Maya Hackers and the Cyberspatialized Nation-State: Modernity, Ethnostalgia, and a Lizard Queen in Guatemala

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Science fiction is generically concerned with the interpenetration of boundaries between problematic selves and unexpected others and with the exploration of possible worlds in a context structured by transnational technoscience.

—Donna Haraway, “The Promises of Monsters”

I’m going to jack you into this piece with a third-world arrival scene. It is 1985 in Nebaj, Guatemala, under a military government. I am on my first research trip investigating the effects of civil war on highland indigenous communities. Guatemala’s population is about one-half indigenous, and Nebaj is famous for its traditionalism. Most women and many men wear the handwoven clothing distinctive to the town; the civil-religious cargo system functions; and the yearly titular festival is intensely colorful, with saints’ processions, fireworks, the Dance of the Conquest, and all-night revelry. Day keepers still practice their craft, giving readings of the present based on the Mayan calendar (Colby and Colby 1981). In other words, the town offered all the exoticism my recently conferred B.A. in anthropology had incited me to desire. Nebaj, however, had also been one of the towns hardest hit by the government’s high- and low-tech counterinsurgency campaign, which leveled all 26 surrounding villages (and had killed some 70,000 Guatemalans in the preceding seven years). In addition to the dancers, weavers, and shamans, Nebaj was a town of refugees, survivors, and soldiers when I arrived.

In 1985 the journey to Nebaj took 12 hours in an extremely cramped Bluebird schoolbus (there were 12 people in my row), groaning its way over the spine of the Cuchumatanes mountains to finally drop down into the remote valley, centered on its colonial-era church. After that ride, while I was walking around the garrison town to stretch my legs a bit, a group of children surrounded me, inquiring if I would buy stuff or wanted my shoes shined. They asked me my

name, and when I said “Diana,” they all start yelling, “Queen of the lizards! Queen of the lizards!”

I was confused. I knew this town had been strongly proguerrilla and I wondered if the kids, in calling the gringa a lizard, were displaying the effects of anti-imperialist education imbied while the town was “liberated.” On the contrary. It turns out they had been sneaking into the cantina housing the town’s one television in order to watch a U.S. science fiction series called V. The show dealt with the arrival on earth of an advanced and apparently benevolent group of aliens who promise all sorts of technie wonders as well as world peace. Most humans willingly accept their offerings and presence. Only a small group of hearty souls realize they are actually lizards disguised as humans, on earth to rape and pillage her natural resources—including harvesting humans for snacks back home. Those who are not duped fight a valiant guerrilla struggle against both their own kind, who refuse to see the exploitative relationship they have entered, and the lizard aliens, led by their queen, Diana.

Telling this story of science fiction in Nebaj tends to excite a giddy sensation in my friends, who usually laugh and exclaim, “How postmodern!” They aren’t very interested, however, in stories of Guatemalan leftists exiled in Mexico City who panned their study groups around the television schedule of V. These urbanized, politicized Guatemalans liked the show because it faithfully represented their own problems of intraclass tensions, the dangers of living underground, and the difficulties of fighting an increasingly hegemonic power structure. This is not as intriguing as the boundary transgression between the supposedly premodern Maya-Ixlil Indians and the “post”-modern of science fiction. Encountering kids who were sophisticated in the ways of lizard queens in a backwater town was something of a shock.

This shock seems to come from the sense that science fiction is about the future, while Guatemala’s indigenous highlands tend to represent the past. This colonial binary of the modern cosmopolitan West opposed to the archaic indigenous, which Johannes Fabian (1983) has explored, is precisely the predicament faced by the growing Mayan cultural rights movement. The assimilationist discourse of Guatemalan nationalism has proposed that the majority indigenous population is inappropriate for modern nationalism. The glorious Mayan past of Tikal and traditional practices of clothing and ritual are appropriated to represent the nation, be it in tourist literature or, to note a more specific example, in a float in the 1993 Pasadena Rose Bowl Parade. However, for full representation in the nation, the Maya have been expected to put aside their indigenousness: to learn Spanish, to dress in Western clothes, and so forth. In fact, the binary semantics of identity in Guatemala mean you cannot be both Indian and modern. Ladin (nonindigenous) identity is defined as modern in terms of technology, lifeways, and so on. Because centuries of mestizaje have made it difficult to tell an indigenous person from a non-Indian, the categories are marked culturally. Thus, any indigenous person who speaks Spanish, has earned an academic degree, or holds a civil job has historically been redefined as ladino. I want to argue that the newly organizing Mayan cultural rights activists are refusing ladini-

zation and instead are “Maya hackers.” Like computer hackers, who deploy intimate understandings of technologies and codes while working within a system they do not control, the Maya are appropriating so-called modern technology and knowledges while refusing to be appropriated into the ladino nation. They are thereby becoming what Trinh Minh-ha has termed the “Inappropriate/Other” (Trinh 1986).

The incongruity of the term Maya hacker also tends to occasion chuckles, which I think highlights the continuing power of the primitive-modern divide. So, I deploy it as a caution against what I call ethnostalgia—as in my sense of exoticism so rudely disrupted when my cover as concerned gringa anthropologist was blown by a positive ID as a lizard queen. Ethnostalgia is a powerful contradiction for Mayan activists. It empowers their own work and wins them allies among ladino elites and foreigners, but it also limits them to the past side of the binary. I will argue that as Maya hackers, by contrast, they are decoding and reprogramming such familiar binary oppositions as those between past and future, between being rooted in geography and being mobile, between being traditional and being modern, between manual labor and white-collar technology/information manipulation, between mountain shrines and mini malls, and between unpaved roads and the information superhighway. Thinking of the site of this reprogramming work as the cyberspatialized nation-state foregrounds the importance of information and representation in the work of the Mayan activists and in the production of an imagined community like the Guatemalan nation.

My designation as lizard queen, like the term Maya hacker, is meant to suggest an incongruous juxtaposition of science fiction and anthropology. I would suggest that this juxtaposition is increasingly the standard fieldwork experience. In this historic moment when the natives are writing back, anthropology must creatively confront that “interpenetration of boundaries” that defines science fiction and the postmodern condition. I think one possible response is to continue the discipline’s self-reflexive double vision, which makes the strange familiar and the familiar strange—a project in which science fiction is an ally. Science fiction has been described as “a thersaurus of themes . . . a body of privileged allegories . . . to cope with the drastic transformations that technology has wrought on life” (Csicsery-Ronay 1991:305). These drastic transformations constitute the conditions of possibility for both Guatemalan nation formation and Mayan organizing in the context of an evolving global political economy of information technologies (Castells 1989). I hope that science fiction terms like Maya hacker and cyberspatialized nation-state help us resist an ahistoric vision of either the Maya or Guatemala as outside of these global trends, as the terms disturb the boundaries between what Haraway calls “problematic selves and unexpected others” (1992:300).

I like the way that the unexpected science fiction of lizard queens in Nebaj interrupts both notions of the authentic indigenous village and my own attempts to say something about the vertiginous experience of Guatemala. It firmly situates me, the anthropologist—as lizard queen, as a border crosser. The ambiva-
The Maayan Cultural Rights Movement

The Maaya, or Maayan, are an indigenous people of Guatemala who have historically been subjected to human rights abuses by the Guatemalan government. In 1996, the United Nations General Assembly recognized the rights of indigenous peoples worldwide, including the Maayas. This recognition was a significant moment in the Maayan struggle for cultural and political rights.

The Maayan Cultural Rights Movement (MRCRM) was formed in 1999, following the signing of the Agreement of San Ignacio in 1996, which ended the Guatemalan Civil War. The MRCRM worked to ensure that the rights of the Maayas, particularly their cultural rights, were protected and respected.

The MRCRM has been active in several key areas, including the protection of linguistic and cultural identity, the safeguarding of traditional knowledge, and the promotion of Maayan participation in decision-making processes. The movement has also worked to support the education and promotion of the Maayan language.

The MRCRM has faced significant challenges, including attempts by the Guatemalan government to suppress Maayan language and culture. Despite these challenges, the MRCRM continues to be a significant voice for Maayan rights and cultural preservation.

The Maayan Cultural Rights Movement is an important example of the power of indigenous peoples to assert their cultural rights and demand recognition and respect for their heritage. It is a testament to the resilience and determination of the Maayas and their commitment to preserving their cultural identity.

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cultural anthropology, and political philosophy. They began to discuss how
contact with urban, political, and economic centers, and their presence in the
community of today. The study of cultural anthropology involves the
interpretation of cultural patterns and their influence on human behavior.

African American culture has been influenced by the African experience,
which includes the cultural traditions of the African continent. These
traditions have been passed down through generations through
storytelling, music, dance, and other forms of cultural expression.

In the context of modern urban life, African American culture has
adapted and evolved. The use of technology, such as social media, has
provided new avenues for cultural expression and community building.

The importance of cultural anthropology in understanding and appreciating
African American culture cannot be overstated. It provides a framework for
understanding the complexities of identity and the richness of cultural
traditions.

This page contains important information about the role of cultural
anthropology in understanding African American culture.
The academic world is often perceived as a place where theoretical concepts are explored and discussed. However, the practical application of these theories is essential for understanding their true significance. In the context of cultural anthropology, the study of human societies and cultures is not limited to academic discussions. It also involves the collection, analysis, and interpretation of data to gain insights into the complexities of human behavior and social structures.

Cultural anthropology is a field that encompasses a broad range of topics, including the origins of human societies, the development of language and communication, and the role of religion and spirituality in shaping cultural practices. It is through the study of these topics that anthropologists aim to understand the diversity of human experiences and the ways in which different cultures have evolved over time.

One of the key features of cultural anthropology is its emphasis on qualitative research methods, such as participant observation and in-depth interviews. These methods allow anthropologists to immerse themselves in the cultures they study and gain a deeper understanding of the nuances and complexities of these societies. Through careful observation and interviews, anthropologists can document the ways in which cultural practices are transmitted from one generation to the next, and how these practices are adapted and transformed over time.

In addition to these qualitative methods, cultural anthropologists also use quantitative research techniques, such as surveys and statistical analysis, to gather data on larger populations. This allows for a more comprehensive understanding of cultural trends and patterns. By combining both qualitative and quantitative methods, anthropologists are able to provide a more complete picture of the cultures they study.

The field of cultural anthropology is not only academic, but it also has practical applications in areas such as international development, human rights, and conflict resolution. By understanding the cultural dynamics of different societies, anthropologists can help build bridges between communities and promote more effective cooperation and understanding.

In conclusion, cultural anthropology is a field that encompasses a wide range of topics and research methods. Through its exploration of human societies and cultures, it provides valuable insights into the diverse ways in which humans have organized and experienced the world around them. As such, it remains an important and relevant field of study in today's interconnected world.
The Complementary Nation-State

Conflicts can be viewed as expressions of the relationship between people's needs and the demands of the state. In many cases, conflicts arise because people's needs and desires are not met by the state, or because the state's actions are perceived as threatening or oppressive. For example, in some cases, conflicts may arise between the state and various ethnic or linguistic groups, as these groups may feel that their cultures and traditions are being threatened by the state's policies. In other cases, conflicts may arise between different social classes or economic groups, as these groups may feel that they are not receiving a fair share of the benefits of the state's economic policies. Overall, conflicts can be seen as expressions of the tension that exists between the needs of people and the demands of the state.
The Maya hackers, the co-creators of this ancient civilization, were not only skilled in the art of weaving and pottery, but also in the secrets of the night sky. Through their ingenuity, they were able to develop a calendar system that was unparalleled in its accuracy. The Maya calendar, with its 365-day solar year and its 260-day ritual year, was a testament to their understanding of both the heavens and the earth. Their knowledge of astronomy allowed them to predict eclipses, seasonal changes, and even the phases of the moon. This understanding was crucial to their agricultural practices, religious ceremonies, and societal organization.

The Maya were also skilled in the art of stonework, with their cities adorned with impressive temples and pyramids. These structures were not only a testament to their architectural skills, but also to their religious beliefs. The pyramids, for example, were considered the homes of the gods and were the sites of important religious ceremonies.

The Maya were a complex society, with a rich culture that included art, music, and literature. Their written language, known as hieroglyphic writing, allowed them to record their history, myths, and laws. The Maya were also known for their advanced mathematical and astronomical knowledge, with calculations that were used in the construction of their cities and the prediction of celestial events.

Despite their many accomplishments, the Maya were not immune to the challenges of their time. The collapse of their civilization, which occurred around the 9th century AD, was due to a combination of factors, including overpopulation, environmental degradation, and conflict. Despite this setback, the Maya left behind a legacy of knowledge and innovation that continues to inspire and educate people today.
A final note.

Preliminary research in the area of artificial neural networks, specifically deep learning, has shown promising results in various fields, including computer vision and natural language processing. However, the field is still in its early stages, and much work remains to be done.

Notes

The field of artificial neural networks is rapidly evolving, with new discoveries and advancements being made regularly. As such, the information presented in this paper is subject to change and should be updated accordingly.

The projection of the back of the head onto the mudra may also be described as the "doloredon boy" aspects of L's backcombre may also be described.
The document contains a discussion on some information age moment changing education and culture. It includes references to various authors and theorists, such as Foucault's work on discourse. The text is a mix of legal and academic language, with references to specific paragraphs and pages from a book or legal document. The content appears to be discussing the impact of technology and information on society, education, and culture. There are also mentions of specific locations and entities such as "Yallah, the University" and "Yallah's rapid, the University, Toronto." The text is dense and requires careful reading to understand the full implications of the discussion.

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