

 ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ONE HOT DAY in October 1995 I sat on the ground by a deer carcass, off in the woods somewhere near the Yucatecan pueblo of Tetiz. After a day of tagging along with a hunting party as it pushed through the brush in one-hundred-degree heat, I was covered with dirt, twigs, and small ticks. Another man and I had each been given a trussed deer to carry back to camp in a way working people of the region practice with heavy loads from childhood: hoisted onto the back, with a rope running from the carcass over the forehead and hands. The first couple of times I tried to get the animal on my shoulders, it flopped around and threw me off balance, knocking me over. Finally, I hoisted it up and staggered forward, the coarse, brutal cord abrading my hands and forehead. I made it about one hundred feet before the deer shifted again, snapping my neck back and pulling me down, one last time, atop the carcass. While I

struggled to get up, my companion continued on his way. “I’ll send help,” he said, leaving me to scribble field notes and take a few photographs to distract myself from my embarrassment. About an hour later, help arrived in the form of a short old man who picked up the deer like it was a bag of feathers, strapped it to his head, and trotted off toward camp. Soon we reached the other men as they rested, pouring hot water over themselves to clean off the dirt and dislodge ticks. Even before my ignominious return, the story of my “dance” with the deer carcass had begun to spread. On arrival, I went with it, reenacting my writhing fall several times, to general mirth. Over the days to come, the story of my pathetic dance began to circulate, and when it is retold, seemingly whenever I return to visit Tetiz, it still, more than a decade later, provokes laughter.

I have long struggled under the burden of this book, and if I have succeeded in carrying it or even dancing with it—however clumsily—it is only thanks to the assistance, encouragement, and inspiration of others, most notably the inhabitants of the towns, pueblos, and ex-haciendas of the Hunucmá region. In Tetiz, first the late Don Javiel Sosa Chim and then Doña Dulce María Sosa opened their houses to me. Over the course of my many visits from the early 1990s forward they and their families treated me as a friend and eventually as a family member. Don Alfredo Quintal and Don Alejandro Tzuc invited me to join their *gremios*, or guilds, and taught me much about *gremios*, hunting, and many other things. On Hacienda Nohuayum, the families of Don Honorio Poot Quintal and Don Leonardo Poot Chuc also welcomed me into their households and, like so many others there and in Tetiz, encouraged my efforts at learning Yucatec Maya by indulging me in impromptu lessons and long hours of conversation. Frequent visits and conversations with Don Dionisio, Pedro, and Julio Chim as well as Don Roque Chuc and Doña Tomasa Chuc also provided a wealth of insights into many things, from labor to hunting to religion and especially to the historical memories of what residents call the times of slavery and the times of liberty. In the town of Hunucmá, the teacher and poet Anacleto Cetina Aguilar shared his expertise on the history of that town in a memorable series of discussions. In too many ways to recount, the people I encountered during my fieldwork in western Yucatán shared their wisdom with me. Even if most cannot be enumerated here—to protect identities, I generally assign them the names of animals and plants similar to those I have heard used as nicknames according to local custom—I thank them for inspiring every stage of the writing of this book, from conception to completion.

While I conducted the bulk of my fieldwork in places like Tetiz, much of my time in Yucatán was spent in the state capital, Mérida, where I conducted archival research. I worked most extensively in the Archivo General del Estado de Yucatán, which has profited immeasurably from the dedicated work of Dr. Piedad Peniche Rivero and of other archival personnel, including Armando Chi, Mauricio Dzul Sánchez, Candy Flota García, and Andrea Vergoda Medina. I also relied heavily on the extensive newspaper and archival holdings of the Centro de Apoyo a la Investigación Histórica de Yucatán and am grateful to its director, Jorge Canto Alcocer, as well as to Patricia Martínez Huchim and other personnel for their assistance. I consulted the invaluable Yucatecan newspaper collection of the Biblioteca Menéndez and the photography archives of the Fototeca Pedro Guerra. I am indebted to Yucatán's office of the Secretaría de la Reforma Agraria for allowing me access to their documents and especially to Angelina Acosta Esquivel for her guidance there. Alejandra García Quintanilla of the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales "Dr. Hideo Noguchi" of the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán provided assistance, friendship, and stimulating conversations about Yucatecan history and culture. Outside the archives, my friends Mercedes Can Castilla, Edwin Carrillo, Lili Fernández Souza, Alberto Gamboa, Susy Peniche, Carlos Rendón, and Doña Candita Souza de Fernández made living in Mérida a pleasure, even as they helped me to adapt to living in Yucatán and to understand the complexities of Mexican history and contemporary politics. Above all, from the moment I set foot in Yucatán, Carlos Encalada González proved a friend and teacher without equal. To him I owe my command of the Spanish language, many of my friendships and contacts with other Mérida residents, and sincere gratitude for a decade of hospitality, as he invited me to stay at his home for long periods over the course of repeated visits.

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I conducted the initial phases of my research in Yucatán as a graduate student in the University of Michigan's Doctoral Program in Anthropology and History and am profoundly indebted to that program and to those who participated in it. I worked closely with Fernando Coronil, who in graduate seminars, as my dissertation supervisor, and over years of conversation then and thereafter has been a perceptive critic, a supportive mentor, and my friend. From our days as undergraduate roommates through travels in Mexico, graduate school, and ever since Aims McGuinness has been a constant and close friend and interlocutor. His intervention at a critical moment to help me carry this project through to completion is especially appreciated. Similarly, David Pedersen has been a comrade in arms since graduate school, and our collaborative work on questions of value has shaped many of the concerns I brought to this book. I am grateful, in ways too diverse to enumerate, to many others, including Jasmine Alinder, Marty Baker, Chandra Bhimull, David William Cohen, John Collins, Val Daniel, Nick Dirks, Laurent Dubois, Elizabeth Ferry, David Frye, Jim Herron, Britta Kallmann, Webb Keane, Oren Kosansky, Mani Limbert, Alf Luedtke, Setrag Manoukian, Steven Pierce, Anu Rao, Bill Rosenberg, Javier Sanjinés, Rebecca Scott, Julie Skurski, Genese Sodikoff, Ann Stoler, Tom Trautmann, Tom Williamson, and Tom Wolfe. I express my gratitude as well to the diverse entities that assumed the burden of funding my research and graduate training: Michigan's Anthropology and History departments as well as the Doctoral Program in Anthropology and History; the Program in Latin American and Caribbean Studies; the Rackham School of Graduate Studies; the Institute for the Humanities; and the Michigan Society of Fellows. The Jacob K. Javits Foundation provided generous support through years of graduate study, and the Fulbright–I. I. E. Dissertation Research Abroad program funded a lengthy period of research in Mexico. Some aspects of this project were supported in later years by post-doctoral grants from the N. A. E.–Spencer Foundation and by an Andrew W. Mellon Foundation “New Directions” Fellowship.

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