

IDENTITY, GENDER, AND MYTH:
Expressions of Mesoamerican Change and Continuity

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WEAVING IDENTITIES: CONSTRUCTION OF DRESS AND SELF IN A HIGHLAND GUATEMALA TOWN. By Carol Hendrickson. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995. Pp. 245. \$35.00 cloth, \$15.95 paper.)

A WAR OF WITCHES: A JOURNEY INTO THE UNDERWORLD OF THE CONTEMPORARY AZTECS. By Timothy J. Knab. (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1995. Pp. 224. \$16.00 paper.)

THE COVENANTS WITH EARTH AND RAIN: EXCHANGE, SACRIFICE, AND REVELATION IN MIXTEC SOCIALITY. By John Monaghan. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1995. Pp. 394. \$42.95 cloth.)

LA FIESTA DE LOS TASTOANES: CRITICAL ENCOUNTERS IN MEXICAN FESTIVAL PERFORMANCES. By Olga Nájera-Ramírez. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1997. Pp. 187. \$50.00 cloth.)

MEXICO'S SIERRA TARAHUMARA: A PHOTOHISTORY OF THE PEOPLE OF THE EDGE. By W. Dirk Raat and George R. Janeček. (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1996. Pp. 212. \$49.95 cloth.)

PEOPLE OF THE PEYOTE: HUICHOL INDIAN HISTORY, RELIGION, AND SURVIVAL. Edited by Stacy B. Schaefer and Peter T. Furst. (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1996. Pp. 560. \$29.95 paper.)

NAHUAT MYTH AND SOCIAL STRUCTURE. By James F. Taggart. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997. Pp. 287. \$15.95 paper.)

If these seven contributions are any indication, scholarship of Mesoamerica and its periphery is more diverse and complex today than at any time in the past.¹ I am referring primarily to cultural anthropology, but these qualities transcend the field. Interest in the peoples, ecology, history, and prehistory of Mesoamerica abounds in all quarters. Complementing the interests of scholars in the humanities and social sciences are those of an

1. Not to be laborious, I will use the term *Mesoamerica* in most instances to include its periphery. Many scholars question the inclusion of the Huichol in the Mesoamerican culture area. In contrast, the Tarahumara (Rarámuri) are not considered Mesoamerican but Southwestern. Such concerns are themselves peripheral to this essay. Where circumstances require a distinction between Mesoamerica and non-Mesoamerica, I will make one.

increasingly predatory yet often gregarious “general public.” Exotic peoples, impressive ruins, and their environments head the list of desirable destinations or rank close behind the resorts that now sprinkle the coasts of Mexico and other countries in the vicinity. Ecotourism is fast becoming a major industry in the region. Consequently, what scholars discover and write takes on greater significance because it often affects what “exotic” people or place that businesses, the media, the government, and tourists will decide next to develop, chronicle, or visit.

With a couple of exceptions, the seven works under review are contemporary contributions and may be considered representative of much of the work being done today in Mesoamerica and Latin America by socio-cultural anthropologists. The authors of these works conducted their field research mainly in the 1970s and 1980s. This group of books covers much of the geographical and the broad cultural domain of contemporary Mesoamerica: the Maya of Highland Guatemala (Hendrickson), the Mixtec of Oaxaca (Monaghan), the Sierra Nahuat of Puebla (both Taggart and Knab), the mestizo Jocoteños of the Guadalajara region (Nájera-Ramírez), the Huichol of Jalisco and elsewhere (Schaefer and Furst and their contributors), and the various peoples of the Sierra Tarahumara (Raat and Janeček).

Most of the peoples and settings are rural. Only the Jocoteños reside near a large urban center. But Jocotán’s time is short. Each day Jocoteños find themselves and their community being engulfed by growing metropolitan Guadalajara. The Huichols are increasingly scattered in rural and urban areas. All are influenced by urban national and international processes to varying degrees and in various ways. Despite this mélange of peoples and places, several common themes and issues emerge in more than one of the contributions. The major themes and issues discussed are issues of identity, issues of gender and multiple voices, and concerns about method and theory. Other issues serve as background to what is covered in these studies. The theme of modernization, for example, underlies many of these contributions but never takes center stage. Although some concerns may be new, many reflect their heritage from the anthropological past, another theme that will be discussed in this essay.

Issues of Identity

Ethnicity is an issue that permeates several of these works. Carol Hendrickson’s *Weaving Identities: Construction of Dress and Self in a Highland Guatemala Town* focuses on Maya identity as a central concern. For the Tecpanecos, a Maya people under external pressures, maintaining their identity requires considerable vigilance. Since the early work of Sol Tax (1937), the importance has been established of native costume to local *municipio* identity in the highlands (along with other cultural and linguistic distinc-

tions). Hendrickson's study drives home the utmost importance of *traje* (native dress) in symbolizing and conserving that identity. Among the Tecpanecos, female *traje* carries the weight of that function. Her work also builds on that of specialists in dress, costume, and textiles such as Margot Schevill (1986), who has explored the importance of dress and costume in communication and cultural identity (see also Hopgood 1990). Among the Tecpanecos and other contemporary highland Maya, female *traje* goes beyond cultural or ethnic identity to define self, gender, and individuality. On that score, Hendrickson charts a finely drawn course detailing how from infancy to death *traje* is intimately linked with the life of the individual and broader social processes. She considers the details of how clothes are made, not in strictly technological terms but always with attention to meaning—or in some cases, lack of meaning.

Costume is also important for the Huichol, although not to the same degree as with contemporary highland Maya. Costume is less significant to Huichol identity because the Huichol have succeeded more in maintaining a total sociocultural identity, of which costume is but one part. In *People of the Peyote: Huichol Indian History, Religion, and Survival*, editors Stacy Schaefer and Peter Furst and their contributors focus more on cultural survival than identity. Survival and identity may be two sides of the same coin, but Huichol history is one of struggles against Spanish and Mexican domination to survive as a people. That history, along with what is known of pre-contact times, is covered by Furst in the second essay and by Allen Franz in the third. Being Huichol is intimately linked with ritual, religion, myth, peyote, and a host of interlinked social, economic, and cultural practices. All these issues are well explored in *People of the Peyote*. The essay entitled "How One Goes Being Huichol . . ." by Ramón Medina Silva, perhaps the best known of all Huichol *mara'akáte* (shamans), conveys an inside (or emic) view of what it means to be Huichol (pp. 186–205). To what extent Medina should be taken as "representative" may concern some readers, but when focusing on questions of identity, he is an excellent choice. Medina may be as well known as the Huichols themselves, thanks to Furst, the late Barbara Myerhoff (1974), and a documentary film titled *To Find Our Life* (Furst 1969). Medina has become the archetypal *mara'akáme*. He is also known internationally for his "yarn paintings," many of which appear in *People of the Peyote*.

Furst believes that even "so-called 'urban' Huichols" do not stop "being Indians" simply because they leave their homes in the mountains (p. 180). The current problems facing the Huichol and their survival are addressed most directly by Salomón Nahmad Sittón in "Huichol Religion and the Mexican State" (pp. 471–502). The subtitle, "Reflections on Ethnocide and Cultural Survival," goes more to the point. Trained in social anthropology, Nahmad has compiled extensive experience with the Huichol as an

official of Mexico's Instituto Nacional Indigenista (INI), having served at one time as director of the INI Center for the Cora Huichol area.

Nahmad takes on the issue of the impact of various institutions of the Mexican state on the Huichol. Yet his analysis covers much more than religion or the Mexican state. Nahmad considers broader events and developments affecting the Huichol such as the Aguamilpas hydroelectric dam, Protestant evangelism, and other threats to native culture and well-being. The Huichols who have migrated to Guadalajara and other urban centers bring the issue of identity to the fore. Nahmad mentions a colony of Huichol in Tepic, Nayarit, who refer to themselves as "*puros Huicholes . . .*, and they hold on as hard as they can to their fiestas and their ceremonies" (p. 493). This description sounds like a people under attack or at least considerable stress. Nahmad believes nonetheless that despite strong acculturative forces and some defections, the majority of Huichols have not weakened their determination to "hold fast to the old traditions" (p. 495). His prognosis may be a bit optimistic.

The question of identity may gain even greater importance if and when the Huichol lose most of their culture and their language is no longer spoken by the young. It is possible that they could someday find themselves in a position not unlike that of the Jocoteños.

For the Jocoteños of Jalisco, costume as a symbol has little significance for purposes of identity. Instead, the fiesta of the Tastoanes carries the weight of defining the community. The people of Jocotán are mestizos, culturally a mix of indigenous and European elements. In *La Fiesta de los Tastoanes: Critical Encounters in Mexican Festival Performances*, Olga Nájera-Ramírez employs the term *hybrid* to describe this situation, in which "Jocoteños may draw upon two cultural systems to create new symbols or to transform meanings of preexisting symbols" (p. 8). To outsiders, La Fiesta de los Tastoanes appears to be a variant of the ever-present drama of *moros y cristianos* (Moors and Christians), but it actually resulted from the hybridization process and is thus a manifestation of it. By examining the details and nuances of the fiesta, Nájera-Ramírez manages to demonstrate how this fiesta embodies the struggle to maintain Jocoteño identity as a distinct people contra the processes of *mestizaje* and claims to traditionally held lands and to sustain their brand of folk religion and beliefs.

In *Nahuatl Myth and Social Structure*, Taggart discusses ethnic relations between the Nahuats and "Hispanics" (his term for non-Indians) as found in their myths and narratives. In the worldview represented in Nahuatl narratives, Hispanics are placed at the opposite pole from what is regarded as good: "To explain the threat Hispanics pose to their order, storytellers place the dominant group in coordinates of space and time just the opposite of those associated with the sun" (p. 67). For the Nahuatl, the sun represents the most creative of all forces. Further, many stories depict

relations between Nahuat and Hispanics “as a conflict between lightning-bolts and the devil” (p. 68). Taggart employs the same structuralist approach in considering sexual and gender relations as manifested in Nahuat narrative (pp. 185–88).

Multiple Voices: Gender and Who Speaks

With Taggart it is always clear that the one speaking is the Nahuat storyteller. The analysis is Taggart’s, but his storytellers are never far from the discussion. Issues of gender and “who speaks” currently inform the anthropological enterprise in numerous ways (see Clifford and Marcus 1986; James, Hockey, and Dawson 1997). Many anthropologists are asking, “Who are we to speak for those we study?” As a result, they would seriously challenge Taggart’s approach. After all, it is Taggart who did the writing. Such concerns are only partially reflected in the works at hand, but they provide some insights into those issues.

An intriguing angle on “who speaks” is the use of drawings or other art works by native informants or collaborators. This practice is not a new device in Mesoamerican anthropology, although a new argument for their use could be made. William Madsen, to cite one example, used drawings by ten-year-old Crispín Meza to considerable effect in nearly every chapter of *The Virgin’s Children* (1960). As Madsen explained, the drawings provided “penetrating insights” for his effort to convey the native concepts of the people of Tecospa (p. xiii). John Monaghan also employs drawings by two local artists of Nuyoo with much the same effect in *The Covenants with Earth and Rain: Exchange, Sacrifice, and Revelation in Mixtec Sociality*. While such drawings lack the finesse of a professional artist, they often open outsiders’ eyes to a different aspect of a cultural practice or belief and convey a strong sense of authenticity. For example, both the Mixtecs of Nuyoo and the Aztecs of Tecospa use images of the Mexican *charro* (cowboy) in depicting evil beings (compare Madsen 1960, p. 134 with Monaghan, p. 320, fig. 22).

Susana Eger Valadez provides a series of germane drawings for her contribution to the Schaefer and Furst collection, entitled “Wolf Power and Interspecies Communication in Huichol Shamanism” (pp. 267–305). These drawings were made by Ulu Temay, a Huichol shaman who also served as her principal consultant for about twelve years. What makes this case special is that Ulu Temay drew on his own six-year apprenticeship as a “wolf shaman” in creating his pictorial narrative (p. 268). This approach results in a tight fit between Eger Valadez’s narrative, which is meant to convey Ulu Temay’s “words and interpretations,” and his drawings (p. 269). This type of presentation comes close to conveying “the insider view,” although Valadez also provides structure and additional commentary.

A more typical approach to illustration is taken by Dirk Raat and George Janeček in *Mexico’s Sierra Tarahumara: A Photohistory of the People of*

the Edge. Raat, a professional historian, and Janeček, a professional photographer, combined their talents to produce a book that is beautifully done. Janeček's photographs are handsomely printed and often stunning. The placement of many of his photographs is often perplexing, however. Missing is a tight fit with Raat's text (or vice versa). For example, a photo of Eulalio Bustillos appears (p. 111), but one finds no mention of this man in the text. There is also a nagging impression that neither Raat nor Janeček got much beneath the surface. The book contains only a few photos of the interiors of homes, and most of those look posed. The photos provide an excellent overview, but a sense of "comfortableness" with place and subject is lacking. It is difficult to resist comparing *Mexico's Sierra Tarahumara* on this score with a work like Dore Gardner's *Niño Fidencio: A Heart Thrown Open* (1992). For this work, Gardner took the photos and collected the data via interviews with followers of the folk saint Niño Fidencio. This approach led to more congruence between the text and the photos. Many of the photos are intimate, and the viewer feels the rapport that Gardner established with her subjects. At their best, such photographs can transcend illustration and approximate the native point of view.

The issue of gender is confronted most directly by Nájera-Ramírez in *La Fiesta de los Tastoanes*. She addresses the subject in terms of her fieldwork and the problem of differential access to male and female knowledge, compounded by her own ethnicity as a Chicana (pp. 29–31). Aware of the complexity of her status as a female and a Chicana in Jocotán, Nájera-Ramírez provides an insightful discussion of how those attributes and others interacted and functioned over the course of her fieldwork (pp. 31–44). These kinds of concerns lead readily to issues of method and theory.

Context: Method and Theory

Fortunately, all the anthropologists represented here conducted ethnographic fieldwork, and none engaged in the "hit-and-run ethnography" decried by Clifford Geertz (1998, 72, n. 3). Most of the fieldwork was done in the 1970s and 1980s, except for a few cases based on earlier or later work and an unusual case in the edited Huichol volume dating back to the early twentieth century. The time spent in the field varied considerably, and some authors' vagueness on this score is frustrating. Taggart began to work in Huitzilán de Serdán in 1968 and continued on and off until 1979. Monaghan spent thirty months in Nuyoo over the years from 1983 to 1993 and another three months of archival research in Oaxaca and Mexico City. Hendrickson's principal period of fieldwork in Tecpán was February 1980 to February 1981, followed by various short field trips spanning the years 1983 to 1992. Nájera-Ramírez's work in Jocotán, off and on, covers the years 1980 to 1986.

Schaefer and Furst's *People of the Peyote* is aptly introduced as "a

multinational collection of essays on Huichol history, religion, and survival" (p. xi). The volume is not easily characterized or defined temporally. Most contributors lived and worked with the Huichol for significant periods of time. The time span they cover (with one exception) runs from the early 1970s through the 1990s. The exception is a contribution by Konrad Theodor Preuss (1869–1938), translated from German by Furst. An early student of Huichol culture, Preuss died before much of his work was published. Furst also details the interesting history of his work, manuscripts, and publications. What is impressive about these contributions is that the basis of the anthropological enterprise—intense, long-term fieldwork—continues to be held in good repute, without the contempt for that method expressed by some "postmodernist anthropologists."

The context of fieldwork is often critical for understanding what the researcher experienced as well as certain objective conditions of local, national, and international significance. None of the researchers completely overlook the circumstances surrounding their work, except for Timothy Knab in *A War of Witches*. Knab gives a good sense of the place where he worked in the sierra but little sense of what was going on in Mexico over these many years. Given the warfare and turmoil that has occurred in Guatemala in the past decades, Hendrickson's *Weaving Identities* testifies to the continuing struggle of the Maya. Unlike works that concentrate on the war and violence, such as Ricardo Falla's *Massacres in the Jungle* (1994) or Robert Carmack's collection *Harvest of Violence* (1988), Hendrickson places her work in context by citing appropriate examples that impinged on the people of Tecpán. Hendrickson admits to selecting Tecpán "because, at the time, it was located in a relatively peaceful area" (p. 25). Given the dangers faced by the Maya, priests and nuns, and foreigners in Guatemala during the mid-1980s, that was a wise decision.

Readers will also encounter issues of tradition and modernity that cannot be explored in detail here. The interplay and dialectic of tradition and modernity often underlie the works under review here, especially with *Mexico's Sierra Tarahumara* by Raat and Janeček, who are more specific in their use of the term than most authors in this group. For the most part, discussions of "tradition" and "modernization" that once dominated much research and writing by scholars in Latin America have become the backdrop of discussion by these authors. Even with regard to a cultural item often labeled "traditional," like clothing, what is assumed to be unchanging and of great duration may be subject to considerable change. But the changes observed are not couched in terms of modernization. Hendrickson explores this issue in her chapter "Transforming the Traditional: The Creative in Traje" (pp. 182–92). She also provides an elegant discussion of the place of creativity within this "traditional category."

Recalling Raat and Janeček's *Mexico's Sierra Tarahumara*, perhaps the lack of fit between text and photos stems in part from an absence of agree-

ment between Raat's stated goals and the text. Raat, best known for his work on the Mexican Revolution, sets out several ambitious but potentially contradictory goals for the book. One wonders what it means to contribute a text that "is a personal testimony about the human situation in a Mexican context," influenced by his own "philosophical inclinations . . ." (p. xi). The goal is not unrealistic, but in this case it is advanced without the details that bring such accounts to life. Where did the Tarahumara sleep? What did they eat, where, and with whom? When they got sick, did any of them seek the aid of a Tarahumara shaman? And what are the "philosophical inclinations" that Raat mentions?

Raat also states that "both text and photographs speak of collective memories, mythology, and humanity" (p. xi). But whose—Raat's and Janeček's, the Mexicans of the Sierra Tarahumara, or a subset of them? How are these "collective memories" to be blended with Raat's "philosophical inclinations" and "personal testimony?" It is unfair to expect a historian and a professional photographer to use the techniques and methods of ethnography, but it is fair to ask if their techniques, methods, and overall orientation contributed to a legitimate scholarly enterprise.

Returning to books written by anthropologists, Timothy Knab's *A War of Witches: A Journey into the Underworld of the Contemporary Aztecs* exhibits a frustrating lack of references, notes, or an index. One finds only a brief glossary with a short note on pronouncing Aztec terms (pp. 213–19). Knab begins by dating the first chapter 12 September 1974, a practice he follows for about half the text, with the last date given as 14 January 1977 (Chapter 6). If dating his entries was important for the first six chapters, why not for the last five? Another problem is the lack of clarity as to when the material was written up, given his report that "Chinese authorities seized [his] research materials" on an undated trip to China (p. 221). Knab does not specify what was lost and how much of the "tale" (as he calls it) was drawn from memory (pp. 221–22).

Without getting fully into the raging battle between "objective empiricists" and "postmodernists," the issue cannot be skirted entirely.² There are clearly notable differences in approach with the "first-person ethnography" or "reflexive" genre exemplified by Knab's account at one end of the continuum and the "structuralism" of Taggart somewhere near the other end.

Knab's *A War of Witches* contains much coverage of *brujos*, *curanderos*, *nagualli*, Talocan and *talocana* (the paradise Talocan and its supernaturals), and a considerable amount about Knab's long process of becoming

2. Interested readers may consult several good sources on this debate. I recommend three recent contributions, namely Layton (1997), Lett (1997), and Kuznar (1997). For a "light" and enjoyable introduction to postmodernism, see Berger (1997). For a good selection of readings on these issues, consult Docherty (1993).

a brujo himself. His journey deeper and deeper into the world of the Nahuat witches entailed his increasing knowledge of their secrets and his piece-by-piece uncovering of “the war of the witches.” This sort of narrative can be exciting reading and can convey a sense of indigenous Aztec thought and belief. Yet successful narrative anthropology requires an appropriate mix of scholarly and personal perspectives. In this case, except for a rare reference to his days in the Haight-Ashbury district of San Francisco or elsewhere (p. 111), Knab provides little by which to judge his personal journey.

Much of what these authors are producing is “normal science,” in the Kuhnian sense, with considerable “puzzle-solving” and exploration of concepts (Kuhn 1970, 23–42; Barnes 1982, 45–53). A good example from *People of the Peyote* is Salomón Nahmad’s extended discussion of the shortcomings of current acculturation theory (pp. 492–498). Nahmad criticizes its limits and inadequacies but does not resolve the problems he finds. His suggestions regarding research on indigenous movements are interesting but undeveloped (pp. 498–500).

In many ways, Taggart’s *Nahuat Myth and Social Structure* provides a classic case of what anthropology is or was all about. He uses a form of controlled comparison to explore differences and similarities between two groups of Sierra Nahuat. Controlled comparison as a method of analysis has been part of the anthropological tool kit since the 1930s. Taggart uses controlled comparisons to test alternate hypotheses regarding the ideology of male dominance and functional relationships between parts of culture, such as relationships between oral traditions and social structure. To explain many of the differences between parts of culture, Taggart explores the differential effects of acculturation on the two communities, and he approaches the material with a firm grounding in the history of the region and intimate knowledge of the language and culture of the Nahuat. Taggart is concerned with differences in sexual ideology as well as with the place of the Sierra Nahuat in Mexican society. He proceeds in an exemplary manner to explain theoretical issues of the study and methodology employed. Taggart finds that the people of the Sierra Nahuat adapt or modify certain versions of stories to best fit their existential circumstances (social position or relative status). He thereby extends much that has been learned from Emile Durkheim and Bronislaw Malinowski.

Taggart could be described as a “structuralist” because of his method of myth analysis, and his conclusions clearly fall within that mode (pp. 200–204). Yet that single label would not do justice to *Nahuat Myth and Social Structure*. For example, he relates the somewhat stronger image of women in Yaonáhuac stories (compared with Huitzilán) to their stronger standing in the more egalitarian Yaonáhuac social structure and family. This interpretation is then related to the differing degrees of acculturation of the two communities and overall relative status of Indians vis-à-vis non-Indians.

While none of the works reviewed here directly challenge existing theory, some signs emerge of more recent challenges to accepted thinking in the field. Nájera-Ramírez might be suspected of explicitly engaging in a postmodern project in confronting the issues of her gender, age, and ethnicity in relation to her research in Jocotán. But even though some favorite sources of postmodernists appear in her citations and analyses (such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Pierre Bourdieu), *La fiesta de los Tastoanes* remains largely within more typical anthropological bounds. Nájera-Ramírez grounds her work in Antonio Gramsci's concept of "hegemony, as explicated by Raymond Williams" (p. 6), not exactly postmodernist stuff. Hegemony linked with hybridization provides Nájera-Ramírez with two powerful concepts that guide her through tough issues ranging from Jocotán history that is contested by them via the fiesta of the Tastoanes and on to issues of community, the role of ritual giving, the festival as social process and symbol, and the future of Jocoteño identity. Many of these same issues concern Hendrickson in *Weaving Identities*, despite her grounding in symbolic anthropology blended with concepts derived from the work of Fernand Braudel (pp. 39–43).

In *The Covenants with Earth and Rain*, Monaghan addresses the subject of community, an issue of interest to Mesoamericanists since the days of Robert Redfield and Sol Tax. Monaghan is aware of problems associated with a too strict objectivist or materialist approach to definitions of community, that is, too much emphasis on structures as a priori things. As a remedy, Monaghan takes an approach that combines attention to native Mixtec concepts with a bit of ethnohistory yet continues structuralists' interest in social institutions. In consequence, Monaghan views "community" as the result of processes of human action, interaction (he borrows Georg Simmel's term *sociation*), and symbolization. Thus community does not disappear like some sort of incorporeity. Rather, Monaghan seeks to underscore its genesis in what individuals do and say. His efforts are fully in line with the work of Kay Warren (1978), John Watanabe (1992), Alan Sandstrom (1991), and others whose works he cites. This is "normal anthropological science" at its best. Nor does Monaghan ignore the material conditions of the Nuyootecos, although he seeks an accommodation with material conditions in questions of causality (pp. 359–63).

Monaghan's linking of significant local change with the appearance of new saints is a remarkable demonstration of his ethnohistorical approach and also illustrates the interaction of varied and complex national and local conditions with Nuyooteco sacred cosmology. In the case of Misericordia, for example, Monaghan writes that the saint's appearance in 1873 was "crucial to social, political, and economic innovation" (p. 361). To get closer to the "ground level," so to speak, this appearance "signaled an attempt by Nuyootecos to create relationships with one another that were in line with the changing material circumstances of their lives" (p. 361). Thus from the

contemporary use of a legendary, quasi-religious hero, Monaghan shows that this process continues in meeting new and changing conditions and the “reinventing” of self and community.

What emerges from these varied contributions and their strengths is focus and keen choice of method and theoretical underpinnings. Each of these books adds to the store of knowledge of the peoples and cultures of Mesoamerica and underscores more diversity than was once suspected among “culturally homogeneous peoples.” The continuing importance of traditional ethnographic fieldwork is also demonstrated. While many research questions and goals have changed, the best approach to answering anthropological questions remains immersion in the culture of those who have the answers. If unanimity is sought in the scholarly enterprise on Mesoamerica, however, that will have to wait. The problems and issues remain all too humanly complex.

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