting that they make up a seamless whole (p. 219). The harmonious textual integration of her chapters and interludes depends neither on the categories developed by anthropology nor on the articulation of a particular level of infrastructure (or superstructure) with another slice of the social world. The coherence of the book lies primarily in this very distinctive style—a tangle of descriptions of images, anecdotes, historical accounts, and discussions of the concepts in question that amounts to a “work in progress” shaping another “work in progress” that is life in Kpuawala. One would have to invent a hybrid term to categorize a work that has the style of Edouard Glissant and the spirit of Michel de Certeau and Pierre Bourdieu, for the Bourdieusians—sociologists—do not live with their objects of study. The experience of the author is omnipresent throughout. As with Margaret Mead or Jean Briggs, the social actors are named—we read of Jima, the twin (pp. 175, 212), Selu’s bedroom (p. 133), Hawa’s father (p. 141). Ferme has seen and heard a lot, clearly in a relation of equality with her subjects/informants. The “he [or she] told me in private” that regularly recurs is not the reporting of confessions to the ethnographer that one finds in the work of Griaule and in many contemporary monographs. Ferme’s text is the fruit of random surveys and patient observations made from day to day in the sharing of the quotidian (“The front door was normally closed from the inside during the day” [p. 124]). The solidity and attention to detail of the ethnography abandons cultural-cognitive typologies for debatable boundaries (“the child was ‘already a little big’” [p. 200]) and the ambiguity of real situations (the elders’ difficulties with the stranger Ibrahim [p. 105]). Ferme gives the example of multiple individual transgressions of public mortality (fishing nets are shared, but one prefers not to lend them and plans in these terms [p. 69]). She embraces the tension between subjects’ practices and the rules, for which convenient resolutions are sometimes

found (“She was too old, she went on, to be interested in sleeping next to her new husband” [p. 97]), and remarks that actors are not always interested in the resolution of conflicts (p. 143). Hammocks and stools indicate and establish the position of each, but the areas of ambiguity and transgression are many. She highlights the constant oscillation between norms and practices, between the social order as given and the social order as debated and negotiated. This is a matter not of false (or alienated) consciousness but of not always anticipating all of the eventual consequences of one’s practices and being called upon to respond with new strategies to situations that are new although inhabited by the memory of old ones. Following Curtin, Brooks, Appadurai, and many others, Ferme speaks of objects as “intelligible historical markers” that allow people to “make sense of the present” (p. 228). The railroad, the kola, the impression of motifs on cloth, the occupation of beds and hammocks, the wearing of jewelry, the use of mosquito or fishing nets, the central meeting place of the village (where women live during their initiation), hair plaiting (whereby history is inscribed upon the bodies of women), the palm tree, etc., are charged with the successive layers of rites and emotions of the history that Ferme systematically recounts. The railroad brought with it colonial taxes; the end of slavery led to a restructuring of residence, and the old men remember a time when the sharing of activities was more important than kinship and residence in establishing unity (p. 152); and Adam Jones has taught us that Mende hegemony developed with the increase in European demand for oil that accompanied mechanization. Objects are not only conceptualized by actors but conjointly conceptualize them. If history/memory legitimizes the present, it is the material of an objective continuum (“Along Mende paths, traces of past rice farming are visible” [p. 40]) that is transfigured by re-presentation (“Upon this landscape is mapped an alternative imaginary topography, one related to the life experiences and encounters of particular social actors” [p. 48]). The author’s use of a writing technique that combines theoretical reflection, anecdote, and historical knowledge permits one to grasp “the production of meaning (semeiosis) as it emerges from the tension between surface phenomena and that which is concealed beneath them” (p. 2). As Ferme writes, her focus “moves beyond the paradigm of consciousness toward an analysis of the material bearers of collective memory and an examination of these contested meanings” (p. 9) and, further, “the point of analyzing ‘the underneath of things’ is not to develop an ontology of Mende secrecy, that is, an elaboration of the structures that undergird surface phenomena and events. Any such pursuit would be frustrated by the fact that meanings are perceived always as unstable and different from prior manifestations” (p. 6). In the changing universe that she depicts, two different elements seem to inscribe a certain permanence. The first is a general principle of inversion found everywhere: both simple (“Only a thin line separated heroic warriors from slaves” [p. 153], the stranger is seen as “both dangerous enemy and welcome guest”

[p. 221]) and structural (one powerful warrior is called Londo, which means "silent," but while the term is employed to designate persons of high rank, so are other terms that suggest rhetorical virtuosity and persuasiveness [p. 168]). That power was conceived as linked with the secret is, it seems to me, the second element of a sort of firm cultural core. It is true that obtaining dependents is what transforms "ordinary persons into extraordinary ones" (p. 172), but these persons are symbolically considered in terms of their capacity to possess knowledge and secrets (p. 144). This thesis, systematically affirmed, is linked with her principle of inversion: "Here a person who communicates directly what she or he desires or thinks . . . is considered an idiot or no better than a child" (pp. 6–7). The association of the invisibility of the diamond business (p. 184) with the fact that the source of the prosperity is buried in the ground (and is thus relevant to the manipulation of esoteric knowledge) doubtless inclined people living on the fringes of the mining enclaves to emphasize the "secret knowledge of substances." But big persons are in the first place themselves the sites of "powerful secrets" contained in their "deep bellies." One must then advance the hypothesis that, like divine kings, they are the equilibrium points of nonexistent communities. Repositories of secrets that are also reserves of meaning, they function to oppose the absence of meaning and are capable of producing new symbolic content. This is why one of the dimensions of the power of a big person is an inherent capacity "to create new styles that embody valued social principles of unity and consensus" (p. 169).

Some passages, notably in the "Conclusion," consider the civil war. Citing the facts that the figure of the traditional hunter and the magical practices and rituals attached to that identity have been revitalized, that the word *sobel* designates "soldiers by day [Dr. Jekyll] and rebels by night [Mr. Hyde]," and that women lost interest in "upland rice" after the advent of food aid programs (p. 47) does not, however, help us to understand the torments that Sierra Leone has been experiencing. While the introduction asks "How could this occur?" the book explores "the ordinary conflicts that may erupt in times of peace" in an attempt to "paint a portrait a society on the brink of violence, and to explore some of the factors that may have led it to this point" (p. 1). The evocation of a parallel between the violence of war and that of global business (violence done to the earth in abandoned quarries, the violence of deforestation) is more poetic than persuasive. Furthermore, although the mining context is relatively specific, the disputes and conflicts described are not particularly Sierr Leonean. They are extramarital affairs, jealousies, rivalries—in short, conflicts opposing nice people like you and me. Undoubtedly, "the dialectics of modernization . . . has not followed a unilinear trajectory toward progress" and people often employ a "logic of unpredictability" (p. 225), but that people like those described by Ferme turn into sadists is in the realm of the unrepresentable. That the world that Ferme describes is outside of the events of the civil war simply shows that even when corrected in terms of what we

know today, the ethnography of yesterday is impermeable to future events. As far as explaining the horror is concerned, I tend toward the Freudian postulate that when the prohibitions have been blown away we are all assassins.

Ferme presents an excellent diagram of the village (p. 146), but why is there no map of the country and the region? I would also have liked a precise description of the conditions of the inquiry. It is only between the lines that one learns that the author arrived in Kpuawala in 1985 (p. 45) to stay for two years (p. 124), with an interruption for Christmas (p. 139), and returned in 1990 (p. 104) and again in 1993 (p. 42). One does not learn how long or how the fieldwork was financed or whether she was ever a member of the Peace Corps or the history of her problematic. These minor points aside, it is the extremely detailed knowledge of daily life that impresses one most about this book, which one can imagine to have been written in the way one recounts one's childhood memories, it is that full of presence. One senses throughout the long labor of writing in response to the need to connect the myriad details emerging from field notes. It also raises the question of the progress of anthropology, for even though one is far from the outmoded patrilineality and matrilineality and the rejected revelation of hidden structure à la Evans-Pritchard or Meillassoux, it is because she stands on the shoulders of her predecessors that Ferme can write with such theoretical sophistication, evoked by the taste of a madeleine, without losing her reader. Her text is also proof that intimacy is indispensable to contemporary ethnology, and I would advise all those who betake themselves to rural areas in the age of globalization to take it with them for inspiration.<sup>1</sup>

## Writing Bioculture

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*French DNA: Trouble in Purgatory.* By Paul Rabinow. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999.

Paul Rabinow's *French DNA*, an account of the public controversy surrounding the proposed scientific cooperation between the American biotech company Millennium Pharmaceuticals, Inc., and France's premier publicly funded genomics laboratory, the Centre d'Etude du Polymorphisme Humain (CEPH), addresses major issues of money, ethics, and power in the world of biotechnol-

1. Translated by Joelle Roche.

ogy. It is, however, primarily an attempt to find an anthropological language adequate to the task of analysing the cultural forms involved in such a field. At one level, the story is quite straightforward: the charismatic and ambitious director of CEPH, Daniel Cohen, favours a deal with Millennium that will generate the substantial income necessary to conduct genomic research and offers access to some of the CEPH genealogies in exchange for technological facilities to analyse them. Both partners want to find the genetic basis of diabetes. The “deal” becomes controversial and gives rise to a new entity, French DNA, which the French government decides cannot be “sold” to an American venture-capital consortium. As a ready-made morality play for the end of the 20th century and the dawn of the “age of genomics,” the “French DNA” controversy could not have found a better dramaturge. And as the ideal stage for Rabinow’s long-standing investigation of the historical drama of life itself, this episode could hardly have been better if he had scripted it himself.

Throughout this skilfully written and enormously informative account of genomics-in-the-making it is clear that Rabinow is not interested in taking sides with any of the key players in the “combat de coqs” that he describes. As the “philosophical anthropologist” invited by Cohen to conduct fieldwork at CEPH in 1994, he is interested in the challenge that such a dense and “singular” conflict poses to traditional means of ethnographic representation and anthropological analysis. After all, this is classical anthropological terrain, high-tech though it may be. At stake is the remaking of the meaning of genealogy, inheritance, succession, and descent, not to mention health, identity, nation, citizenship, and property. Ties of blood are at the centre of this profoundly European drama, which is as ancient as it is modern and as global in all of its implications as it is local in all of its particularities.

As usual, the blood ties at stake are complicated. They consist, in this story, of the blood samples donated by families that have volunteered their shared biological substance to facilitate CEPH research into the causes of genetic disease. These donations participate in a rhetoric of exchange first described in the British sociologist Richard Titmuss’s polemical *The Gift Relationship* (1970), in which he valorizes blood donation over the use of any kind of financial reward that would commercialize a practice that comes to be seen not only as an enactment of social solidarity but as a superior system because it is based on altruism. In France too, as Rabinow explains, “The [blood donation] system is a magnificent one of social solidarity based on an act, the passing of the most precious of substances, thereby creating a tie, a bond, a recognition. The *bien* (good), by being given, creates a *lien* (tie).”

In Britain as in France the social solidarity expressed through blood donation is strongly connected to the legacy of World War II. In Britain the establishment of universal health care was explicitly linked to the sacrifices made by the national populace during the war, and in France, as Rabinow notes, “it was not hard to make the

equation ‘benevolent donors = resisters, paid donors = collaborators.’ ” The association of blood donation with solidarity and monetary pollution with collaboration neatly summarizes the tone of the controversy accompanying the suggestion that French DNA was, in effect, being sold to a profiteering U.S. corporation. The more scientific sense of collaboration in research terms could not be disentangled from its more sinister connotations, and the spectre of French patrimony on sale to a foreign bidder became unassailable.

For Rabinow, the CEPH/Millennium saga is an event which poses for the anthropologist of the contemporary a distinctive challenge at the level of both description and explication. He is sceptical about approaches that would “explain” the various forces at work in terms of gender (masculinity), nationalism, or capitalization because none of these broad structural approaches are designed to address the way in which a specific event crystallizes into a particular form. He advocates an “impossible” analytics largely out of a dissatisfaction with existing approaches because of the extent to which they “already have the answers they are seeking.”

This means that he draws his inspiration from the Foucauldian models of genealogy that he has long relied upon and newer models from both science studies and continental philosophy such as those developed by Bruno Latour and Gilles Deleuze. Both Latour and Deleuze are interested in the idea of assemblages—an idiom to which Rabinow turned at the end of *Making PCR* but with the Lévi-Straussian model of *bricolage* as his penultimate analytical figure. In that earlier book, on nearly identical themes, the *bricolage* model underscored Rabinow’s conclusion that PCR was not so much a “revolution” as a kind of accident, a “swerve” in the system that created a cascade of orthogonal shifts—a historical curve ball that emerged out of but completely reshaped “business as usual.”

The implication for the CEPH/Millennium controversy is that it was entirely fortuitous that it ended one way rather than another and that it does not really matter except that in the event, because of the event, and all around the event a particular process of cultural transformation occurred. It is the specificity of the emergence of cultural form that Rabinow wants his ethnographic excursions to elucidate. *French DNA* is therefore very much a book about what it is not: it is not, as Rabinow explicitly states, “about Society as Pierre Bourdieu or Anthony Giddens or Jürgen Habermas have so profoundly theorized it. *French DNA* contains no totalities, formal systems, encompassing fields, epochs, world-views, universal subjects. It does not even contain Theory in the traditional sense of the term that would make the empirical material into a case study, an example, a testing ground.”

Too much of social explanation, in Rabinow’s view, relies on fitting what we can’t explain into formal explanatory structures that discipline them according to predictable outcomes. This is what he does not like about “totalizing categories” such as “culture”: they make us lose the “keen awareness that the taken-for-

granted can change"—in part because the tools we use to describe it keep it within a frame of the too familiar.

This means that what is most exemplary about Rabinow's work is its mode of description, and his greatest advocacy of anthropological method is evident in his desire to enable the slippery vicissitudes of "happenings in the world" to become visible through what is not said about the why or how of them instead of responding in the familiar languages we all know already (and thus not telling us anything new). *French DNA* is ethnographically experimental, polemical, iconoclastic, and innovative in ways that are not dissimilar from those of the often forceful and irascible characters Rabinow portrays with a frankness that never succumbs to either irony or sentimentality. Like them, he too is a cartographer constantly in search of a new idea of what a map could be or do. Rabinow's form of ethnographic writing could not be better matched to its subject, and it provides a rare antidote to the overwhelming tendency of writing about the genome project to "explain" it in entirely predictable ways. As he has become an intrepid ethnographer of elite scientific circles, he has preserved in his practice and pursued in his writing a form of anthropological attention that is particularly vital now that social science is increasingly being asked to provide "answers" to the social "consequences" of the new genetics—as if interpretive action could only occur after the fact of technological discovery. Maintaining this critical stance and putting it into practice in the field may be among the most important tasks facing anthropology as biology increasingly becomes a cultural form.

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## An Embarrassment of Riches

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*Feasts: Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives on Food, Politics, and Power*. Edited by Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001. 432 pp.

"Feasts" is a powerful and appealing word. As a title, it's almost irresistible, as I found when I took this hefty tome with me on a recent trip. Waitresses, business travelers,

and airline stewards, glimpsing the cover, were moved to say things like "Wow! That sounds like fun reading!" In truth, few nonacademic readers would find this dense collection of theoretical and substantive studies entertaining, but for researchers interested in long-term processes of social change it does indeed offer the cornucopia of thought-provoking material promised by its title.

Above all, this collection is timely: feasts are "in" these days among archaeologists, and Michael Dietler and Brian Hayden have set out to provide the definitive set of studies for a concept that has come into wide circulation. At a time when "master narratives" are regarded with suspicion, however, definitive statements are difficult to frame. Adopting a wise if somewhat Solomonic solution, these editors begin their book with a coauthored introduction that emphasizes rather than papers over the profound differences between Hayden's cultural-ecological perspective and Dietler's more "culturalist" focus on practice theory and the relationship between culture and power. Next come separate articles by each of them in which they develop their distinctive arguments using ethnographic material from Southeast Asia and Africa respectively.

Despite the occasional ethnographic and ethnohistorical nugget, three introductory essays totaling over 100 pages whetted my appetite for more specific discussions of actual feasts; it was with some eagerness, then, that I turned to the six ethnographic and six archaeological studies that followed, which provide data from the Americas, New Guinea, Polynesia, and the Near East. Overall, these were quite good, and some of them made compelling cases for the utility of the idea of feasting as an analytical tool. For Weissner and Junker, attention to changing feasting patterns brings into focus larger, more diffuse patterns of political-economic change. Knight uses the hypothesis of feasting behavior to reinterpret puzzling archaeological data and ultimately to reorder the data on Southeastern U.S. prehistory.

Satisfying as this book was on a number of levels, I did not close it with that sense of total satiation that follows an actual feast. Some disappointments were minor. I missed more discussion of the Inca, surely a classic case of an empire built upon feasting. And the experience-distant stance of the essays left something missing: the very aspect of feasting that piqued the interest of the weary traveler and the blasé waitress. Feasts engage our senses and our love of sociality: to arrive at a feast is to enter a synaesthetic sensorium, evanescent but overwhelming, that arouses and satisfies our most basic desires—and our most transcendent ones. These analyses did much to reveal the underlying political and social structures brought into play by feasts, but in staying so far away from the feast's ability to excite and please us they risk missing the very source of its unmistakable power.

More fundamental, I finished the 425 pages of text hungry for a more succinct and less sprawling definition of the central concept, its utility, and the limits (if any) of its applicability. Definitions abound: of feasting itself,

of several sets of subcategories (Hayden has four, Dietler three, Kirch nine; other contributors propose regionally specific typologies), and of a variety of enumerated "components," "stages," "assumptions," etc. Some of these, like Hayden's list of the "archaeological signatures of feasts," seem immediately useful, if only to provoke argument; others, like his concluding list of "principles," struck me as too heterogeneous to stimulate cogent analysis.

A more thorough consideration of the extensive historical and anthropological literature on the nature of the meal could provide some definitional clarity. The various contributors to this collection are correct in asserting that feasts are shared rituals in which food, drink, and commensality become vehicles that impel actors to declare loyalty to groups and leaders, as well as to contribute labor and goods both for the feast itself and contractually for the future. But none of these characteristics differentiate them from everyday meals in premodern and noncapitalist settings or even in regions such as rural Mesoamerica or the Andes in the 20th century. The contributors have perhaps not reflected on how curious our own late-capitalist attitudes toward eating are in the larger scheme of human history. We eschew etiquette, having lost our appreciation of the social and economic obligations arising from commensality; we make meals without deep religious and political significance; we even eat alone. In most societies, such attitudes and behaviors would have been unimaginable: eating alone, for example, is often tantamount to declaring oneself a witch. Even today, young people from rural Andean communities may experience solitary snacking as a pleasure guiltier than masturbation or theft.

Feasts are indeed different from ordinary meals, but an elucidation of this distinction must begin with a more general comparative consideration of how food and drink are consumed. Such attention could resolve an underlying tension in this set of studies. For some, feasting is just something people do, everywhere and always; what is needed, then, is a cross-cultural, transhistorical definition so that archaeologists can look for feasts just as they look for warfare or craft production. For others, feasts have particular theoretical significance as an engine of social transformation at specific historical junctures; here, a more limited definition would be more useful, for example, one that focuses on the feast as a mechanism by which ambitious individuals may propel decentralized horticultural or foraging societies toward more centralized forms of political economy.

Clarifying the distinction between meals and feasts could help here. Any food event unifies the eaters as a social group and marks them as distinct. Even solitary freeway drivers wolfing down fast food express their social condition, whether we see them as enjoying that celebrated American love of individual freedom or suffering from the anonymous isolation of modern urban life. Feasts do the same, but they generally differ from meals by bringing together larger groups than those that eat together every day. Thus the hierarchy of meals and feasts reflects and reproduces the hierarchy of social and

political units. For egalitarian foragers such as the San, every meal is a feast, since every consumption event is used to reinforce the notion that there is only one social unit, the largest possible one. It is only when a society discriminates between public and private spheres that meals and feasts become differentiated. It follows that at moments when new, larger, and more centralized units are being constructed out of or imposed upon a decentralized congeries of smaller social units, feasting becomes a highly significant act that leaders use to maximum effect. Similarly, processes of disaggregation may be marked by a renewed elaboration of smaller, more local feasts and a growing economic investment in them.

I have highlighted here only a few aspects of the embarrassment of riches to be enjoyed in this volume. Given the multiplicity of explanatory models and analytical tools it presents, this book may resemble real feasts in yet another way: the wealth on offer here may inspire others to respond in kind rather than convincing us that there can be no further feasting on the concept of "feasts."

## The Evolution of a Melting Pot

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*Unearthing Gotham: The Archaeology of New York City.* By Anne-Marie Cantwell and Diana diZerega Wall. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001. 374 pp.

*Unearthing Gotham* chronicles the 11,000-year history of human occupation in New York City. Cantwell and Wall approach modern New York City as a large archaeological site in an effort to unravel its urban and preurban past. Using the material record, historical documents, and oral tradition, they disentangle the complex relationships that existed between Native Americans, Europeans, Africans, and Americans and raise intriguing questions about urbanism. The result is a coherent narrative that will appeal to the general reader and the professional alike.

The authors start by investigating the Native American past with the sparse evidence left by Paleoindians (11,000–10,000 B.P.) in the borough of Staten Island. Key archaeological sites are reviewed to illustrate the diversity of hunter-gatherer adaptations during the Archaic (10,000–3,700 B.P.) and Transitional (3,700–2,700 B.P.) periods, including Early Archaic hunting sites on Staten Island, Middle Archaic oyster-processing sites along the banks of the Hudson River, Late Archaic shell middens

in upper Manhattan, and Transitional hilltop burial sites on eastern Long Island. Cantwell and Wall propose that Late Woodland (1,000–400 B.P.) people became less mobile and increasingly tethered to the rich estuarine ecosystem of coastal New York and that this settling-down process included the incorporation of dead ancestors into community life. As support for this view they cite burial evidence that reveals profound changes in funerary behaviors during the Late Woodland period. They argue that these findings imply a sense of Native American permanency in the New York City region prior to European colonization.

They go on to describe the evolution of New Amsterdam and then New York City into a major colonial seaport, discussing the significant contributions of Native Americans, Africans, and Dutch colonists during the 17th and 18th centuries. They maintain that local Native Americans, or Munsees, played significant roles in the “forging of the global economy” (p. 131), pointing to the remains of an indigenous trade-bead workshop on Long Island. Similarly, they explore the African presence in the city with a review of the discovery of an African burial ground in lower Manhattan in the early 1990s. Physical evidence from the burials indicates that African slaves, especially children born into slavery, endured severe physical hardships such as malnutrition, infectious diseases, and bone deformation. This, they assert, is “irrefutable testimony” (p. 294) to the African contribution to the formation of modern New York City. An important aspect of this period to which the authors call attention is the retention of cultural traditions within the ethnic mosaic of a growing seaport city. There is archaeological evidence that Munsees were actively engaged in preserving their culture as they selectively traded for European metals with traditional meanings (e.g., copper and brass), and at least some African customs, such as the filing of teeth into distinct shapes and the use of ritualistic symbols on material goods, persisted during the period of enslavement. Material remains from household privy pits and basement floors and historical records indicate that Dutch colonists continued to use their native goods and traditions (e.g., Dutch meals and ceramic dishes and pipes) after the English conquest of the city in the later part of the 17th century. The authors also address questions pertaining to changes in gender relations and the increasing separation of work and domestic spheres of life by exploring the 19th-century lifeways of middle-class and immigrant New York City families.

Examining the use of urban space within the context of a growing metropolis, Cantwell and Wall consider settlement trends over time as a reflection of changing social relations. For example, they present archaeological and historical evidence that the separation of home and workplace occurred in wealthy families at the start of the 19th century and in middle-class families during the following decades. These former city dwellers were the first suburban commuters, traveling from the new villages (e.g., Greenwich Village and Brooklyn Heights) on the outskirts of the growing city to their workplaces in

lower Manhattan in horse-drawn omnibuses or steam ferries. Other topics discussed include the construction of the city’s waterfront along the tidal banks of the Hudson and East Rivers, the spatial distribution and construction methods of urban backyard features (such as privies and cisterns) prior to indoor plumbing, and rural lifeways and use of space in the modern boroughs of Brooklyn, Queens, the Bronx, and Staten Island.

Expertly designed, well illustrated with informative maps, drawings, and photographs, and provided with detailed references and notes, *Unearthing Gotham* is not only an elegant synthesis of New York City history but also an earnest appeal for action to counter the continual destruction of archaeological sites in urban settings. Despite legislation to protect sites in New York City, few if any construction projects have been required to do so. The authors are to be commended for acknowledging the significant contributions of women and African-American scholars and of amateur archaeologists to our understanding of the history of New York City and for bridging the gap between indigenous history and the more familiar recent history. As they note, concerted effort by archaeologists, the public, and government agencies is needed to protect and preserve this common heritage.

## Long-Term History Without History?

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*World System History: The Social Science of Long-Term Change*. Edited by Robert A. Denemark, Jonathan Friedman, Barry K. Gills, and George Modelski. London and New York: Routledge, 2000.

Most of the (16) papers in *World System History* cover large parts of the world and long historical periods. More are by political scientists and sociologists than by historians or prehistorians. Interactions between regions being the context in which particular historical societies and historical change are understood, many address the history of the world from 3000 B.C. to modern times. Perhaps as a consequence, little attention has been paid to historical method. Certainly, questions of major change in the structures of large-scale societies or world systems are of critical importance, but are such issues to be addressed by reference to the past only in global terms? Do we not, paradoxically and like Braudel, need to come down to detail? True, in his sweep from the Neolithic Revolution to the 16th century A.D. (“Envisioning Global Change”), Sherratt (p. 129) does refer to

constraining macro-structures' being offset by "great freedom at the level of micro-structures," but he does not elaborate on the micro level. To put it another way, what kinds of evidence do we need to examine and what level of analysis is appropriate to support the assertion that the Indic system was engulfed by the central world system around 1600 (Wilkinson, p. 56)?

Understandings of the world system in the volume are diverse. For Frank and Gills ("The Five Thousand Year World System in Theory and Praxis"), world systems are systems of regular and extensive trade (it is implied that the regularity and scale of trade in any period are self-evident) that bring about a transfer of surplus mobilized by the elites of peripheral societies to the elites of centres. Capital accumulates in one place at the expense of others. Chase-Dunn and Hall, too, work along these lines ("Comparing World-Systems to Explain Social Evolution"); their interest is largely in cyclical change and transformations of world systems—how they absorb new areas, how world systems have merged, how peripheries have developed, and how modes of accumulation have changed. The scope here, too, is from the beginnings of recorded history until modern times. The major contrast in the two approaches is that the latter do not find market systems and capitalism in the earliest epochs. Hornborg ("Accumulation Based on Symbolic versus Intrinsic Productivity") attempts to define and analyse accumulation, the capacity to command various kinds of resources, material or symbolic: unequal exchange, inadequate recompense for labour, and underpayment for energy/materials relative to the output. He draws on material from pre-conquest South America for his analysis.

Sanderson, however, in "World Systems and Social Change in Agrarian Societies 3000 B.C. to A.D. 1500," seems to find that the essence is "world commercialization." With this go cycles of population increase, urbanization, technological development, and ideological change. Modelski ("World System Evolution") calls world systems "the social organization of the human species." Social organization is, by definition, "subject to evolutionary processes," and therefore we need to study institutions such as the market that are of "species-wide impact and significance" (pp. 25–26)—all in terms of species, variety creation, selection, or evolutionary potential and evolution. For his part, Wilkinson ("Civilizations, World Systems, and Hegemonies") starts (p. 54) by stating, "Civilizations are world systems." They have cities, writing, a wide distribution, accumulation of wealth, etc., but a single city and its political and military hinterland may also count (p. 57) as a civilization/world system. Core-periphery hierarchies are not essential to world systems for Wilkinson (pp. 62–63), nor is trade a central issue.

Meanwhile, Friedman ("Concretizing the Continuity Argument") tries to establish that the economy of classical antiquity was capitalist and then argues for another kind of continuity, the rise and ebb of multiethnicity. In Ekholm-Friedman's "The Evolution of Global Systems: The Mesopotamian Heartland" and in Warburton's "State and Economy in Ancient Egypt," the relevance to actual world systems is hard to make out, and we are told that

the paper on Mesopotamia is only the first half of a longer piece. Cioffi-Reville's argument on the scale and processes of warfare from ancient Egypt to the Arab-Israeli conflict is difficult to comprehend, and the jog-trot of world developments from the Fertile Crescent to Europe in 1492 in Bosworth's "Evolution of the World City-System" has little connexion with Frank and Gills's world-system concept except for some references to trade and connectivity. More relevant to world systems are McNeill's "Information and Transportation Nets" (necessarily sketchy) and Sing Chew's discussion of the ecological limitations, largely related to deforestation, on world system expansion ("Neglecting Nature"). Needless to say, Thompson and Denmark's concluding chapters do not succeed in bringing the papers together in a coherent framework.

As originally envisaged, world systems have to do with worldwide division of labour and the enrichment of some regions at the cost of others. Focusing on world systems as the context of historical development, some of the contributors emphasize their continuity, and this slips into an insistence that market systems and capitalism have existed since the dawn of history. With Frank and Gills, it appears, such a stand is a counter to Eurocentrism: perhaps with the best of intentions, they insist that Africa and Asia too had capitalism and centres of world systems. The monetization, formation of merchant capital, emergence of nation-states, enclosures and large-scale migrations of peasantry to towns, Industrial Revolution, colonization, etc., that went into the emergence of capitalism in Europe are given scant attention in this volume.

It does need to be said, however, that Asia and Africa may not be eager to find their place in the development of capitalism. In southern India in the 1970s, the multinational Cadbury encouraged large-scale planting of cocoa by offering incentives and high purchase prices. Once farmers had made irreversible investments in the cocoa plant (its cultivation increased from 1,927 hectares to 6,980 hectares within a decade), the company slashed its purchase price from Rs. 14 to Rs. 6, and as India is being drawn into globalization the resultant misery is evidenced by 140 farmer suicides in the year 2000 in just one drought-prone district. Capitalism does not mean progress, rationality, or efficiency for all. Instead, some scholars in poor countries reject it as by definition exploitative and are suspicious of those who peddle it as primordial or natural to the human condition.

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