



FIGURE 4.1. *An INAH guard stands near the top of Chichén Itzá's most famous monument, the Castillo, observing the morning's first visitors. Photograph by author.*

BY BLOOD OR BY SWEAT: SHAPING RIGHTS TO WORLD HERITAGE

Chapter 4

Given the long and complicated history of private-sector intervention within the archaeological zone at Chichén Itzá, how could the privatization signaled by the 1999 constitutional amendment initiative present a new threat to the ownership and custodianship of these monuments to ancient Maya civilization and the Mexican nation? Some time after watching the protestors at Chichén Itzá in 1999 I understood what they were really protesting. While public concern centered on the integrity of the nation's tangible cultural patrimony, local INAH site guards and custodios at Chichén Itzá trained their anxious attention in another direction: toward the intangible institutional structure of heritage management in Mexico. If privatization promised to relieve the state's responsibility for managing, protecting, and investigating the tens of thousands of archaeological sites across the national territory, what would become of the federal INAH employees: the thousands of academics, managers, and site guards who staff the workaday production and reproduction of heritage across the national territory?

Privatization signaled the potential for Chichén's workers to lose not only their federal employment under the auspices of the INAH but perhaps even more significantly, all the perks—some legally sanctioned and some not—that accompany working inside the archaeological zone. Focusing here on the INAH employees at Chichén Itzá, we will explore this issue of job security. Over and above any reference to the ancient Maya past, the three generations of caretakers at the site view the ruins as a modern workplace and understand their employment itself to be a kind of patrimony.

While the 1999 protests mark a moment of crystallization and intensification of ambivalence toward cultural patrimony, this moment is neither isolated nor without antecedents. The heartfelt sentiment of "Our culture is not for sale" has long simmered among workers and local residents in and around Chichén Itzá. Countless residents of Pisté and the smaller communities surrounding the archaeological zone express worry

and even anger over the increasing loss of the site to big-business tourism developers and the state.

The notion that the site is slipping away from the hands of the local Maya residents into the grip of the powerful *mercadotecnia* (market force) is only relatively recent, coming with the major infrastructural development projects beginning in the mid-1980s. If the 1999 privatization initiative spurred protest by the extended Chichén community, why, then, would I look at this moment as one marking an intensification of ambivalence? To answer this question, I document the actions and reactions on the part of INAH employees at Chichén Itzá for whom privatization of cultural patrimony first and foremost signals the restructuring of the cultural labor market of which they are a part. For these archaeological site custodians, privatization does not undermine their cultural identity as indigenous Maya as much as it threatens their job benefits as federal employees.

MODERN ANCIENTS

Just about everyone who lives near the world-renowned Maya archaeological site Chichén Itzá knows that the *antiguos*, the ancient ones, still haunt the ruins.¹ While an occasional tourist among the thousands who arrive daily might hope for some kind of spiritual or mystical connection with an antiguo, they are likely to be quite surprised—and more than a little disappointed—upon seeing Chichén's antiguos wearing blue uniforms and carrying walkie-talkies. No, these "ancient ones" are not some sort of doppelgänger. They are INAH employees.

Though Maya residents in and around Chichén Itzá have been employed in the sites' excavation and restoration, maintenance, and protection on a regular basis since the 1920s, only with the establishment of the INAH in 1938 did a small number of these Maya workers become official custodians of the site. It followed for the next six decades that the everyday care of Chichén Itzá became a dynastic enterprise as work positions have passed from father to son until today. Thus, the contemporary caretaking of this World Heritage Site is a sort of family business. And the modern antiguos remain among the ruins—not as ghosts of the ancient past, but as none-too-distant descendants of the very first Maya workers at Chichén to rebuild and reconstruct the monuments and plazas one sees now upon visiting the site.

Chichén's modern antiguos do not hide in a shadow of mystery, as the popular discourse on Maya civilization suggests. Much to the

contrary, they occupy the archaeological zone with loud silver whistles and unmistakable swaggers. One even rides a shiny red scooter up and down the tourist paths. They guard Chichén, they protect the monuments, and they say they love these ruins. Here they work. Here, until the early 1980s, they actually lived. From Chichén Itzá, all have earned their livelihoods.

In this chapter I trace the contemporary history of Maya labor at Chichén Itzá, recreating through remembering the meanings of a key site of ancient Maya culture through the perspective of those who spend their workdays inside the zone as federal and state employees. This analysis focuses on thirty-four men and two women who work at the site for the INAH. Due to its extensive area and high-volume tourism, Chichén Itzá has more than double the custodial staff of any other site open to the public in Yucatán. These custodios carry out the day-to-day functions of the archaeological zone—selling tickets, groundskeeping, patrolling tourist activities on the pyramids and other structures. While doing so is not technically among their official duties, custodios also answer visitors' questions on a variety of topics, help them plan their tours of the zone, take photos, and even pose for some, too.

When considering the field of cultural patrimony, privatization is more than simply a symptom or indicator of the implementation of neoliberal economic theory into policy. It is, perhaps more compellingly, a very local phenomenon tied to space-claiming techniques practiced by a community of daily users of the archaeological zone—those who have personal and family history attached to a heritage site. I previously created a provenance—or spatial genealogy—of Chichén Itzá, tracing the various hands through which it has passed. In doing so, I demonstrated that the archaeological zone is a produced space representing multiple interests, most notably those of the state and the private sector. Here we will look at another group of social actors who represent a different spatial genealogy of Chichén and who possess it as another form of privatization.

The antiguo custodios, using their advantageous presence in the archaeological zone, assemble and enact a system of what I call "patrifruct"-based rights. In principle and so far in practice, patrifruct rights guarantee *users* of heritage access to it. In another demonstration of territorialization, the claiming of patrifruct rights extracts certain aspects of the meaning of Chichén Itzá from the public realm to maintain it in a privatized realm—that of their families. We might call this kind of privatization a territorialization of meaning. Not always a unidirectional process, initiated top-down by the state, this ambivalent territorialization of meaning is

enacted by an unexpected group of major players in the privatization of Chichén Itzá: the Maya laborers who participated in the initial phases of development whose descendants now work as site guards and caretakers. As Chichén's antiguo custodios creatively claim the archaeological site as their patrimony, they demonstrate yet another form of monumental ambivalence. As a site of national and World Heritage, Chichén belongs to everyone, and therefore the workers have the right to claim this renewable cultural resource as theirs.

CARING FOR THE RUINS

The natives were energetic and willing to carry out their tasks. . . . Small in build but with strong bodies, these Indians sometimes labored in oppressive heat and stifling interiors, always without complaint. They resisted only when they were faced with unfamiliar techniques. (A description of Maya laborers at Chichén, circa 1930, cited in Brunhouse 1971: 209)

Nor should there be forgotten the native workmen whose toil transformed a shapeless hill into a thing of enduring beauty. As a whole, they were as efficient, as dependable, and as agreeable as any group one could hope to find in any land. (Archaeologist Earl Morris 1931: 9)

Each morning at around seven o'clock there is a changing of the guard at Chichén Itzá. With no pomp and even less ceremony, the night watchman leaves the sun to rise from behind the Temple of the Warriors and the day shift enters the archaeological zone. Of the custodios arriving early in the morning, just a few are uniformed for patrolling the site's public areas. Most are outfitted in outdoor work clothes. They head off in a group of eight to begin clearing the dense undergrowth that threatens to overtake the tourist paths around the Cenote Xtoloc. By eight o'clock more blue-uniformed guards enter, the gates are unlocked, and the first visitors trickle in. Another typical day at Chichén Itzá begins to unfold.

Perhaps the following illuminations of "backstage" Chichén Itzá—or any tourist site for that matter—spoil the semiotic pleasures of touristic or imaginative consumption. Indeed, the *jouissance* of a site of ancient Maya civilization, for tourists that is, requires an experience of the site as discrete in time and place. For a place to be produced for tourist consumption, it must first be marked out, or defined, and then commodified so that it can be consumed by the tourist as either a discrete experience or as an image (MacCannell 1989; Urry 1990). The pleasure that tourists

take in exploring Chichén Itzá arises—perhaps only in part—from the circumstance of its hermetic containment from the everyday lives of contemporary Maya. The mystery machine of the heritage assemblage properly commodifies Chichén Itzá, hiding the anachronistic conditions of its production.

The heritage assemblage territorializes the archaeological site both spatially and temporally to subvert the historical reality of "Mayas (re)building Maya ruins" in service to archaeological science and the state. To put it simply, the commodification of Chichén Itzá as a tourist site masks the labor of the site's production. I am not speaking of a singular, originary moment of production, such as the reconstruction projects of the 1920s through 1940s, but rather the ongoing, everyday presentation, maintenance, and protection of Maya Culture. For the thousands of men and women who work at Mexico's archaeological zones as archaeologists, administrators, tour guides, guards, or vendors, what is perceived by the "tourist gaze" (Urry 1990) is a carefully constructed vision that promotes the ancient mystery of the monuments and obscures the labor of its every production and reproduction. Yet we will see workers reflecting on the commodification of Chichén Itzá, defining their own relationships to the zone and its genealogy. We will see that Chichén's custodios are not so much subverting the tourist gaze, supported as it is by archaeology and the state, as they are deflecting its hegemony of vision, giving rise to yet another form of monumental ambivalence.

MAYAS REBUILDING MAYA RUINS

Who built the temples of Chichén Itzá? Who knows? I have heard the old people say it was the Itzá who built them. They were people like us, but they knew things we do not know. (Eleuterio Pat, cited in Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934: 330)

How have Maya people worked to create and recreate Maya heritage sites? How might we understand their participation in the "archaeologization" of the Yucatecan landscape? Since the early days of Maya archaeology, researchers in the field rely on local communities to provide the labor required in large- and small-scale excavation projects. These practices continue today. Maya laborers may be skilled in the masonry of architectural consolidation or the drawing of architectural profiles. Unskilled workers haul stones, clear vegetation, and excavate. Male workers may perform heavy digging and lifting at the excavation site, while women and young

people wash and label ceramics at an off-site lab or base camp. Women also work in tasks that are supportive of the investigation, such as cooking, housekeeping, and doing laundry for the project staff.

The early excavation and reconstruction projects at Chichén Itzá carried out by the CIW and the Mexican agency Monumentos Prehispánicos, precursor to the INAH, required dozens of on-site laborers. Maya workers cleared overgrown structures, disassembled them, organized the pieces, fired new stones from an on-site lime kiln, and rebuilt portions of the structures. Some skilled workers with experience in reconstruction projects were brought by archaeologists from other sites in Campeche and Yucatán. However, most of the workers were recruited locally from the town of Pisté, just two kilometers from the site.

Proto-archaeological amateur explorers and later professional scientific investigators describe a particular relationship to their projects, the archaeological site, and the inhabitants of Pisté. In this manner, archaeology, broadly construed, has provided the occasion for informal analyses of living Maya communities. Rather than scientific results, these analyses are relegated to commentary, asides, or acknowledgments marginal to the official reporting activities of the discipline. For the most part, they are economic in substance and framed in colonialist terms. In particular, Pisté is presented as an exploitable labor resource that would, in turn, make possible the exploitation of the ruins-as-resource.

Austrian photographer and archaeological explorer Teobert Maler described his perspective on labor relations between himself and workers from Pisté while working at Chichén Itzá in 1891:

Pisté is a sad village in which some dozen native families gain a living from their small maize farms, spending on a vile *aguardiente* [grain alcohol] the entire product of their labor. . . . Money has little attraction for these native people, and at Pisté, no one works when he has earned four *reales* or a peso. . . . Only when the last centavo has been spent will they again resolve to work for a day or two. (Maler 1932 quoted in Steggerda 1941: 8)

In the 1920s, as the CIW's Project Chichén Itzá directed by Sylvanus G. Morley was getting under way, a clause in the concession contract between the CIW and the Mexican government set the first institutionalized parameters of modern labor relations at Chichén. This labor clause stipulated that the CIW had to hire Mexican workers except for the technical directors and specialists. Rather than shift the dynamics of the de

facto labor relations that had existed for decades, the provision affirmed a paternalistic role for both the state and foreign researchers in the custodianship of national cultural patrimony.

The U.S. and Mexican reconstruction projects from the mid-1920s through the end of the 1940s represent a level of site development unsurpassed at Chichén Itzá until the "megaprojects" of the 1980s. Morley's biographer, Brunhouse (1971: 208–209) gives a glimpse of the scope and intensity of labor required for excavating and rebuilding some of the site's best-known structures—the Great Ball Court, the Temple of the Warriors, the Nunnery, and, of course, the Castillo, or Pyramid of Kukulcan:

Just after the season began in 1925 with sixty-nine workers, the number jumped to eighty-two. . . . [When Morley] returned after a brief absence he discovered to his consternation that the [Maya] foreman had gone on hiring natives until 215 were on the payroll. . . . The next day he called 133 of them into the yard of the Casa Principal [Hacienda Chichén Itzá], explained that they had been taken on by mistake, paid them off and added a gratuity, and sent them away in good humor. He realized that he might need them in the future.

The colorful details presented in biographical material, particularly of Morley, match those that most vividly remain in the living memory of Chichén's current workers, including CIW cook Tarsisio "Jimmy" Chang, of Maya-Korean mixed ancestry; Eugenio May, a Maya worker whose photo now hangs on the wall of a small museum at the entrance of the archaeological zone of Chichén Itzá; and Isauro Olalde, whose circa-1930 portrait hangs inside a sitting room off the lobby of the Hotel Hacienda Chichén, the former headquarters for Edward H. Thompson and the Carnegie staff, adjacent to the archaeological zone.

Notable exceptions to such representations may be found, among other places, in the front matter of archaeological monographs. A good example is a note in the preface to Earl Morris's (1931: 9) publication of the results of the excavation and reconstruction of the Temple of the Warriors:

Juan Olalde, Mayordomo, and his son and first lieutenant, Isauro, served faithfully and intelligently.² Because of their understanding of local conditions and their intimate familiarity with the material environment, they were able to give assistance which it would have been difficult in the extreme to do without. . . . Angelino Pat, master mason, courteous, faithful, and intelligent to a rare degree, brought to bear

upon his work a resourcefulness that I have not seen equaled. To him is due the credit for difficult pieces of construction, far more than to those to whom, in the natural course of events, it would be given.

Morris's naming of specific workers and their contributions to the project stands in contrast to Maler's and Steggerda's commentaries. And although Morris's salute to the workers denotes more a view of them as Noble Savage than trusted colleague, the acuity of Morris's last statement is remarkable. In the natural course of events, credit to Maya workers is erased from the projects in which they have reconstructed their cultural patrimony, and they risk losing claims on it that they never even knew they could make. After all, Chichén was a site of ruins but not a heritage site until it was rebuilt in the 1920s and 1930s.

Though I want to focus the rest of this chapter on contemporary Chichén, I include these references to repopulate, so the speak, the history of Chichén Itzá. So much of the discourse on Maya archaeological sites focuses on abandonment, lost civilizations, and European discovery. Even the archaeological zone's history in the twentieth century adds to popular misconceptions that the Maya no longer exist or that the living communities are mere remnants of a former great civilization.

CONTEMPORARY CUSTODIANSHIP

The labor regime governing Chichén Itzá has shifted from the colonial-style paternalism of early archaeological development (1920s–1940s) to one more characteristic of a modern bureaucratic state. Custodios are salaried federal employees who receive health care and pension benefits, uniform allowances, and generous paid vacation. Chichén's thirty-six custodios—most of whom speak Yucatec Maya as well as Spanish—sell tickets, guard the entrance gates, keep the monuments free of weeds and debris, and frantically blow their whistles when young tourists get too rowdy while climbing the precarious steps of a pyramid.

Custodianship at Chichén Itzá is more than keeping the grounds clean and ensuring visitor safety. These formal duties only partially fulfill what many site employees sense and enact as their larger responsibility in caring for the archaeological zone. Custodios stand guard at various points throughout the site, inside the small museum, and at the two entrance gates. One custodio per shift patrols Chichén Viejo (Old Chichén), another part of the zone two kilometers from the main tourist area currently closed to the public due to ongoing excavation and restoration.



FIGURE 4.2. INAH custodio Javier Pat checks tickets at Chichén's main entrance. Photograph by author.

While guarding Chichén may appear to be a rather passive activity, custodios actively engage in constructing a possessive relationship with the site, as when they speak of the ruins as "My Chichén." Their intimacy with the zone cannot be accounted for in the dominant discursive arenas of either archaeology or the state. Nor does it find a venue of expression in the tourism industrial complex, rigid as it is in both creating and disseminating proper interpretations of ancient history. Instead, the intimacy of



FIGURE 4.3. INAH employees Felipe Yam Pat and Julio Salazar pose for a photo in a shaded area between the Castillo and the Ball Court. Photograph by author.

Chichén Itzá emanates from experiences of the night watchman who has spent twenty years of long and very dark nights protecting the archaeological zone. It arises out of the banter between older workers as they seek the shade of a ceiba tree during a slow afternoon shift; for those who walk across the site's main plaza remembering the baseball games or fútbol (soccer) matches played there in their youth. Indeed, the everyday life of the archaeological zone is a pastiche of memories and overlapping images, of

what the site used to be, what it has now become, and how their own lives have intertwined with the monuments. There seems to be something about working at a famous archaeological site that exceeds the reach of official mandates, rules, policies, and procedures.

The administrative hierarchy at the site is fairly simple and is exclusive to Chichén Itzá as the most heavily staffed site in Yucatán. At the top is the *encargado*, the administrative site manager. Chichén and one other site have *encargados* who are not *custodios*; the rest have senior *custodios* in charge. Chichén's *encargado* does not patrol the zone regularly, nor does he wear a uniform, but he does generally accompany important visitors in their tours of the archaeological site. The *encargado* at Chichén Itzá during the period of my fieldwork had held his job for nine years and has since been replaced. Significant in terms of the internal dynamics of the working atmosphere at Chichén Itzá, the *encargado* was not from Pisté, nor did he speak Maya. Rather than choose to live locally, the *encargado* preferred to commute daily from Mérida. A lawyer with no notable professional experience in the field of cultural heritage, the *licenciado* was quite successful in his private legal practice maintained throughout his tenure at Chichén.³ The *encargado* used his position of authority at the site as a local base from which he could extend his network of private clients.

The thirty-six *custodios* at Chichén are organized from within and without in both a *de jure* and *de facto* hierarchy. The workers are officially divided into two groups, *grupo norte* (north) and *grupo sur* (south), who rotate weekly work schedules. On a typical day, only one group patrols the zone. Meanwhile, the other group works behind the scenes in site maintenance (weeding, clearing footpaths, erecting or repairing protective fencing, etc.). The group on maintenance finishes its week early with a long weekend off.

The north and south labels, then, do not correspond to distinct areas of responsibility inside the archaeological zone. Instead, they are arbitrary names that are rarely used. *Custodios* prefer to identify their group using the first name (or even nickname) of their group leader. The two group leaders are administrative coordinators, both second-generation INAH employees and both with fathers who are still full-time *custodios* on site. The coordinators, though younger than many of the other *custodios*, are generally respected among the workers, most likely because they tend not to engage in public displays of authority over their groups.

Perhaps this is because the group leaders do not, in fact, hold the authority that the official administrative structure at the zone gives them.

While the official designation of the two work groups decides the logistics of covering shifts and tasks, there also exists a hierarchy of de facto organization based on kinship, place of birth, and place of residence. Among the custodios, it is clear that a third-generation custodio born in Pisté—regardless of work skills and often even of personal temperament—is of a higher caste than a first-generation employee whose family comes from another Maya town, even one only thirty to forty kilometers away. Place of residence factors more complexly and more ambiguously. Owning a home in Mérida offers significant cultural capital to a custodio, yet owning a large, ostentatious home in Pisté can factor similarly. These weighted and measured distinctions both shape and reflect how the custodios express and justify their rights to claim "My Chichén."

Maintaining Security

One of the primary responsibilities of custodianship is maintaining security and order among the monuments. Security concerns have two facets: first for the concern for the material patrimony itself, including artifacts on display or stored in a museum, monuments, and archaeological materials yet to be unearthed; and also for the safety and comfort of the visitors. Preventive measures at Chichén Itzá have included the installation of ropes or chains to aid in climbing certain structures and to prohibit public access to others. For many years, a heavy chain hung down one of the two reconstructed staircases of the Castillo. The chain eventually wore a deep groove down the center of the pyramid's staircase and was subsequently replaced with a thick rope. The stairs of the structure, with their narrow footholds and uneven heights, are difficult for some visitors to navigate even under dry conditions. It is not an official policy for custodios to warn visitors against climbing, even when the lightest rains turn climbing into a slippery and dangerous undertaking.

Custodios report that many visitors view climbing the Castillo's 365 steps as the main goal of their visit to Chichén Itzá, and staff members have little chance of dissuading visitors from this goal. Deaths of both tourists and locals from falling and lightning strikes have not received wide publicity, but lightning rods were installed on top of the Castillo to deflect future lightning strikes during the frequent storms of summer and fall. During extreme weather conditions such as hurricanes, the entire zone may be closed to visitors.

I observed several incidents and accidents at Chichén Itzá during the spring and summer of 2001 that appear to be representative of those that

normally, though infrequently, occur at the archaeological zone. Some, such as heat stroke or exhaustion, can be attributed to the extremely hot and humid weather. Other safety-related problems involve falling from structures. Two incidents live on in custodios' memory. One occurred when a twenty-five-year-old man from Guadalajara unsuccessfully attempted to slide down the balustrade of the Castillo instead of climbing down the steps. Custodios who witnessed the event found it "so stupid" they did not know if it was suicidal or just foolish. He left the zone by ambulance in critical condition. The other incident belongs to a third category of mishaps at the zone involving visitors deliberately damaging structures. Custodians tell of a man who claimed to be competing in the "Super Champion of the World" contest after moving one of the Thousand Columns beside the Temple of the Warriors. This modern-day warrior ended up paying a fine of several thousand pesos.

Containment, Control, and Boundaries

The expansive size and outdoor setting of the zone together produce an environment that cannot always be controlled. While in decades past the site had abundant flora and fauna, visitors today are more likely to confront a roaming dog, of which there are many, than a jaguar. On one occasion, I accompanied the INAH site manager in a search through the bush around the monuments for a dog that had reportedly committed an unmotivated act of aggression on a tourist. The tourist was bitten on the finger, which was, moments after the incident, bleeding slightly. The dog in question had to be found in order to assess its state of well-being and what sorts of dangers it posed to the bite victim.⁴

The search for the dog along the back paths of the zone provided an occasion for the encargado to comment upon such problems of daily occurrence at Chichén and his role in handling these issues, and in a more generalized sense, he commented upon what I would call the "problem of containment" concerning the zone's boundaries. Rather than directing and managing all of the INAH activities at the archaeological zone, the encargado's daily routine was more directed toward acting as the public face of the INAH at the archaeological site. As such, custodios called on him to resolve visitor problems of a routine nature, whether disputes over the payment of entrance fees, the adequacy of services, or justification of the rules and regulations under which the site operated. Visitors are surprisingly likely to advocate for less-restricted access to the site: wanting to enter the zone before opening hours and stay beyond closing time, desiring

to climb or enter prohibited areas or take unsanctioned photographs.⁵ In sum, many of the everyday problems at Chichén revolve around one central theme: the freedoms and restrictions of visitors in interactions with material embodiments of national and world heritage.

While the above are spatially articulated to the area within the officially delimited boundaries of the archaeological zone, we can see how these borders are both permeable and negotiable. The instability of the line distinguishing the zone from its outside confounds the territorial limits. This takes multiple forms. First, it is an issue of physical access to the zone. There are two official entrances to the archaeological zone. One is through the *parador turístico* (the public entrance hall), and the other is near the Mayaland Hotel. Another entrance, used by locals but not the public at large, is at the INAH *campamento*. Because several contemporary living communities surround the archaeological zone, there are, as I indicated previously, numerous paths and trails skirting the perimeter of the zone and even permitting direct entrance to the site center. The zone is enclosed, except in the most public areas, by a haphazard fence of wooden posts and wire.

It was not until a crisis of containment emerged in the late 1980s—the initiation of an ongoing series of artisan “invasions” at Chichén—that some of the site’s perimeter was enclosed at all. In successive waves throughout the past twenty or so years, local artisans and handicraft vendors have illegally entered (or “invaded”) the archaeological zone to sell souvenirs to tourists. Armed only with bundles of hand-carved wooden statues or small molded-cement figures, dozens of vendors including women and children have taken advantage of Chichén’s porous and permeable boundaries, to the consternation of INAH officials.⁶ Indeed, one does not have to be particularly sneaky or adept to enter the zone. However, upon occasion custodios themselves have turned a blind eye to the ambulant vendors who might well be friends, neighbors, or even kin from Pisté. I have myself witnessed occasions when this has clearly been the case. Chichén’s active rumor mill charges certain custodios with direct (financial) complicity with the vendors. Though posed as hypothetical, the following scenario described to me by custodio Don Sebas in the spring of 2001 (a time when, incidentally, no ambulant vendors were to be found in the zone) is highly probable:

INAH employment pays a good salary and has good benefits. It allows for a custodio to accumulate capital. With this capital, one can invest in a business such as artisanry, T-shirts, whatever you like. When the tour-

ism market is low, it is difficult to sell things in a shop or on the street in Pisté. [Therefore] the vendor must enter the archaeological zone to sell.

In such a situation, the custodio is complicit with the “invading” ambulant vendor as the vendor works to sell the merchandise belonging to the custodio. This type of arrangement is not unusual, and I see it as an integral part of the issue of containing and controlling a zone. The case of the artisan invasions presents at once the transgression of physical borders and the manipulation of the boundaries set upon the official duty or responsibility of a custodio. We see here that Chichén cannot be contained. Not only is this failure located along the site’s extensive, unattended perimeter but also in the ambivalent role played by the zone’s front-line defense: the custodios.

Custodianship is an attempt to contain not only the physical limits of the archaeological zone but also social and even moral limits. Part of a custodian’s duty is to maintain order at the multiple intersections of these various kinds of boundaries. These efforts play out on a daily basis, even in the most routine of custodial activities. While no book of rules delineates the proper etiquette of either custodians or site visitors, it is as if both parties enter into a tacit agreement to respect the site and its authority figures once the visitors enter the zone’s territory.

When the agreement is violated, a shrill whistle sounds—literally. Most custodios wear a whistle on a cord around their necks, the only “weapon,” as one junior worker called them, with which they are armed. Some custodios are known for using their whistles too much, while others rarely use it. Don Cesó is known among his cohorts for overusing his whistle, a practice embedded within his complex and often contradictory opinions regarding his work and the tourists he observes and often interacts with at the archaeological zone. He coined the term *turismo agresivo*, aggressive tourism, to describe visitors who actively and blatantly disregard the zone’s regulations.

Don Cesó and other site guards rank different national groups based on their tendency toward *turismo agresivo* and their behavior in general. Custodios report that they find Argentinians to be the rudest and most likely to break the rules. Italians rank high as well. In Argentinians and Italians many guards perceive a generalized aggressive, noncompliant behavior often stemming from visitors’ previous experiences in archaeological sites in their home countries. A disparity in the manner of protecting archaeological monuments around the world seems to promote disagree-

ment on how the public may interact with a site. Custodios are quite vocal and articulate about the problems they encounter with Mexican nationals—nonlocal, non-Yucatec citizens—whom they ultimately define as the most unruly of all visitors to the site. According to one frustrated custodian, Mexican tourists "assume the rules don't apply to them. They ignore the 'No Trespassing' signs and walk around and climb wherever they want. More than once, I have stopped someone by shouting or blowing my whistle, only to have the visitor shout back at me, arguing that it is his patrimony, too, and he can do what he pleases."

Recently, custodios have half-seriously requested badges, something like police shields, and T-shirts with "INAH" printed in block letters across the chest, like FBI T-shirts in American movies. These would not be for everyday wear but for special events that draw large crowds, such as the fall and spring equinox. Each March and increasingly in September as well, tens of thousands of visitors come to the zone to see the Feathered Serpent "descend" the balustrade of the Castillo through a play of light and shadow.⁷

Even on the most heavily visited days at Chichén, custodios are armed with the same basic equipment: a uniform, a whistle, maybe a two-way radio, and nothing else. To my knowledge, no daytime custodio at Chichén carries a weapon inside the zone. In the more remote archaeological zones of the Yucatán Peninsula's Ruta Puuc, guns or machetes are kept in the ticket booth areas. In the past, it would not be unusual for a custodian to patrol Chichén Itzá with the long-barreled rifle he used for hunting. For this was when the two activities were easily and naturally combined, as the job of a custodio was a job of the *campo* (the rural outdoors), not of a site in the highly developed international tourism-industrial complex.

Over the past several decades, the work of custodianship has transformed, in a sense, from taming nature to containing culture. In other words, contemporary custodianship requires that the "nature skills" of the Maya campesino are kept offstage at Chichén Itzá. In their stead, as we will see, custodianship demands "culture skills," understood here as the ability to police the boundaries of appropriateness in the activities or behaviors of tourists.

IDEOLOGICAL CRISES OF CUSTODIANSHIP

It was a particularly hot and slow afternoon. But the sun had slipped behind deep blue clouds threatening a rainstorm still hours, even days, away. I entered the zone and immediately headed for the Observatory, or

Caracol, where I knew I could usually find Don Hugo waiting away the afternoon. Don Hugo was only a few months from his retirement, having worked for the INAH as a custodio for nearly thirty years, first in the Puuc-area sites, then at Chichén Itzá. His was one of fifteen families that until 1983 lived inside the archaeological zone.

A grandfather in his late sixties, Don Hugo had little formal education but was an avid reader, with tastes ranging from the daily newspaper to popular magazines to historical and anthropological texts about Yucatán and the Maya. He is an attentive television viewer, and the introduction of Sky TV to the pueblo of Pisté, where he lives, offered the Discovery Channel and A&E. He rarely missed a documentary or investigative journalism piece. Don Hugo is also a fan of the program *Wild On*, broadcast on the E! entertainment channel. *Wild On* takes its viewers around the world to show partying and nightlife, replete with images of barely clad women and excessively carefree behaviors. The Cancún episode is typical of the genre, showing drunken and sunburned spring breakers moving their partying from the beach to Chichén Itzá, following a pattern common among tourists visiting Yucatán.

On this particular day that I met up with Don Hugo, he had with him in addition to his ever-present copy of that day's *Diario de Yucatán* newspaper a several-month-old copy of a popular culture and entertainment magazine for teenagers. He waved it at me and called, "Come over here and look at Britney Spears!" I, as one of the few familiar nontourists at the site, often found myself as the unwilling bearer of U.S. culture, somehow deeply intertwined with, if not responsible for, the profusion of signifiers from the United States.

"What do you think about this: is she really a virgin?" he asked me with just a hint of a smile. "I don't know, but she sure likes to show it off!" I replied. "Just like a lot of the tourists here," he observed. "They walk around looking at Chichén Itzá in their short shorts and miniskirts and bikinis. I guess they forgot they left the beach when they got on the bus in Cancun." He continued, "If someone told me thirty years ago that the zone would be like this today, I would have told him he was drinking too much."

I was surprised at his statement, revealing as it did an unusual hint of lament. After all, Don Hugo was more often than not highly ambivalent toward the politics of the zone. So I asked, "But do you think it is OK for women to walk around the zone in their bathing suits?" He replied, "It depends on who you ask. For some of my co-workers, it is perfectly fine. They want to see people enjoy themselves, and they also want to enjoy

themselves. For others, they want them to cover up, at least on the bottom. This is an important place. People should have some respect."

Though Hugo had worked at Chichén for thirty years, it was not through this entire course of time that the zone has changed so dramatically. Archaeological and infrastructural plans dating back to the 1920s consistently had the increase in tourism as a goal, but it was not until the late 1970s and the establishment of Cancún as an international tourism center that the everyday scenery of Chichén was affected. One marker of this change is the presence of large numbers of international tourists who visit the archaeological site on chartered day trips.

Girls in bikinis present a crisis in the custodianship of the archaeological zones in a logistical sense as well as in terms of representation. This crisis, alternatively described as a symbolic reversal of the tourist gaze, constitutes a transformative moment in the genealogy of labor at Chichén. In this transformation, custodios move from being campesinos to imagining themselves as cosmopolitan, at home in the archaeological zone as an international space of multiple signifiers. In this space a discussion of Britney Spears' virginity and the difference between showing off breasts or bottoms is part of the everyday language of working at Chichén. As a logistical crisis that is also a crisis of vision, custodios have to negotiate the appearances and practices of visitors that are not necessarily defined by the rules of the zone but that they might find inappropriate. Next to the monuments of national cultural patrimony, girls in bikinis are signs of the success of tourism development and symbols of decadence within the ruins.

CHICHÉN'S ANTIGUOS

In a fashion that cannot be perceived through the eyes of tourists, the archaeological zone is the dominion of the antiguos, dating back to the decades during which the custodios and their families lived within the archaeological zone. Only about half of Chichén's current custodial staff can count themselves as antiguos, for this elite status is derived from having once lived inside the archaeological zone is not shared by all. From the 1940s until the early 1980s, Chichén's custodios and their families lived within the site center. Through these four decades, the INAH workers created a community among the archaeological ruins. Though not officially a pueblo, or town, Chichén Pueblo functioned as such for its residents. Fifteen houses stood along what was then the main road running through Chichén Itzá, just fifty meters from the Castillo. A school, refreshment and

gift stands, and small ticket booth all operated by the families of the INAH custodians complemented the scene that visitors encountered upon their arrival to the world-famous archaeological zone.

Oral history accounts of daily life within Chichén Itzá from the former inhabitants, most of whom now live in Pisté, portray the zone as having been a quiet, family-centered community. The workers' duties were to sell tickets, keep the grounds free of litter and debris, clear the reconstructed monuments of weeds, and maintain the visitor paths that provided access from one part of the zone to another. Nearly all of the families operated side businesses devoted to providing basic tourist services. Other family members—wives, daughters, and young sons—took advantage of the steady flow of foreign and national tourists to supplement the family's income. Buses stopped twice a day at Chichén as they traveled the Mérida-Cancún highway that cuts directly across the zone between the houses and the Castillo. Visitors without the comfort of accommodations at the Mayaland or Hacienda Chichén Itzá hotels adjacent to the zone were happy to take advantage of the beverages and meals sold by the families near the ticket booth. Occasionally, tourists would "tip" workers to see inside their houses. One can only surmise that their motivation was to see and experience, amid all that is ancient, something of the contemporary lives of Maya people.

After tourists were gone for the day, adults played baseball in the wide plaza and in front of the Castillo. Perhaps it is hard to imagine the walls of Chichén's Great Ball Court serving as boundary markers for an informal game of fútbol for a group of teenagers as occurred throughout the 1950s, '60s, and '70s. During these decades, sons of the first generation of custodians grew up and began to have children of their own, many of whom would continue the family tradition of working for the INAH.

Living in the archaeological zone was not simply a matter of convenience. It was an obligation. Indeed, part of the job of custodios was to simply maintain a living presence at the archaeological zone. As a matter of course over four decades, the everyday activities that accompany life in a small community necessitated different kinds of infrastructure at Chichén. Children went to primary school in the immediate vicinity of the housing area, and some went on to secondary school in nearby Valladolid or Mérida. Families attended mass in the chapel of the Hacienda Chichén Itzá less than a kilometer away. Residents at the hacienda, who were employees of the Barbachano family's two hotels, and those of Chichén Pueblo celebrated the feast day of May 15 to the patron Saint Isidro

Labrador. In their communal solar several families kept domestic animals such as chickens and pigs. All families had dogs, which made everyone feel safer during the dark, unelectrified nights.

The employees' duties then, as now, included selling tickets, keeping the grounds free of litter and debris, clearing the reconstructed monuments of weeds, and maintaining the visitor paths that provided access from one part of the zone to another. Women, the wives and daughters of the custodians, supplemented the family income through selling food and drinks to visitors. Don Pepe, a contemporary *antiguo*, describes his family's tradition of caring for Chichén:

My grandfather worked in Chichén Itzá, keeping the structures he had helped reconstruct clean and free from weeds. . . . The next generation of custodians came to love this place, too. Not only did they work there, but they made it their home, just as my grandfather had. My grandfather passed on the concept of the protection of the archaeological zone to my father. And he, too, loved it. Thus they became, along with their other *compañeros*, the most protective [*celosos*, or *jealous*] guardians of the site.

In the early 1980s, state development plans for improving tourist services at the zone necessitated the demolition of the custodians' houses. After losing their homes and their intimate presence in Chichén, these INAH workers would devise other ways to keep Chichén "in the family" as a special kind of patrimony. The *antiguo* workers claim that the knowledge, ability, and sensitivity required to properly care for Chichén Itzá is in their blood. From an outsider's perspective, their commitment to the past and future of Chichén Itzá is admirable, if a bit romantic. Perhaps the site does benefit from such skill and dedication passed along from generation to generation, especially from the perspective of archaeology and cultural resource management. Yet the transformation into a local elite of these Maya workers—self-identified by virtue of their intimate proximity to the economic resources of this cultural heritage site—has occasioned contentious broader community concern for equitable access to the archaeological zone.

The dominant role of the *antiguos* in the micropolitics of the zone is a source of great consternation for other social actors heavily invested in Chichén, including non-*antiguo* site workers, archaeologists, and INAH administrative officials. Indeed, through the inheritance of job positions in the zone, the *antiguos* have, in a sense, kept this World Heritage in their families. But in a slightly more sinister reading of their activities,

one archaeologist went so far as to call the *antiguo* dynasties at Chichén a "mafia."

Instead of claiming inheritance to Chichén based on descent from the ancient Maya, Chichén's *antiguos* base their patrimonial claims to the archaeological site on what I call "patrifruct" principles. The arguments work in the following manner: Chichén is theirs not by right of cultural affiliation to the ancient Maya but by their twentieth-century presence living and working in the archaeological zone. In today's tourism industrial complex, rapidly becoming transformed by neoliberal agendas, is there a place for alternative kinds of claims to cultural patrimony such as this? The predominant discourse on indigenous claims to cultural and intellectual heritage requires, for the most part, a demonstrable link between ancient civilizations and their contemporary descendants. These cultural affiliations are notoriously complex, caught up in a confusion of identity politics in an unholy alliance with the scientific rigidity of the archaeological record.

But the *antiguos*—these second- and third-generation federal employees at Chichén Itzá—have formed a very powerful claim to Chichén Itzá that cleverly rearticulates the relationship between ancient material culture and contemporary indigenous people. This rearticulation skips over the fraught debates of identity politics, cutting straight to the heart of the matter. He who has the knowledge to care best for the archaeological zone has the right to benefit economically from this endlessly renewable resource.

The claim on the archaeological site as inheritable family patrimony is maintained through the articulation of two overlapping notions. The first is based on consanguinity and the second on the collective memory and tradition of working in the site. While the first is a patrimonial link by default, the second complements the importance of blood ties to another key body fluid, to put it crudely, the sweat of one's brow. Birth is important, but the labor carried out by one's hands is perhaps equally important in demonstrating one's ties to Chichén. Custodianship of the archaeological zone becomes a usufruct right as it is equated with agricultural cultivation. Working the monuments and the land around them is a kind of traditional outdoor work not unlike clearing weeds from a field, planting a crop, or keeping a watchful eye over one's prize harvest so no man or beast can intrude. Indeed, Chichén's first custodios were local men chosen for their skills as *campesinos*, and it is only very recently that other skills—such as archaeological knowledge and language competencies—are sought.⁸ Over the course of three generations, these two notions—right by birth

and right by work—are nearly indistinguishably mapped onto each other in such a way that their correlation is seamless. Though justifiable, a question of fairness arises regarding the patrimonial claims made by Chichén's antiguos to keep exclusive rights to benefit from Chichén Itzá, this site of national and international patrimony.

ABOLISHING THE ANTIGUO MONOPOLY

The first encargados of archaeological zones were elevated custodios placed in charge of the sites. They spoke Maya, were accustomed to life in the campo, and rarely had formal education. These early encargados established a system of worker patronage at the zones. When a position needed to be filled, the encargado would present a name to the INAH central office, usually that of a relative. Due to a patron-client relationship of *confianza*, the inherent confidence and trust in the encargado, the name would be accepted for employment without question. The authority of the encargado ensured the satisfactory performance of the workers on a site-by-site basis. This system worked for more than four decades.

The patronage system of hiring site custodios raises issues of nepotism and the dual-edged "benefit" of strong family networks among INAH custodians. Until very recently, the family networks served to hold the system of custodianship in place of other kinds of local infrastructure. The most obvious infrastructural deficit was in the field of communication: regular communication was very poor between the archaeological zones and the INAH central office in Mérida. Complicating the matter was a lack of intercommunication among the zones themselves. I am referring here to literal modes of communication—roads, radios, and telephones even today do not conveniently or reliably reach some of the sites under regular INAH custodianship. Thus, the autonomy of the encargados was by default and necessity. Staff in the central office in Yucatán's capital city could not micromanage the zones even if they wanted to!

On the other hand, the de facto circumstance of the discretionary power of site encargados has become a source of consternation for officials at the INAH central office in Mérida. If authorities attempted to sanction one custodian for a job-related infraction, such as excessive tardiness, absenteeism, or drinking on the job, often the whole family would take offense and protest the sanctions. Thus the attempt to resolve issues regarding the job performance of one worker can result in the protest of an entire work team of a particular zone. The issue is further exacerbated when family networks extend across multiple zones, even in different areas of the

state. For example, the labor history is one of genealogies crossed in complex ways among sites as far-flung as Chichén Itzá, Uxmal, and smaller sites on the Ruta Puuc and even Cobá in the neighboring state of Quintana Roo. Added to this mix are strong union participation among the majority of custodios and the political prominence of certain encargados and workers in their home communities, usually the towns closest to their work.

NEW WORKERS, A DIFFERENT FORM OF CUSTODIANSHIP

Fully one-third of the custodios at Chichén are not antiguos. Only in the past decade has the INAH state office opened local competitions for custodial positions. For the first time, job opportunities opened up for "outsiders" to join the ranks of custodios, most from Pisté and one from outside the state of Yucatán.⁹ Though some had worked at the site daily for eight or nine years, they remained *los nuevos*, the new ones. The INAH state office in Mérida, despite pressure from the antiguo-controlled labor union,¹⁰ knew the system would have to change.

In 1994 an open competition for custodio positions was held in Pisté. An examination concerning Mexico's cultural heritage, developed through INAH-labor union negotiations, was presented to all applicants. Of twenty questions, ten were representative of the INAH custodian exam administered throughout Mexico, and ten were put forth by the union. Eighty people presented themselves along with their official documents to compete for six positions. Current university students and those who had already completed a university education were not permitted to enter the competition. Acceptance into the available positions was based on the highest scores. Only those already living close to the archaeological zone were chosen, with the objective of benefiting local communities with these stable and well-paid federal jobs.

The custodial positions stand in great contrast to the current labor economy in Pisté and nearby smaller towns. While many residents are engaged in economic activity closely associated with the ruins, the kinds of work required, number of hours, and days off do not compare with those enjoyed by the custodians. Hundreds of people work within the archaeological zone and along its perimeter as cooks, launderers, gardeners, and the like. Of those informally or self-employed, many make and sell handicrafts (Castañeda 1996; Peraza López and Rejón Patrón 1989; Quintal Avilés 1995).

Almost all of their jobs are for forty-five hours a week rather than thirty-five as is the case for most employees at other zones. The Chichén

custodios' work schedule is ten days on followed by four days off. Seven of the ten days on are dedicated to patrolling in uniform around the zone. The remaining three are out-of-uniform, shorter workdays for performing maintenance such as cutting the grass, hacking down overgrown areas, or spraying herbicide on weeds that push between the stones of the restored structures. However, in the time I carried out my research at Chichén, it was rare to find any custodios actually carrying out these activities. Instead, it was from these three days out of every two weeks that vacation and compensation days were taken.

The number of compensation days seemed rather high but was explained to me in the following manner. All federal employees get a certain number of days off, most of which are national holidays. The archaeological zone is open to the public every day of the year, which means that employees have to work on holidays. They are compensated for these days by being allowed to schedule other days off during a regular work period. Patrolling during the hours that the zone is open to the public represents the greatest need in terms of manpower; thus workers are unlikely to get any of the first seven days of each two-week work period as a compensation day.

Traditional work—understood as the labor of a campesino—is being replaced by the increasingly high degree of tourism development at the site and the corresponding high volume of visitors. Another way to describe this transformation would again be through the performance metaphor of onstage labor, involving public presence and constant, direct contact with visitors, replacing the backstage labor more commonly associated with the traditional tasks of the campo.

The period from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s marked a transformation in labor activities of caring for the patrimony at Chichén Itzá, in both the duties of a custodio and the technologies of the modernization of labor. It appears that the everyday duties of a custodian are quite particular to the extensive development of Chichén Itzá and perhaps increasingly at Uxmal as well. At other zones, where there is little tourism and no state infrastructure or promotion, the work of custodianship remains within the concept of traditional masculine outdoor activity.

The following example defining the duties of custodianship at a less developed site in Yucatán is telling. When one position opened in the archaeological zone of Ek Balam, three men competed for it. Part of the examination was to test the men's skills in *chapeo*, or clearing brush and weeds from paths, monuments, and other areas in the archaeological zone. Each was given an area twenty or so square meters to clear. The

applicant who performed this task the best in addition to achieving a competitive score on the written examination became an INAH employee.

The transformation from the traditional work of the campo to a new labor regime of custodianship in Chichén Itzá is situated within modernizing practices of the heritage assemblage. Caring for the monuments at Chichén has been greatly affected by the site's infrastructural development as a tourism destination and by a host of new ideologies of service-industry labor. Today, new custodios are required to have good people skills, as their jobs entail face-to-face interaction with national and international tourists. A customer-oriented politics of politeness is part of the new professionalization of custodianship. Not simply a matter of attitude on the part of Chichén's workers, the customer-oriented atmosphere requires new skills.

Though not federally mandated as yet, custodians are encouraged to develop at least minimum standards of foreign-language proficiency. One might encounter in the archaeological zone on any given day guards able to give directions and answer visitors' questions in English, Italian, or German—in addition to Spanish, of course. Although there is usually an ambulance on-site staffed with paramedics, custodios know that they might shoulder the responsibility of first response to any accidents inside the zone. From these few examples and those that follow, the genealogy of labor at Chichén Itzá reveals that the archaeological site is no longer the campo—it is a space of complex, fluid modernity.

THE DAILY GRIND

Forty-five hours a week in an archaeological zone is a long time in a busy yet seemingly unchanging place. After the first several weeks of my ethnographic work, I experienced a period of intense boredom during the daily walk or bike-ride to Chichén from Pisté, knowing that each day would be remarkably similar to the one before it. I kept hoping, rather darkly I suppose, that something would *happen* in these long and tedious weeks, maybe a fall from the Castillo, a lightning strike, or a slip and fall into the Sacred Cenote. My heat-affected imagination struggled to run wild. Yet the most exciting event was the summoning of the on-site ambulance to the Observatory late one afternoon. A small child had been stung by a bee on her foot. Her slight injury was attended to in relatively short order, followed by a quick cruise around the site in the ambulance as a reward for her halted tears. How could such a wondrous place be so, well, boring?

By the time I had been visiting Chichén for several months, I had nearly forgotten this early ennui. Some days found me traversing the zone several times, meeting up with custodios at their assigned locations to chat or conduct taped interviews. Other days I would spend hours in the same spot, usually with a site worker, finding a new work rhythm for myself. This, in retrospect, seems to have derived a good deal from the custodians' own pace and perspective of their work routine. I used this personal experience of Chichén Itzá as my own worksite to think through how it functioned for others performing a different kind of labor.

"Fabulous place" (Castañeda 1996) though it may be, certainly the significance of the zone changes for a person who works there, day after day, year after year. But as in almost any job, INAH workers tactically manipulate their job sites and descriptions to maintain a sense of meaningful activity and pride in their positions. One explanation would go like this: "Certainly many observers see workers, men for the most part, as developing considerable skill in making 'the best of a bad job' in using their human imagination and ingenuity in turning work into more than just a job" (Morgan 1992: 79). While I have to qualify this statement in light of the case at hand—no one considers the work of a custodio to be "a bad job"—I find that this passage raises an issue important to characterizing work at Chichén. What extracurricular activities produced by site workers' "imagination and ingenuity" make the job of custodianship more than "just a job"? Here I will point out three significant activities that help add texture to the everyday life of Chichén Itzá.

The first is social activity, something that is certainly not exclusive to archaeological site workers. INAH workers incorporate social activities into their daily routines, leaving their patrol areas and meeting up with compañeros at another, stopping to talk to others while crossing through the zone to enter a work area, or arranging break-times in pairs or small groups. For example, one group of three to five antiguos—two of whom worked at the Mayaland entrance ticket booth—cooked on site and ate lunch together nearly every day. They prepared meat in an underground pit oven (*piib* in Maya) in the ground behind the ticket booth. Chicken and pork cooked *piib'il* style, in a homemade underground oven, is a popular dish in Yucatecan regional cuisine, in homes as well as in restaurants oriented toward tourists.

In addition to this kind of group activity, custodios socialized with other people engaged with work at the site. Most of these were tour guides from Pisté, Cancún, or elsewhere who made daily trips to Chichén with groups of tourists. This form of socializing led, in one case, to

building business relationships between tour guides and one custodian. Inside the zone, the custodio sold sets of photographs of the monuments to the tour guides, who in turn would sell them to tourists. While technically not "legal," INAH officials who were aware of the situation were initially unconcerned. One set of photos, however, turned out to be of an area undergoing excavation that therefore was closed to the public. The archaeologists working on the project were especially upset, as their own research results and photographs had not yet been made public. The worker involved was reprimanded but not formally sanctioned.

Another form of social activity on the job at Chichén takes place through walkie-talkies. Though these are costly and difficult to maintain, many of the guards on duty in the archaeological zone will use radios for communication with each other and the zone's headquarters. In a zone as large as Chichén Itzá, a guard might be as far as several kilometers from a colleague or from headquarters. Apart from the conveyance of critical security-related information, radios also made a handy tool for girl-watching. Radio communication was used to signal to the employee at the next post of the approach of attractive women. The INAH does not supply a radio unit for each worker on duty at a given time; only about half of a shift will have communication units with them. Of the available units, most were donated by the Barbachano family, while a few others were personally owned by custodios.

Radio communication takes place in code, using numbers in place of location names and activity descriptions, much like a police radio system. As much as was revealed to me by the custodios concerning every aspect of daily life at Chichén and the work of the custodios, radio codes were sacred and therefore secret. When they did speak outside of the number code system, the workers often communicated with each other in Maya rather than Spanish. In this way, the Maya language functioned as an everyday code in the presence of tourists.

I include these descriptions to emphasize not the uniqueness of Chichén Itzá but its ordinariness as a workplace. However, in some ways INAH custodianship is not just another job. Indeed, membership in the INAH ranks at Chichén Itzá has its privileges. The degree to which workers are able to spend long hours together under relatively light supervision, the fairly predictable volume and behaviors of the crowds of visitors, and the necessity of close collaboration when confronting serious problems all tend to promote a strong camaraderie among the custodios. But as we will see, this camaraderie is not without its caveats.

PRIVILEGES OF MEMBERSHIP

That which a certain group of the site's guards and caretakers are keeping under their watchful eye, or better stated, their controlling collective thumb, is not simply the monuments per se. Instead of playing their "legitimate" role as federal employees, Chichén's custodios are divided among themselves about the direct control over rights to profit from the World Heritage Site and international tourism destination. These workers are not merely functionaries of the state as their job titles would suggest. They are Maya entrepreneurs who have historically been able to intervene in the national heritage assemblage, making the stuff of the public good that of private enterprise.

The contention for the archaeological zone's resource potential was not an open issue until the state-sponsored major infrastructural development plan of the early 1980s to modernize Chichén threatened to wipe out the kinds of claims and practices the antiguos and their families had been building upon since the late 1930s. This modernization agenda has included the construction of hotel facilities and food, souvenir, and handicraft vending areas, most of which are now located on the perimeter of the area declared as federal property. Thus, Chichén's modernization was not an abstracted process: it was very much accompanied by the increased, felt presence of new regulations and restrictions within the zone's territory. The intensification affected the structure and organization of labor relations at the site as well as the relations between the site and the surrounding residential and business communities.

The antiguo lineages are known today not only within the archaeological zone but in Pisté, where most members reside. Here, the antiguo label is neither neutral nor simply descriptive. Rather, it carries a host of other characteristics that arise from the historical dimensions of the genealogies of the family lines themselves and of the wealth of privileges that membership in an INAH family carries. Due to generations of secure federal employment, INAH workers tend not to be subject to the same precarious economic dependence on the fluctuating tourism economy like many of their neighbors. Numerous paid holidays afford leisure time unthinkable for those who have to sell handicrafts in the streets on a daily basis to make ends meet. Clothing allowances and educational opportunities are also among the job benefits.

Successive years of federal INAH employment have led to capital accumulation, making investment in new local business opportunities possible. Already among the most privileged in their employment, INAH workers



FIGURE 4.4. A concrete marker (left) denotes Chichén Itzá's UNESCO World Heritage status where the houses of INAH employees stood until the early 1980s. Photograph by author.

also are entrepreneurs. Since the 1940s, INAH families have used their presence in the archaeological zone to directly provide tourist services, primarily through selling refreshments. The relatively small-scale sale of a cold drink or a plate of food in front of one's home, as was the business practice until the zone's modernization in the early 1980s, raised few eyebrows. Coinciding with the tourism boom in Cancún, the cultural resource presented by Chichén Itzá piqued the interests of officials, particularly at the

state level. The workers' inhabiting of the nation's patrimony—their residence within the ruins—became an image problem. A contemporary Maya scene of rambunctious children, laundry hanging out to dry, and roaming dogs and chickens alongside the monuments was incongruent with the modern representation of tourist destination.

If they could not live in the archaeological zone, raising their families, planting their crops, and providing services for tourists, the antiguos were determined to be compensated for the loss of their homes and to find another way to maintain the dominion they had held over Chichén Itzá for decades. When bulldozers leveled the last of the INAH employees' houses in the archaeological zone, cash compensation was promised to each head of household to purchase property and build a new home elsewhere. Left unresolved was the greater concern for many of the antiguos: their exclusive presence in the zone that had afforded them opportunities to earn over and above their federal salaries through providing tourist services. The situation was shortly "rectified" through an under-the-table agreement the custodians made with state officials and federal INAH representatives to establish two refreshment and souvenir vending stands under the control of the custodians and organized as cooperatives.

Shortly before workers knew that structural and infrastructural changes would soon instigate their eviction from the zone, the José Erosa Peniche primary school ceased functioning. A group of then-resident custodios drummed up a plan for a way to profitably exploit the vacated structure: they would outfit a small store to serve the other workers, including those employed at the hotels Mayaland and Hacienda Chichén Itzá, not to mention the ever-growing influx of tourists to the site. Seizing the opportunity that had presented itself, they pooled enough resources to begin to outfit and stock the modest space. Just a year later, when they had barely gotten the shop up and running, the demolition was imminent. They were "left with nothing," said Don Rosendo, one of the oldest and most formidable of the antiguos and an original investor in the primary school bodega. He described the situation, curiously enough, in the third person:

The truth is, the families didn't want to leave the site. They were very accustomed to living there, and some people had lived there their whole lives. It was painful for some, not because they felt like they were *owners* but because they were accustomed to the ambience of the site: the sounds of the night, the sounds characteristic of the archaeological zone. So it was difficult for them to leave.

Though Don Rosendo plays up the emotional connection of the resident INAH families, the removal of the employees and their families from the site was reckoned with as if a simple business transaction. The employees' loss should be properly compensated by the state and federal entities involved in the site's redevelopment.

In response to this demand, the state government worked in conjunction with the INAH and the affected workers to come to a settlement agreement. The exact parameters of the agreement and amounts of money it entailed were conveyed to me by those involved and others (friends and neighbors) in wildly varying accounts.¹¹ According to one informant, custodios were promised three thousand pesos each, which would have been enough to resettle a family in modest quarters in Pisté. Another informant—whose statement was widely backed by many others—claimed that no fixed cash settlement was ever distributed. In lieu of cash compensation, workers were offered a settlement-in-kind in the form of an arranged mortgage on a house in Pisté.

INAH custodios were, to say the least, dissatisfied with the phantom or inconveniently contingent nature of the compensation plan. They set their sights on alternative ways of securing the economic benefits they held when living inside the zone. Along with the mid-1980s construction of Chichén's *parador turístico*, two palm-roofed vending centers (*palapas*, or thatch huts) were built inside the INAH's jurisdiction of the zone. But who would control these potentially big money-making enterprises? The twelve custodios had invested in the old school building claimed that they were owed compensation, but not a specific amount of money. Instead, they requested and—after much negotiation—received permission through an accord between the INAH, CULTUR, and the Barbachano family to establish a vending cooperative in one of the two *palapas* inside the zone. It was the mid-1980s, when the tourism influx that centered on Cancún and trickled down to Chichén and Pisté was seemingly limitless and unstoppable.

The vending cooperatives thus established only included among its beneficiaries one group of former site residents. Soon, the others—led by two wives of custodios—mobilized to establish their own cooperative in the second *palapa*, advantageously located some three kilometers away at the Sacred Cenote. Representing the business interests of their husbands—longtime custodios who had become physically incapacitated through illness—the women had to battle for the *palapa*, in which a refreshment stand had already been established through the Barbachano family.

The establishment of the two *palapas* and their associated cooperative members gave rise to an important distinction among custodios that is still

very much operative today. Those INAH workers who once lived in the zone and secured an economic interest in the palapas after Chichén's redevelopment all became *antiguos*, even though those who established the second palapa were technically newer workers on the site. Thus the "antiguo" label stands as much for economic rights as for longevity in INAH employment.

The "nuevos," on the other hand, never lived in the zone. They came from Pisté, San Francisco (a nearby *ranchito*), Santa Elena (the largest town near the site of Uxmal), and Peto. Some had more than ten years on the job at Chichén and resented being called "new." But they preferred this label to *antiguo*. Outside the zone, at home in Pisté, this cohort was particularly sensitive to the town's opinion of INAH custodians. "They group us all together. . . . Most people don't realize that we nuevos don't share in the money made by the antiguos with their palapas inside the zone and their other businesses in Pisté," said José María, a nuevo in his thirties who had been at Chichén for six years. Though his family has a longevity of several generations in Pisté, no one among his relatives had previously worked in the INAH. Tired of waiting tables at the Mayaland Hotel and elsewhere, he relished the opportunity to work inside the zone. And the steady salary along with its other benefits was a safe, secure way to support his family.

José María was particularly vocal in speaking out against the system of economic benefits that antiguos developed. His complaints have an interesting discursive simultaneity—invoking the site as both "cultural patrimony of all" and as a place where the nuevos should have their "fair" chance to earn more than their salaries by working there. While attacking the "injustice" from the standpoint of undermining the practice in terms of its illegitimacy according to policies and regulations concerning patrimonio cultural, he wanted equal opportunity to profit from the site. Why should they earn so much money in "*mi Chichén*"? His possessiveness is more than a pride in the cultural patrimony of the Maya, of Yucatán, or of Mexico. He was from Pisté and worked at Chichén—he was not just one of the passersby who flood the zone on a daily basis. It was his Chichén, and he wanted his financial rewards.

While José María's critique articulates the ambivalence of Chichén Itzá as both everybody's and nobody's, the antiguos assert their own logic for rationalizing and legitimizing the existence of the cooperatives in their present form. They do not appear to seriously consider what they call the "petty complaints" of unfairness by nuevos. However, the custodians involved in the cooperatives do see the state government as presenting a threat to their business inside the archaeological zone. The following



FIGURE 4.5. INAH employees' cooperative palapas inside the archaeological zone cater to visitors' refreshment needs. Photograph by author.

explanation demonstrates one palapa owner's attempt to protect his interests inside the archaeological zone by appealing to the contemporary popularity of the nongovernmental civic association as an institution working for the public good.

These cooperatives are not cooperatives [in the legal sense]; they are *asociaciones civiles*, they are *comercios* [businesses]. If they [the nuevos] want to join, yes, the door is open, but you have to give your part [an investment in the group enterprise]. When the palapas were formed as *asociaciones*, they were not formed under the name of one person; rather, they carried the names of all [antiguos] who were present at this historic moment. That is why it is an *asociación civil*.

He continued to rationalize the exclusivity of the enterprise by claiming Chichén as an INAH-family patrimony:

The cooperatives were formed as entities completely separate from the business of Chichén. They do not receive any of the income of the archaeological zone, and since they are separate, membership is not the right of just any worker. . . . It is a very special, historically justified situation. These people who have no roots in Chichén are not a part of this. It is an exclusive right for the families who once lived in the zone.

This statement requires a bit of unpacking, mostly in the terminological realm. Interestingly enough, he admitted that the palapas are not technically cooperatives, which is correct. But then he proceeded to identify them as *asociaciones civiles* (A.C.'s). According to a lawyer I consulted, the enterprises inside the archaeological zone are actually *sociedades anónimas* (S.A.'s): for-profit business associations. The rationalization for calling the *cooperativas* by the name *asociaciones civiles* is highly important in justifying the existence and continued functioning of the refreshment and souvenir stands inside the archaeological zone. The A.C., a nongovernmental organization (NGO), has a coveted nonprofit status and carries the flavor of civic duty, performing disinterested public work, benefiting society, and "doing good" in general. Thus, this labeling recasts what from one perspective looks like a "mafia" organization motivated by personal greed into the light of public good. The term "mafia" likewise carries with it a set of distinguishing characteristics: family-oriented business that is heavily involved in illegal activities. Unlike the hyperstructured organization or bureaucracy, the mafia organization has a personalistic ethos. A mafia might be described as a kinship group with consanguineous, affinal, and fictive kin relations. "In the absence of a legitimate system of effective power, the mafia emerged as a system of parasitic power" (Alba 1985: 36).

In my own research and corroborated to some extent by an INAH official, I found no legal provision for the palapas. The owning organizations do not appear to be cooperatives in a legal sense. Instead, the day-to-day operations and business practices appear to be those of a for-profit corporation. Rationalized as a product of historic patrimony and situated as they are in a site of Maya heritage, the palapas, as one *antiguo* explained to me, are "cultural foundations." Yet for more than fifteen years the *antiguo* vending cooperatives continue to operate private, quite profitable business enterprises within the federal borders of the archaeological zone. Though legally suspect, the vending cooperatives are justified by the *antiguo* families on the basis of patrifruct rights to economically benefit from the archaeological zone. Because their fathers worked the land of Chichén Itzá, they have inherited the right to a presence in that space. They too imagine their duties as a way of working the land of Chichén Itzá, not as the campesinos of earlier generations but as caretakers of the nation's patrimony at an international tourism destination. One third-generation custodio, son of a well-respected *encargado*, rationalized the establishment of the vending cooperatives: "No one can own cultural patrimony . . . it belongs to everyone. Therefore, we have to claim our part of our heritage that we deserve."

Indeed, the *antiguos* themselves claim to abide by the principle of cultural patrimony as "commons," but only for its rightful heirs. One young *antiguo* said,

For a custodian . . . every day you go to Chichén Itzá, there you spend your time, and on the side you have a little business. For me, this is something that should be respected by history, the people, and the government. After all, how many men have dedicated their lives to the archaeological zones? How many descendants have stayed on to maintain the same site?

Now, why would officials buy this rationale and even allow the establishment of the refreshment stands—especially given that all archaeological zones in Mexico are under a constitutional mandate declaring them under custodianship of the nation? The answer comes in the form of a caveat to the genealogy of *antiguos* at Chichén Itzá.

Recall the circumstance of landownership: the whole archaeological zone is actually privately held land, having been purchased in bits and pieces between the 1920s and 1950s by a single very wealthy Yucatec family. In this site of cultural patrimony of the Mexican nation, only the monuments are technically under federal control—not the land upon which they sit. Because the refreshment stands do not interfere in the built architectural space of the monuments, they are on the land owned by the descendants of tourist agent and hotelier Fernando Barbachano. The *antiguos* need only pay steep rental fees to the property owner to continue their own enterprises within the zone. Today the Barbachano family owns and operates multiple hotels, two of which are technically inside the borders of archaeological zones, along with restaurants, bus lines, and guide services. All of this is made possible by a patriarch's keen vision of the future of Maya ruins in the international tourism industry.

Alongside the strong private-sector presence in Chichén Itzá represented by the Barbachano family, the *antiguo* vending cooperatives do not look quite so exclusive. But that is not the perception by the various "publics" that have vested interests in the archaeological zone. Why, other local residents ask, should only a privileged few benefit so directly from what is, at least rhetorically, patrimony of the whole nation? The question is one not likely to be resolved any time soon, especially as the interests of all of Chichén's stakeholders are increasingly under the threat of formal privatization of national patrimony in Mexico.

Over the past several decades, the *antiguos* have demonstrated a remarkable flexibility in shaping their patrimonial claims and in their ability



FIGURE 4.6. *Heading off: A custodio walks his bicycle along the path linking the parador turístico entrance to the site center. Photograph by author.*

to maneuver around de facto legalities (perhaps not unlike the “mafia” they have been labeled) regarding who has the right to benefit from cultural heritage resources in Mexico. However we want to call them, these antiguos, these “mafiosos,” these Maya, these workers, these indigenous people are just one segment of one local population that finds itself engaged in the everyday negotiation of the global political economy of tourism.

There is something about the splendor, mystery, and magic of Maya ruins that conveniently produces a sense of wonder and obscures the intimate politics of the everyday production and maintenance of an archaeological site. A focus on the genealogy of labor intervenes precisely in this antipolitics of heritage by foregrounding the political economy and the “everyday life” of Chichén Itzá. Historically, Maya workers have produced the site literally through the reconstruction projects of the 1920s through 1940s and continually reproduce the site through maintenance and provision of tourist services. Looking closely at the ambivalent heritage-claiming practices of Chichén’s custodios, we can see that it is not always and exclusively the state or even the big-business private sector that sets the terms for the commodification of cultural resources and the interpellation of these properties into the heritage industry.

The workers’ assertion of patrifruct rights to Chichén Itzá represents a doubly significant form of privatization. The economic activities of the custodio-run cooperatives within the archaeological zone coincide with any workaday definition of private-sector business activity. At the same time, the antiguos employees are practicing what I would call a “privatization of meaning” at Chichén Itzá. By narrating the past century of the site’s history as deeply intertwined with their own family histories, the custodians make the zone theirs, protectively and even “jealously” guarding Chichén Itzá.