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

**Diane M. Nelson**
*Sociology/Anthropology Department*
*Lewis and Clark College*

> 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.
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> —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

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

I was confounded. 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 imbibed 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 techie 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 planned their study groups around the television schedule of *V*. These urbanized, politicized Guatemalans liked the show because it faithfully represented their own problems of intracell 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-Ixil 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 semiotics of identity in Guatemala mean you cannot be both Indian and modern. Ladino (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 desk job has historically been redefined as ladino. I want to argue that the newly organizing Mayan cultural rights activists are refusing ladinization 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/d 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[1]—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.[2] 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.[3] Science fiction has been described as "a thesaurus 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-

lence of this position was violently brought home in March 1994 when a well-meaning gringa was beaten almost to death in a highland Mayan village (Adams 1996; Kadetsky 1994; Nelson 1995). Rumor had it that she was stealing babies for organ transplants—a very lizard-queen-like project. Being designated Diana, Queen of the Lizards, forces me to consider the sorts of fantasy spaces that I inhabit for those I am "studying" and how my fantasies and romances inflect how I "study" them.[4]

This is increasingly important to address as Mayan organizing calls into question the representational work of anthropologists. While much ethnography has been useful for the Maya, we must acknowledge that the anthropological project often appears to be a *V*-like alien harvesting of information for intellectual snacks back home.

Keeping this ambivalent lizard queen position in mind, I will first briefly describe the work of the Mayan cultural rights activists in Guatemala and the centrality of information technologies to their work. Then I will discuss the effects of their struggles over representation and the responses of nonindigenous (ladino) state sectors. By drawing parallels between cyberspace and the nation state, I hope to keep "the context structured by transnational technoscience" on our view screens (Haraway 1992:300).

## The Mayan Cultural Rights Movement

It is 1993, and I am on my sixth sojourn in Guatemala. I am sitting in an upscale Guatemala City steak house with Dr. Demetrio Cojti, a well-known Mayan professional. Between my first trip to Nebaj and 1988, when I first met Dr. Cojti, I had lived for 15 months in highland Guatemala researching the impact of the civil war on indigenous identity. In those years, I had grudgingly come to agree with some of the doomsayers who foretold the end of Guatemala's Indians. In 1988, however, I began to interview men and women like Dr. Cojti, who were forging something new, an identity they called Mayan.

Although indigenous people make up nearly a majority of the population, indigenous identification in Guatemala is very local, taking the form of 22 different ethnolinguistic identity groups, including K'iche, Tzutujil, Chuj, and Mam. As Carol Smith (1990) and others have noted, these local identities are marked sartorially by distinct dress and by kin relations, dialect, and economic, civil, and religious organization. While nonladinos have been called *indios, naturales,* or *autoctónas,* there had been little effective organizing around a larger, pan-indigenous identity. To my surprise, in the denouement of the violence of the early 1980s, indigenous identification and organizing has exploded (Nelson 1991; Smith 1991). Some of this has involved what Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger call "invented tradition" (1983). For example, activists have taken the term *Maya*—formerly reserved for the ancient temple builders and Guatemalan tourism campaigns—and reprogrammed it to represent an incipient pan-indigenous identity at the national level.

I followed the work of these activists from the highlands to the capital, Guatemala City, where I spent an additional 17 months researching the national



Mayan movement and the reactions of the democratizing ladino state. So in the steak house in Guatemala City in 1993, Dr. Cojti and I are talking about the politics of creating a pan-Mayan identity, as people had begun to self-identify as Maya-Ixil, Maya-K'iche', Maya-K'ekchi, and so on. Many were also reversing the standard appropriation of indigenous people to ladinization by calling the mestizo population "Maya-ladino"—another reprogramming of the premodern/modern that has shocked many ladinos. Planning for our next meeting, Dr. Cojti pulled out one of those amazing computerized datebooks that hold thousands of names, addresses, dates, world time zones, telephone numbers, and even maps. I said, joking, that they should invent a new identity term, the "Maya hacker."

We both laughed, but I came to think this *could* describe Dr. Cojti—a man who holds a Ph.D. in communications, who is very technologically literate and serves as a node for various information networks, including the burgeoning Mayan cultural rights movement as well as various government, NGO, and international webs, in part through his job at UNICEF. He is also connected to the rural-urban matrix through contact with his small-town home and many rural-based Mayan organizations, and he frequently contributes to the national press and indigenous publications. In its short history, the Guatemalan indigenous rights movement has been split between what are known as the popular indigenous organizations—like Rigoberta Menchu's Campesino Unity Committee (CUC) and other human rights groups that identify with class issues—and the more culturally active "Mayan" movement, which insists that racism is not reducible to capitalist exploitation (Bastos and Camus 1993; Smith 1991).[5] Dr. Cojti, however, is becoming a vital node in the attempted conciliation of these two positions, a process energized by such national and international events as the Columbus Quincentennial, the ongoing peace talks, and Rigoberta Menchú's Nobel Peace Prize and the international summits she convened during 1993, the U.N. Year of Indigenous Peoples.

## Why *Hacker?*

The term *hacker* originated at MIT, the primordial soup of computing, as a term of respect and acknowledgment for extraordinary competence in the manipulation of hard- and software. The *New Hacker's Dictionary* defines a hacker as "a person who explores the details of programmable systems and how to stretch their capabilities . . . who enjoys the . . . challenge of creatively overcoming or circumventing limitations" (Raymond 1991:189). For Bruce Sterling, to hack means to explore and be "determined to make access to computers and information as free and open as possible" (1992:50). Thus, hacking is about the understanding and control of information technologies and, most importantly, the ability to form networks for communication and information sharing.

When I joke about the Maya hacker, I am thinking about the vital importance of information and networking to the political strategies of the indigenous cultural rights movement. Information, of course, has been an essential tool in the colonial and postcolonial history of Guatemala. Knowledge of the Indians—

especially their divisions—facilitated the Conquest. The colony was instituted through the sword and the cross, that is, a combination of violence and ideology. Colonial ideology, however, needs translators; the colonial structure had to create interpreters. So over the past 500 years, a variety of middle men and women were produced as information technicians: lay church workers, document translators, and, later, bilingual school teachers, health workers, and agricultural extension officers. The way colonialism created these roles was explicitly laid out in the British document of 1835 known as Macauley's "Minute on Indian Education," which states:

> We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect. . . . We must render them by degrees fit vehicles for conveying knowledge to the great mass of the population. [cited in Spivak 1988:282]

But in Guatemala, as elsewhere, indigenous people did not experience this process of being rendered fit as simple, passive conduits of knowledge. These translating roles offered assimilation, allowing entry into the cash economy and promising that with a generation or two of speaking Spanish and dressing "up," their children might escape the stigma of indigenous identity. However, it is precisely these middle men and women who have begun to appropriate these information technologies and to deploy them for alternative aims. The role of "vehicle for conveying knowledge" is no longer so desirable: as indigenous members of the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (ALMG, the Guatemalan Mayan Language Academy) have said, "Many activists come from the education field: they often find in their students the best mirror to reflect their own frustrations. . . [F]rom the inside schools are revealed to be great prisons for mental castration, true advance troops for colonial domination" (ALMG 1990:60). Instead, they are using literacy, desktop publishing, linguistic theories, radio, and computers to promote cultural survival. Rejecting the Macauley role, they say that the "decolonization of the Maya begins with knowing how to use technology and not being used by it" (ALMG 1990:42).

Although public indigenous organizing around such cultural issues as the survival of Mayan languages began in the 1950s, by the 1970s there was a critical mass of indigenous men and women working throughout the highlands in churches, schools, agricultural cooperatives, nongovernmental development agencies, and medical services who began to meet and discuss issues of indigenous empowerment. Critics of the Mayan movement have called these people an elite. Yet many of them have only a sixth-grade education, and while they may receive a salary for their work, they are often still part-time farmers or traders, commuting, as Dr. Cojti does, between the urban and rural scenes.

Mayan leaders say that in the 1970s they began to understand the importance of language—of the indigenous languages as both a symbol and ongoing practice of indigenous identity, *and* of language and information as a way to contest racial, economic, and political oppression. They began to discuss how



ladino control of the representation of indigenous peoples in history, education, and the media determined how the Maya saw themselves, in turn making them unwitting allies in this process. As one activist who had worked as a Catholic catechist with his father said in an interview: "I spoke against the traditional religion. We were the worst destroyers of our own culture. Now that I am more involved, I understand the barbarity I've committed and the need to support our traditions."

Guatemala, with a primarily agrarian economy, suffers one of the most skewed land distributions in Latin America, with much of the fertile land devoted to plantation production, while Indians are relegated to increasingly smaller (and steeper) plots. In the 1970s, with Guatemala's growing poverty, many of those who are now Mayan activists were influenced by liberation theology and other social movements (and began working closely for the first time with different ethnic-linguistic groups and ladinos) and were then radicalized by the military government's violent suppression. Rigoberta Menchú's testimonial vividly recounts the journey from nonviolent social activism to armed resistance (1987). While some indigenous activists took this route, thousands of educators, catechists, and development workers were killed for their middle-(wo)man roles alone. As one Mayan leader remembers: "There was so much violence because the army was not in control of the situation. That is why the thing was so brutal, so bestial, totally excessive. It was meant to scare people. We continue to fight, but we have learned from the mistakes of the past. We are working differently now."

The catastrophic violence of the civil war and continuing human rights violations limit political organizing around taboo subjects such as land reform, but the 1986 inauguration of civilian rule has created a space for survivors and for a new generation to undertake different kinds of political work. The massive violence has convinced many of the need for new strategies and careful organizing. Unfortunately, many indigenous people were disillusioned by their experiences of racism within the popular and revolutionary movements. This has also convinced them that alternative, indigene-controlled organizing is necessary. As one activist said to me: "[our work] looks like it's just 'cultural,' but inside we are very political. We are defining different models of development. We are struggling to regain our culture, the languages, but it is the organization that is difficult to regain. Many of us have lost our identity."

Thus, contrary to fears that 30 years of ethnocidal civil war would destroy the Maya, in the past ten years hundreds of groups identified as indigenous have emerged. These Maya hackers are not challenging state and ladino power directly but instead are sharing information and creating networks. They are concentrating on education, on rural development, on research and support for languages and other cultural expressions (such as religious, sartorial, and artistic expression), on the creation of libraries and literatures devoted to indigenous issues, and on publishing, radio broadcasting, and lobbying the Guatemalan Congress (often in collaboration with international organizations that remain in contact through e-mail and faxes). These modes of "working differently" are

tactical responses to violence, but they also reflect a global historical shift. While many indigenous people are small farmers, agricultural peons, textile producers, or workers in Guatemala's industries and *maquila* production, increasing numbers have service and information management jobs, such as teachers, lawyers, bureaucrats, and merchants. Thus the conditions of possibility for the Maya hacker include the emergence of a critical mass of educated indigenous people, shifts in the transnational economy that increasingly emphasize the information economy,[6] and technological changes that have made relevant hard- and software increasingly available.[7]

One expression of this "working differently" is the Guatemalan Mayan Language Academy. Organized in 1984, the ALMG is an umbrella organization for Mayan groups, including the Guatemalan Academy of Mayan Writers, the Center for Mayan Research and Documentation, the Permanent Seminar for Mayan Studies, the Coordinator of Indigenous Integral Development, and the Mayan Education and Cultural Center Cholsamaj (a publishing house). Member organizations work in Maya-controlled grassroots development projects, as well as in research, documentation, and education. They sponsor conferences and seminars and publish economically and intellectually accessible materials—what I would call "shareware."

Academy members represent all of the 20 Mayan languages officially recognized by the academy. Leaders are chosen for a one-year stint from member organizations based throughout the country. For example, a recent president commuted weekly to Guatemala City from his hometown, where he had a one-year sabbatical from his teaching position. Many members work full time at the national office, maintaining their families at home in Alta Verapaz, Quetzaltenango, or Huehuetenango, where they spend their weekends. The ALMG's first hacking project was to create a unified alphabet for the different Mayan languages, through linguistic research and painstaking negotiations, and then to lobby the national Congress to make this alphabet official for use in school texts and government publications. In pursuing this goal, they have deployed the 1984 Constitution, which, although it enshrines Spanish as the official national language, does recognize the existence of indigenous languages. Strategically deploying the embedded code of this national operating system, the ALMG won official recognition for its new alphabet, thereby joining in the struggle for representation, in its double sense (Spivak 1988:276). First, in the sense of a portrayal: monitoring and shaping how the Maya are portrayed in the national media is a central activity of the ALMG. Second, these efforts are directly linked to their struggle to win representation—in the sense of speaking for themselves—in the state. Through tenacious lobbying and strategic use of ladino internal divisions and ladino allies, in 1991 the ALMG itself won recognition as a government-funded, but autonomous, organization in charge of linguistic and educational research, the development of curriculum materials, and the training of teachers, among other things. Like hackers who work in the interstices of computer networks, the Maya hackers are creating spaces for themselves inside the state.



Thus, rather than the state being a "thing" to be smashed, the Maya seem to see the post-1985 Guatemalan government as a *site* for their work. As an ALMG document states:

> It is difficult for the Academy to work in the sewer waters of a structure of social and economic exploitation. But this does not mean that we cannot carry out dignifying activities within the political and economic ladino hegemony. However, it must be clear that this is not the only solution, but an historical contribution in the struggle for Mayan rights that must follow many paths. [ALMG 1990:61]

The academy plays a major role in Mayan organizing, and it is a nodal point for the many Mayan organizations based in the countryside. The flow of information through this node was clear to me in the hours I sat in the ALMG waiting room until someone had time to be interviewed. The building was filled with a procession of indigenous people from all over the country, coming in for training sessions, to turn in vocabulary lists from their linguistic areas, to confer about curricula for their Mayan schools, or to gather people to take a request to Congress or to the press. My interviews were constantly postponed as ALMG members left town to run a seminar in some small village or to do computer training.

While Mayan groups make political and economic demands, they are keenly aware of the power of discourse and representation—that is, that the production and deployment of information and knowledge is a potent form of power. For 500 years the killing fields have been controlled by those with superior hardware. Now, with a radio transmitter, a computer and printer, a modem, or a chip-run datebook, the Maya hackers are reprogramming from the bottom up. This is also the position of many U.S. hackers, like Phiber Optik, who was recently released from a year in jail for computer trespassing. "Raised in a working-class neighborhood," according to *Time*, Optik "used his $300 Radio Shack computer like a magic carpet to cyberspace, staying up all night to explore the mysteries of the worldwide telephone grid . . . and he was happy to share his knowledge" (Quittner 1995:61).[8]

Similarly, using the tools at their disposal, and without large financial reserves, Mayan activists are insisting on the appropriateness of their presence in the postmodern world by appropriating such technology for their own ends. One Mayan leader told me, "the Maya give thanks for food, for air, for the tools that serve us, the office machines, and the computers." Generations of indigenous struggle and the tools of the information revolution, combined with the historic reconfiguration of the Guatemalan state, have opened up a new arena where Mayan activists can hack the ladino power structure. By "hack" I mean they are overcoming system limitations, decoding and reprogramming postcoloniality, and pressing "enter" on the keyboard of the Guatemalan nation.

A second meaning of the term *hacker* is the sense of a romantic outlaw. In *The Hacker Crackdown*, Bruce Sterling describes "hackers of all kinds [as] absolutely soaked through with heroic antibureaucratic sentiment. Hackers long for recognition as . . . the postmodern equivalent of the cowboy" (1992:51).

This is the hero-protagonist in such films as *War Games*, *TRON*, and *Johnny Mnemonic*, and the genre of science fiction known as cyberpunk.[9] This hacker, in fiction as in "real life," is almost always male and surfs through the military industrial cyber-networks, laughing at their security systems and occasionally leaving a clever clue to his passing through. In the material world, however, these generally lighthearted break-ins often lead to paranoid warnings that a hacker will start World War III, which in turn justify periodic hacker crackdowns and punishments wildly disproportionate to the "crimes."

I argue that the Guatemalan state may think of the Maya as hackers in this sense. Decades of antiracism work in Guatemala have driven most overtly anti-indigenous remarks out of public discourse. Most ladino state functionaries are publicly very pro-Maya—some are most sincere, while others are clearly attempting to appropriate this vibrant new social movement to their own ends. However, there are suggestions that ladinos feel the Maya are invading a space that is inappropriate for them: the urban, literate, mediatized state. I think this space of the nation-state, the hackers' topos, and the ground of contention in Guatemala can be visualized as cyberspace.

## The Cyberspatialized Nation-State

Cyberspace is a utopia in two senses. Many proponents excitedly proclaim that you can be anything you want to be there; it promises unlimited information and communication—the ultimate public sphere. In this way, cyberspace offers similar hopes to those surrounding democratization and the peace process in Guatemala. However, it is a utopia as well in the etymological sense of a no-place. In this sense it is also similar to the state—a notoriously difficult entity to pin down, as Timothy Mitchell (1991) reminds us. Cyberspace is where computer information "is," where your money "is" when you think it's in the bank, and where people "are" when they gather in multiple-user dimensions. The term was coined by the science fiction writer William Gibson who, in his 1984 novel *Neuromancer*, calls it "a graphic representation of data abstracted from the banks of every computer in the human system. Unthinkable complexity. Lines of light ranged in the nonspace of the mind, clusters and constellations of data . . . a consensual hallucination" (1984:51). Does this sound like Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" (1990[1983])? I think it does, and I think the science fiction of the cyberspatial nation-state may be productive for thinking about Guatemala and the Maya—just as Guatemala may be productive for thinking about cyberspace.

I am saying not that the nation-state is exactly like cyberspace, of course, but that both are communities formed through shared information. Anderson, discussing the importance of print capital to the development of nationalism, says, "fellow-readers to whom [the citizen is] connected through print, form, in their secular visible invisibility, the embryo of the nationally-imagined community" (1990[1983]:47). Cyberspace is both the informational computer codes of its infrastructure and the active and constant creation of shared "space" and subjectivity as people write themselves into being on the Net. Economically, the nation-state and cyberspace both are ways of organizing material production. Also, in the nation, liberal discourses of universal citizenship offer the ideological fantasy of total inclusion, and the proponents of cyberspace offer a similar dream: that you can be whoever you want to be, that all the limitations of gendered, racialized, or otherwise "disabled" physicality will fall away.[10]



If the nation is understood as the space in which "state sovereignty is fully, flatly, and evenly operative over each square centimetre" (Anderson 1990 [1983]:26), cyberspace is described by "silicon positivists" (Ross 1991:94) in similar terms, only better. It is "a world in which the global traffic of knowledge, secrets, measurements, indicators, entertainments . . . take on form, can be . . . accessed from anywhere. . . . Suddenly cultural knowledge, collective memory, technological advances [become] the object of interactive democracy" (Benedikt 1991:7). In language reminiscent of the colonial basis of the nation-state, but without the pesky natives, cyberspace is seen to "represent a continent about which we have hitherto communicated only in sign language, a continent 'materializing' in a way" (Benedikt 1991:17). Both the nation and cyberspace are founded on exclusions marked by race, gender, sexuality, and so forth—the nation-state through historically embedded racism, sexism, and homophobia and cyberspace through educational and financial limits on who has access to the Internet. However, I would suggest that the metaphor works in a positive way as well, as both the democratizing Guatemalan nation-state and the technologically emerging cyberspace are spaces for active negotiations about their future configurations.

In addition, I deploy the science-fiction-like cyberspace metaphor to unsettle certain ethnostalgic tendencies, such as the New Age search for modernity's antidote in archaism[11] as well as the hopes of those who want the Maya to form the ethnicity-for-itself that will end Guatemala's long calvary. The science fiction of the cyberspatialized nation state may also be useful for thinking about a democratizing Guatemala with both a booming stock market and 80 percent of the population in extreme poverty. The Maya are hacking a world deeply structured by transnational technoscience—whether it is the Israeli computers that allow Guatemalan army intelligence (known as the "Archive") to track guerrilla safe houses through tiny increments in electricity use or the faxes and e-mail that regulate the flows of just-in-time production that determine the daily lives of young Mayan maquila factory workers.

The nation-state and cyberspace as environments are also both the monstrous spawn of the military-industrial matrix: gridded and programmed in accordance with the demands of command-control-communication-intelligence, or C3I. Both the nation-state and cyberspace are concerned with mapping territories, constituting boundaries, and charting population movements, as well as constituting identities and determining potential risks. In *Neuromancer*, Gibson describes cyberspace as the visualization of maps of data organized by corporate conglomerates:

> The unfolding of his distanceless home, his country, transparent 3D chessboard extending to infinity. Inner eye opening to the stepped scarlet pyramid of the Eastern Seaboard Fission Authority burning beyond the green cubes of Mitsubishi Bank of America, and high and very far away he saw the spiral arms of military systems, forever beyond his reach. [1984:52]

This cold reminder of the military presence emphasizes the origins of actually existing cyberspace in army simulation tanks, funding from the U.S. Defense Advanced Research Project Agency (DARPA),[12] and the current use of cyberspace in smart bombs. The military foundations of the cyberspatialized nation-state reminds us, when thinking about Guatemala, that the spiral arms of military systems always embrace the hard and software that Maya hackers and sympathetic lizard queens are trying to reprogram: there is *always* danger involved in this work.

Guatemala's virtual nation-state seems deeply ambivalent about its Indians and their supposed embeddedness in premodernity. As I mentioned, ladino state officials, in interviews and other public statements, espouse the politically correct vision of an inclusive Guatemala in which unity is strengthened by diversity and everyone partakes equally in rights and responsibilities. In unguarded moments, however, they suggest that the Maya are obsolete—that the Maya express themselves through handwoven cloth in the age of the microchip and satellite transmission. In this stereotype, the Maya show up as *defined* by their commitment to tradition, that is, by their lack of modernity. This is signified through the very things that drew me (along with increasing numbers of tourists) to Nebaj—their traditional clothing, their noncapitalist relationship to the land, their Catholicism, their illiteracy, and especially their inability to speak Spanish, which is seen to limit them to the local and the past. A newspaper editorial argued that Mayan languages should not be taught at the elementary level because they are "stuck in the middle of the sixteenth century" (*La Hora* 1990). In one of my interviews, a former Finance Ministry official asked: "How is a modern nation possible if we have people speaking 23 different languages? How can you translate Shakespeare into K'iche'? How will they have access to universal culture if they are isolated in their different languages?"

This very resistance to modernity is often lauded by these same people, however. The vice minister of labor spoke approvingly of "the amazing valor of these people—they have almost been genocided, but they maintain their culture, they do not forget their origins. Even when they migrate to other places to work, they do not change. And the women especially, they are the most resistant to foreign values. They reproduce their culture." The head of a government development agency expressed awe at the Indians' different sense of time: "This is a distinct advantage. They do not think about progress in one year or five years. They think in terms of hundreds of years! They are in no hurry."

This sense of the Maya as outside history informs the popular notion of the indigenous community as naturally equal, inherently resistant to such army counterinsurgency measures as the Civil Defense Patrols (the imposed military service for rural men), and representing a wholeness that national culture has



lost. A member of the government's human rights office remarked: "indigenous communities are horizontally organized. The Civil Patrol is vertical and destructive to traditional community life. In the communities, people are respected for contributing to the community, for their skills and their knowledge." Another government development official said: "Indigenous social structure is very complete and democratic and functional. It is better than the national structure. Their system is very rich, but they are very jealous of it. They will not let us enter. Their elders and leaders are very powerful and there is a deep mysticism they will not share with us."

Such forms of ethnostalgia and fascination are important for the high tech imag*ination*[13] of cyberspace, from the tribal subcultures and totem identifications of hackers to total immersion games, like Dungeons and Dragons. Similar visions of tradition and community, of course, hold romantic power for lizard queens involved in writing social scientific fictions and for Mayan nationalists working to make such fictions into science. Much of the work of Maya hackers in documentation, publishing, and education has been aimed at rescuing or even re-creating traditional indigenous lifeways. The ALMG have said, "we seek to affirm our identity through strengthening the values of the Mayan culture through the research, institutionalization, and systematization of a desire to be different in language, external identification (clothing), cosmology, and other factors" (1990:4).[14] Most Maya hackers, however, are quite explicit about their appropriateness in the modern world. For ALMG founder Guillermo Rodriguez Guajan, "Mayan Nationalism means combining 'modern' science and technology with traditional Mayan knowledge of language, medicine, farming know-how and community life in order to develop new forms of Mayan knowledge." This is precisely what many ladinos try to delete from their screens.

In interviews, most ladinos do not deny that the Maya have a right to inclusion, but they insist that the access code is in Spanish and English, not Kaqchikel or K'iche'. To log on to the modern, the Maya must ladinoize. Literacy, technical expertise, Spanish, Western clothes—these are by definition ladino. The colonial binary that consigns the Indians to the premodern while defining ladino as those with access to the "modern" has worked historically in Guatemala by redefining any indigenous person who spoke Spanish or wore Western clothes as ladino—in the census and in popular understanding. For example, a government development official said: "The leaders of the Indian movement are not Maya. They do not come from the communities and they all have a book under their arm." In short, if they read, they are not Maya.

This mutually exclusive binary informs and shores up many of the negative reactions of state sectors to the Mayan nationalist movement. As a ladino researcher who identifies as a Marxist told me: "This cultural rescue work denies the Indians the possibilities of enrichment from other cultures. . . . They are very closed. Their work is motivated by resentment, and I think it is dangerous because it has no future. They care more about what they were than what they will be."

Those Maya who choose to jack into national and transnational information networks, to read, live in cities, do intellectual work, or carry computerized datebooks—those who snarf, or appropriate, anything "modern"—will themselves be appropriated, automatically becoming ladinos.[15] Those who remain in the premodern countryside and maintain "real" indigenous lifeways will be appropriated as well—as tourist commodities for the postmodern world eagerly seeking an "island in the net" (Sterling 1986) for a quick vacation getaway.

To many ladinos, the Maya hacker is inappropriate to the cyberspatialized nation-state. The Maya hackers themselves, however, are staking out an alternative position as "inappropriate/d others," which Trinh Minh-ha describes as the "historic positioning of those who cannot adopt the mask of either 'self' or 'other' offered by modern Western narratives of identity and politics. To be an 'Inappropriate/d Other' means to be in a critical, deconstructive relationality" (cited in Haraway 1992:299).

In this critical relationality, the Maya hacker is always already inside the machine. As the Mayan congressman Claudio Coxaj said: "We are inside the State. We have adopted the modern." Similarly, Demetrio Cojti said: "Modernity is not the property of anyone. It is universal; no one can lay claim to it. . . . Everyone is always trying to say that we are inauthentic. But their ideas of indigenous people are very stereotypic, very rural. We are trying to mix things up." In fact, this might be the Maya hacker ethos. As cyberpunk writer Neal Stephenson puts it in his science fiction novel *Snowcrash*, "A truly advanced hacker comes to understand the true inner workings of the machine—he sees through the language he's working in and glimpses the secret functioning of the binary code" (1993:279). I argue that the advanced Maya hacker is reading the binary codes of ladino/Maya and modern/premodern, codes that structure the Guatemalan cyberspatialized nation-state, and is "mixing things up"—decoding, reprogramming, and then networking to train others to continue this work.

In addition to the networking I have described, the Maya are intervening in these contests through their publications, which act as shareware and include *Specific Rights of the Mayan People* (Guatemalan Council of Mayan Organizations 1991), the proceedings from the Forum of the Mayan People and the Presidential Candidates (Center for Mayan Research and Documentation 1992), Dr. Cojti's *The Political Thought of the Mayan People* (1990), the Mesa Maya's document *Identity and Indigenous Rights: Statements and Demands in the Negotiating Process between the Government-Army and the URNG* (1993)[16] and *Mayan Agenda* (Cholsamaj 1994), a calendar paralleling Gregorian and Mayan dates and providing information about traditional practices. These documents are tools for reprogramming work, manuals for writing a new operating system that will read commands in indigenous languages and lay out a menu of demands for cultural, educational, health, territorial, and human rights for the Maya.

Of course, such science fiction boundary-crossings by unexpected others tend to problematize the self—to show up the bugs in the way the programs run. Through the work of the Maya hackers, the cyberspatialized nation-state is shown to be itself divided and unsure, forced to question its own hold on modernity.[17] As the Maya begin not only to appropriate the markers of "modern" ladino identity (such as technological expertise and international networking skills) but also to hack the identity itself, as they rename the nonindigenous as Maya-ladinos, many binary codes begin to misfire.



Functionaries in the Guatemalan nation-state are much like computer executives and other postindustrial capitalists. They have developed and used the state and/or cyberspace primarily for personal profit and believe it to be a clean and secure workplace, but they are now confronted with the traces and long-lasting effects of hackers in the system. Through military intelligence (the Archive) and highly developed surveillance and information recall technologies, they were accustomed to being the ones with the data on diskette, the ones who represented (in the sense of forming and controlling an image) those excluded from cyberspace and the nation-state. The border crossings of unexpected and inappropriate/d others who insist on representing (speaking for) themselves is highly problematic. In the United States, the paranoia about these "intrusions" was expressed in the "hacker crackdown" that followed the 1990 crash in AT&T's system (Sterling 1992) and in the subsequent demonization of the hacker in the popular press. Blamed on "hackers," the AT&T crash led to a nationwide mobilization of law enforcement personnel and the trampling of multiple civil rights (Sterling 1992:101–107, 147–164). However, the crash was actually caused by an internal software flaw,[18] paralleling the internal contradictions of Guatemala's exclusionary nationalism, which has led to civil war.

Thankfully, there has so far been no crackdown on the Maya hackers, who have been extremely careful in their dealings with the cold embrace of the spiral arms of military systems. However, ambivalence and creeping paranoia about their border crossings are beginning to come on-line. A staff member of the presidential secretary for political affairs told me: "The government thinks the Indians are not capable of anything. They are ignorant and dependent. But they also say that the Maya are our competition for the future." Despite the vocal rejection by Mayan nationalists of much of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) movement's revolutionary politics and methods, official discourse attempts to link Mayan nationalists and the URNG, a strategy that has had bloody consequences in the past. Even powerful ladino state officials say they have been accused of being guerrillas because they express sympathy for the Mayan position. Former defense minister General Enriquez, while not directly accusing the Maya of subversion, has warned that their demands may be "appropriated and taken advantage of by the URNG guerrillas. God willing," he continued, "the ideological use, the interested use, of the issues of the Pueblos Indigenas will not drive us to a national division. This is perhaps our greatest concern."

This fear of the "interested use of the issues of the Pueblos Indigenas" colors other reactions to the Maya hacker as well. Leftist ladinos and U.S. academics[19] have suggested that they are co-opted by the state, or even by the very tech-

nologies they are appropriating. Such concerns, well intentioned I know, reify either-or categories imbued with an ethnostalgia that posits some pure, authentic space of indigenousness that is outside of "the state," technological degradation, and history itself. Again, these imaginaries are powerful for both the Maya and those who seek to support their goals, but (besides the way they echo ladino state functionary discourse) they also refuse the "mixing up" that Maya hackers feel is so necessary.

Jane Collier (1995) has suggested that it may be less useful to investigate the authenticity, or lack thereof, of any cultural expression than it is to interrogate modernity itself, including its engendered categories. This has been my goal in investigating the work of the Maya hackers and their role in the cyberspatialized nation-state, which is both a very scary place and a site for struggle. As Haraway suggests, we should view the "daily sphere of human-machine interface not only as a product of power relations but also as a potential site for contesting and redefining those relations" (cited in Ross 1991:161). Most importantly, there is no outside to this interface between humans and machines, humans and the state, humans and the transnational information economy. Despite past and present attempts to exclude them, Guatemala's indigenous peoples have always been deeply imbricated in the "modern" nation-state: as laborers, as symbolic markers for national identity, and as tourist commodities—in short, as the necessary other of the binary code.

Perhaps this disavowed identity is what feeds a paranoic ambivalence about the Maya hackers' new ways of articulating with the cyberspatialized nation-state. Haraway describes cyberspace as a "consensual hallucination of too much complexity, too much articulation. It is the virtual reality of paranoia . . . the belief in the unrelieved density of connection, requiring, if one is to survive, withdrawal and defense unto death. . . . Paradoxically, paranoia is the condition of the impossibility of remaining articulate" (Haraway 1992:325). Articulation with the environment that is cyberspace and the nation-state is "terminal"[20]—where could one withdraw to? The Maya hacker is articulated to the cyberspatialized nation-state, creating a relation in which, despite paranoia, there is room for contestation. Gods willing—as the Maya might say—the Maya hackers' reprogramming is rearticulating the Guatemalan nation-state, and further genocidal attempts at a higher crackdown will register as a systems error, as unreadable code.

## A Final Note

I chose the metaphor of the Maya hacker as a countermeasure to the trope of consigning the Maya to the romantic premodern, a trope common to both anthropological and popular discourses. But I also do not want to romanticize the complex positionalities of the Mayan activists or disavow the exclusions involved. The less heroic aspects of hackerdom—specifically the gender politics—are also too easily transferable to the Mayan nationalist movement. Women are almost completely absent in both communities. The complaints of several Mayan women about their experiences in different organizations suggest that the "adolescent boy" aspects of U.S. hackerdom may also be descriptive of some Maya hackers.



I must also explore what I as a lizard queen hope to find in the Maya and why it has been so easy to transfer the metaphor of the rebellious hacker cowboy to the Mayan Indian. Steve Levy's *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution* calls hackers "a unique new breed of American hero," and the book is described on its jacket as "Fascinating. Inspiring. Here is the splendid epic of . . . the hackers, people whose brilliant thinking has created the future—the ultimate triumph of man and machine" (1984). As class-based revolutions in Central America grind down, with no ultimate triumph in sight, perhaps I need a "new breed" of hero.

The heroization of the hacker *and* of the Maya needs further exploration, as do their problematic relations with lizard queens. But in the context of transnational technoscience, it seems important to find ways to work together to reprogram the binaries of either/or into both/and—as in both a lizard queen and a gringa anthropologist in solidarity, as in the Maya both retaining indigenous identity and participating fully in the Guatemalan nation-state, as in the nation-state as both a site and a stake in the struggles over representation, as in the Maya as both appropriate to and inappropriate/d by the modern, transnational world.

## Notes

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1. Mario Loarca shared this term with me.

2. Abigail Adams (1996) is theorizing the fascinating repercussions of the term *gringa.* I thank her for making me think about it. Many papers could be written on the role of the gringa's virtuousness in her pursuit of virtuosity in the field of anthropology, that is, the fictions too often left out of our science concerning sexuality and the multiple "interpenetrations of boundaries" that occur when white women go to the field.

3. In fact, there's more than fictive kinship there, as embodied in science fiction writer Ursula Kroeber LeGuin, daughter of Alfred Kroeber.

4. Of course, the danger facing me as a gringa is very limited compared to what Guatemalans endure.

5. In long-running debates over the origins and effects of racial or ethnic identities, an orthodox marxist position has held that race is an ideological cover justifying class inequalities. The Guatemalan historian Severo Martinez-Pelaez (1990[1970]), in a book that is the standard text at the National University of Guatemala, has argued that the category of Indian was created during the colonial era to designate those most exploited

by the hacienda system. The result of this class reductionism has been a tendency to downplay issues of racism, insisting that once the class structure is overturned such discrimination would melt away. Partly in response to the Mayan cultural rights movement, both the armed revolutionary movement and popular organizations are becoming much more sophisticated in their analysis of the imbrications of class and ethnic identifications. Gender, unfortunately, remains relatively undertheorized.

6. There is a growing literature attempting to name and analyze these "New Times" (Hall and Jacques 1990[1989]), which are variously characterized as post-Fordist, postindustrial, disorganized capital, the new international division of labor, and so on. I have found Castells's notion of the informational mode of development to be very useful (1989). See Amin 1994 for an overview of these discussions.

7. By this I mean the computer, but also low-cost publishing and reproduction technologies, radio equipment, and even simple telecommunications grids, including phone lines, short-wave radio, and so forth—through which to keep in touch. For example, it was not until 1993 that Nebaj received telephone service. Given Guatemala's high levels of illiteracy, radio has traditionally been an important medium and message: both in the sort of ideological work on passive listeners that some media critics have warned of (e.g., Adorno and Horkheimer 1993; Bukatman 1994; Debord 1983[1967]) and as a carrier of other messages—in Mayan languages, for example (Adams 1996)—or of official messages that can be decoded (Cojti 1990; Hall 1993). I am arguing not that the Mayan cultural rights activists have complete control over this or other technologies but that the hacker mode is an appropriate tactical response to what Rob Latham calls "the real ambiguities of information society, whose promise of technological empowerment bears with it the threat of increasing politico-economic surveillance and control" (1995:10).

8. Kevin Mitnick, a recent hacker cause celebre, was also from a "disadvantaged" beginning—the child of a divorced waitress, he never finished high school (Markoff 1995; Quinn and Evenson 1995).

9. The hacker-samurai main character of Stephenson's cyberpunk novel *Snow-crash* (1993) is named Hiro Protagonist.

10. "Conscience of a Hacker," appearing in the hacker manifesto *Phrack*, claims: "We seek after knowledge . . . and you call us criminals. We exist without skin color, without nationality, without religious bias . . . and you call us criminals. You build atomic bombs, you wage war . . . yet we're the criminals. Yes, I am a criminal. My crime is that of curiosity. My crime is that of judging people by what they say and think, not what they look like. My crime is that of outsmarting you, something that you will never forgive me for" (cited in Sterling 1992:83). Stone (1991) and Haraway (1991), among others, address this trick of erasure.

11. The obsessive interest in this supposed beginning of a new age, termed the "Harmonic Convergence" and based on the Mayan long-count calendar, gripped many in North America in 1987. Thousands of people flocked to "spiritual" sites—many in Guatemala and Mexico—to experience it. The effect was lampooned by Gary Trudeau as the "Moronic Convergence."

12. DARPA, "famed for its managerial flexibility and its bold understanding of scientific research, has launched a number of ambitious programs, connecting leading universities and high-technology companies in defense-targeted research programs. . . . The acceleration of the technological revolution and its particular emphasis on information technologies represents a qualitatively different stage in the close interaction among the military, technological change, and industrial development" (Castells 1989:267). Castells also discusses the role of the Pentagon in developing the ADA language, which allows different software systems to communicate, as part of the Strategic Defense Initiative.



13. I borrow this resignification from Kay Warren.

14. This is very much the hacker mythos as well, although their communities do not fit the closed corporate model. The hacker zine *2600* describes a world in which the "tiny band of techno-rat brothers (rarely sisters) are a besieged vanguard of the truly free and honest. The rest of the world is a maelstrom of corporate crime and high-level governmental corruption, occasionally tempered with well-meaning ignorance" (Sterling 1992:64). Sterling calls them a subculture: "Undergrounds by their nature constantly must maintain a membrane of differentiation. Funny/distinctive clothes and hair, specialized jargon, different hours of rising, working, sleeping. . . . The digital underground, which specializes in information, relies very heavily on language to distinguish itself" (1992:72).

15. To snarf is to "grab, especially to grab a large document or file for the purpose of using it with or without the author's permission. . . . To acquire, with little concern for legal forms or *politesse* (but not quite by stealing) . . . with the connotation of absorbing, processing, or understanding" (Raymond 1991:326).

16. URNG is the umbrella guerrilla organization that has fought Guatemala's military governments since 1963.

17. For example, an essay by Dr. Cojti is entitled "Problems of Guatemalan 'National Identity' " (in Rodriguez Guajan 1992[1989]).

18. "The stuff we call 'software' is not like anything that human society is used to thinking about. Software is something like a machine, and something like mathematics, and something like language, and something like thought, and art, and information . . . but software is not in fact any of those other things. The protean quality of software is one of the great sources of its fascination. It also makes software very powerful, very subtle, very unpredictable, and very risky. . . . There is simply no way to assure that software is free of flaws. Though software is mathematical in nature, it cannot be 'proven' like a mathematical theorem; software is more like language, with inherent ambiguities, with different definitions, different assumptions, different levels of meaning that can conflict" (Sterling 1992:31–32).

19. I am thinking of questions raised very passionately during presentations of this work at University of California–Davis and Yale University. Thanks to those colleagues for helping me think through this issue.

20. Following Scott Bukatman I take "terminal identity" to mean "a new subject that can somehow directly interface with . . . the cybernetic technologies of the Information Age, an era in which, as Jean Baudrillard has observed, the subject has become a 'terminal of multiple networks' " (1994:2). This identity is "an unmistakably doubled articulation in which we find both the end of the subject and a new subjectivity constructed at the computer station or television screen" (Bukatman 1994:9). Rather than the end of the subject, I find the notion of terminal identity useful for its reliance on connective devices, for its suggestion that there is no identity outside of those articulations mediated by various information technologies—from the Macauley Minute to the television show *V*. It is another way to eschew the binary opposition between being inside and being outside of the nation-state, a way to resist assigning a third-world country like Guatemala to some pre-Information Age moment.

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