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The Huipil Metaphor:

Authenticity as a Tool in the International Artisan Craft Market in Chiapas

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In the Mexican city of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, the indigenous garment known as *huipil* is valued as an object of cultural identity and as a trade commodity. This paper explores the relationship between consumers, intermediaries and producers of culturally identified artisan products as an avenue for studying notions of authenticity. My analysis of the huipil shows that consumers do not recognize the role of their interaction with artisans in defining the authenticity of an artisan craft. Foreigners who buy huipils and other artisan crafts value these items because they represent a cultural "other" that they perceive as separate and unchanging. This perspective is based on incorrectly understood ideas about the history of Maya communities in Mexico and masks the ways that artisans participate in the trade. My work seeks to open up spaces to acknowledge the contributions of participating artisans by incorporating their perspectives on the trade. Changes in huipil design demonstrate that contemporary Maya cultures are continuously changing through the social interactions of its members and the exercise of creativity in the crafts that represent them.

Introduction

A large number of intermediaries are currently involved in the marketing of Maya artisan crafts produced in Chiapas to visiting tourists and customers abroad. In my research, I explore the dynamics of the exchange between three participating parties: artisans, intermediaries and consumers. I argue that the discourse of this trading network revolves around misconceptions of authenticity. Intermediaries use this discourse to portray indigenous artisans and their work to consumers and shape the exchange of artisan products. I use as an example the case study of San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas. I will try to demonstrate the role of the discourse on authenticity by portraying the role of intermediaries as the link between artisans and consumers. Intermediaries encourage the view that indigenous artisans are a cultural "other" because their position depends on the need for a cultural broker between artisan and consumer. My fieldwork in Chiapas has shown that artisans understand the concept of cost-effectiveness in the marketing of their products. They consciously transform their work to sell it to foreign tourists and differentiate those objects from those of personal and cultural value. They are nonetheless limited in their participation in the artisan craft market by barriers related to language, family, and low socioeconomic status. Many of these, however, have come to represent aspects of their "otherness" that when they are surpassed put in question their authenticity as perceived by consumers of their crafts. Consumers' view of authenticity and misconceptions of the trade play an important role in maintaining indigenous artisans as a marginalized group.

The Power of Ideas

One of the aims of my research is to portray contemporary Maya culture as a dynamic group that changes continually as it participates in global culture. In this work, I am not questioning the value of the work of the artisan crafts, much less their authenticity because there

is no effective way to evaluate that. Instead, I am exploring how misconceptions about value and authenticity structure the exchange between artisans, intermediaries and consumers. The importance of this paper is to recognize the power of discourse in not only misleading consumers into believing false notions of authenticity, but also in the power of these ideas as a tool that marginalizes groups of people through cultural otherness.

The Huipil as a Metaphor

In this paper, the huipil represents misconceptions of authenticity because of the transformations it has undergone as an artisan craft and because it is a tool used by intermediaries to display authenticity. At first glance, the *huipil* can be defined as a square-shaped blouse with colorful decorative elements typically found around the neck and sleeve openings. One can approach its definition further through an analysis of its stylistic variety, process of production, or function within society. The huipil as a metaphor signifies a combination of deeply-embedded traditional meanings and newly-acquired importance as a prominent product in the international craft market. These characteristics make it a useful tool for exploring questions about the authenticity of traditional items that are changing in the interest of Western tastes.

Background

History: A Story of Change and Continuity

Although it may appear that Maya artisans have only recently become incorporated into the international market, Maya people have been weaving and trading since prehistory. Fragments of ancient cloth and other archaeological evidence indicate that the production of woven cloth in ancient Maya culture was undertaken by women at the household level, a practice

that has continued into the present.[1] Evidence of continuity in the production and use of traditional textiles within a world that is continually changing can be interpreted as a sign that Maya people have had control over this craft. Embedded within the Maya weaving tradition is a string of transformations as the Maya people adapt to a changing world. Scholars attribute the imbalance of power that exists today between groups of people to the changes that occurred in the process of globalization, emphasizing changes that have occurred since colonialism. Susan Kellog defines globalization as "the continuous process of economic and cultural change developing primarily out of the expansion of European markets and colonial domination of nonwestern people."[2] Maya voices emerge through a study of the changes in weaving production that have occurred since prehistory and the changes that are not always a result of outside influence. Examples of Maya as active members of the world can be found in the traditions and changes throughout the history of weaving.

The huipil is an example of continuity because it is a traditional blouse used by contemporary Maya whose shape and decorative patterns reflect those used by the ancient Maya. Artisans have produced these garments for thousands of years because they are meaningful to Maya identity. Brenda Rosenbaum and Liliana Goldin believe that the continuation of traditional designs can be explained by the low cost of production, lack of alternatives to labor and lack of technological innovation.[3] June Nash, who emphasizes the role of continuity, explains that the low cost of production allowed Maya products to compete with manufactured articles during and following the Colonial period.[4] However, it is important to note that the production of textiles (taking into account labor, skill, and the cost of raw materials) is expensive in contemporary Maya culture. In fact, one of Kellog's main arguments is that women's participation as artisans in an intensifying global economy results in heavier work loads, meaning that the task of

weaving traditional garments is becoming more difficult.[5] One could emphasize the role of choice in the fact that despite outside influences and the high cost of production of traditional textiles, women of contemporary Maya societies continue to produce and wear traditional Maya clothing. Because Maya people believe these garments are an essential part of their identity, they choose to continue their production although it is easier and more affordable to obtain nontraditional clothing.

The history of trade between Maya people and dominating societies is marked by many changes. Scholars attribute many of the changes visible today to the Spanish, many times without exploring how Maya artisans mediated the changes that occurred during colonization. Since the sixteenth century, the Spanish have imposed changes in the organization of the Maya marketplace, moving the market from open areas to enclosed spaces, organizing it by type of product rather than by community, and establishing set prices and written contracts in place of bartering and verbal agreements.[6] However, one might ask how artisans reacted to these changes and how they incorporated these changes into their lives. For example, one can continue to observe bartering in contemporary Maya markets, which shows that Maya artisans have resisted to some of the changes imposed by the Spanish. In studies on today's international market, scholars seem to forget that artisans had already begun to create untraditional products for tourists before intermediaries took control over the sale of these products. Now, artisans continue to follow the trends set by consumers but they work in new conditions that are imposed by outsiders. Exploring the different roles of artisans, intermediaries and consumers allows us to understand current changes in this exchange.

Weaving and Maya Female Identity

We must understand the significance of weaving in women's lives to understand the role of gender in the exchange of woven artisan crafts and how indigenous women have become a symbol of authenticity in the marketplace. The close association between women and weaving is portrayed in Mayan mythologies describing the origin of weaving. The Maya goddess Ix Chel is believed to have taught the first women to weave on the backstrap loom. Weavers in different communities pray to their local female saints for inspiration in their work. From the moment a Maya girl is born through her adolescence to her life as a grown woman, weaving forms part of her identity. The extent to which this facet of her identity influences her other roles as a woman is a topic that several scholars in the field have discussed in their work. Scholars agree that weaving is intricately interwoven with the traditional household roles of Maya women in their community and their changing roles in the global marketplace.

Scholars have identified rituals practiced at the time of a girl's birth that are used to designate her gender role. In the Maya community of Zinacantán where Patricia M. Greenfield did her research, family members introduce items such as weaving and cooking tools to a newborn girl.[7] Linda Asturias de Barrios explains that a girl's umbilical cord is buried in the home and a boy's in the field to reinforce their corresponding roles in these separate physical spaces. At baptism, the gender of a newborn is portrayed through his or her clothing, a huipil and skirt for a girl or a shirt and trousers for a boy.[8] The idea that women's responsibility is to attend the household is reinforced during childhood, as girls imitate their mothers by making mud tortillas and playing on toy looms.

What may seem as simple child's play, however, is important in the development of particular characteristics that will allow these girls to perform their future feminine roles. Greenfield argues that in practicing their household activities, such as making tortillas, carrying

firewood, and washing clothes, Maya women exhibit certain characteristics such as kneeling and upper-body stillness that are also important postures for weaving on a backstrap loom.[9] By imitating their mothers in these activities, young girls learn the appropriate body language for their future roles in the household and are prepared to learn how to weave. When their mothers give them their first weaving projects, their bodies are already accustomed to long periods of kneeling, keeping their upper bodies still, and balance that are required for weaving on a backstrap loom.

Weaving on a backstrap loom is an activity that women are expected to perform in addition to other activities that they carry out in their household. The "lord of the house," as Maya women are called in San Andrés, Chiapas, is responsible for preparing meals, cleaning and taking care of the children, as well as weaving clothes for her family.[10] The ability to weave skillfully is an attribute that some men look for in their future wives, as a man from Tenejapa, Chiapas explains, "Don't fall in love with a girl if she doesn't know how to weave… [If she cannot weave,] what clothing shall I wear?"[11] Women take pride in the textiles that they create because they are a form of self expression.

Weaving is also tied to women's role as participants in religious festivals and in local markets. The value of woven textiles such as the huipil is evident in the way that this traditional woman's blouse is used to dress statues of the local saints. Walter F. Morris explains that women with important roles during religious ceremonies weave a special huipil to wear for the occasion.[12] On festival and market days, it is possible to identify a woman's status by the style of her huipil. Thus, the ability to represent her community and herself is an important aspect of being a skillful weaver.

The close relationship between weaving and other Mayan female roles is visible in the way that Maya women's involvement in a growing textile market for tourists has changed some of the traditional female roles in their households. The image of a Maya woman weaving has become representative of Maya culture to outsiders, such as tourists seeking to buy "traditional Maya" souvenirs when visiting markets in Chiapas and Guatemala.[13] The artisan craft marketplace, where Maya items are sold mostly to outsiders, is dominated by women vendors who engage in activities that have allowed them to gain more independence and power within their households by engaging in activities outside the home. These women travel out of their communities, control the finances of their sales and participate in artisan associations. Walter Little found that the Maya households of women vendors "were characterized by families eating together and men helping with preparation and cleanup."[14] The traditional ideals that sexes should eat separately and that women are responsible for the cooking and cleaning were not acted out in their daily lives.

When examining the connection between weaving and other roles that define the identity of Maya women, it is important to note that not all women weave today. Women sometimes purchase clothes from other weavers. Brocading, adding patterns into the cloth as it is woven, is a technique that is mastered by a minority of women in a community. Traditionally all clothing was made by the women in a household, but these garments are being replaced by industrially-made clothing, purchased in nearby cities, especially in the attire of men. In some communities, brocading and weaving are being replaced by embroidery on pre-made fabric. The treadle loom is a weaving machine introduced by the Spanish that has been primarily associated with men in Maya culture.[15] Although, they are uncommon because they are expensive and difficult to

maintain, their use by male weavers in some communities demonstrates that weaving is not purely a female activity in more recent history.

Although the degree of influence between weaving and other Maya female activities is arguable, scholars identify weaving as an activity that is an important component of the identity of Mayan women. The association between weaving and femininity is portrayed in the mythologies and ideologies of the Maya people. Through their development into adulthood, Maya girls are encouraged to weave as they are prepared to perform their household duties. The ability to weave skillfully allows Maya women to participate in important religious roles and gain prestige in their communities. In the international craft market, consumers value the artisan's role more for their cultural associations rather than their skill. Working with an intermediary may be necessary to connect to the foreign consumers but in turn, can compromise the control artisans have over their crafts.

Levels of Interaction: Types of Contemporary Artisans, Intermediaries and Consumers

My study relates in many ways to the work by Eric Wolf in Mexico because of its focus on a "web of group relationships" rather than communities or institutions.[16] Wolf traces the diachronic dynamics of the interaction of cultural groups throughout the history of Mexico. He describes how a "repatterned Indian community" emerged from colonialism.[17] The Spanish crown encouraged the organization of Indian populations into compact, autonomous communities by granting each a legal charter and communal lands with its own administrative and religious centers. Colonial settlers gained power over Mexico and organized haciendas, paying Indian laborers to work on their land. Threatened by the encroachment of colonial settlers, Indian communities unified and formed stronger boundaries. Hacienda owners took up a

"buffer" position between Indian communities and "nation-oriented groups" or those who are linked to national institutions.[18] Wolf refers to the people in the "buffer" position as "intermediate power-holders" or "brokers." These are characterized as being instruments of a national agenda. As intermediaries between local and national, they depend on the tensions between local and national groups because their existence depends on their ability to manage these differences. The intermediaries in the international craft trade hold a comparable position to Wolf's "brokers" as the link between "nation-oriented" (or should we say international-oriented) groups—the consumers—and community-oriented individuals like the artisans. Wolf effectively demonstrates that indigenous communities are not pristine, static groups but rather, that they are a part of complex society.

Teresa Ramos Maza's work in San Cristóbal explores the relationship between indigenous women and mestiza coletas, who are the local nation-oriented group in San Cristóbal.[19] She contributes an understanding of the complexity of relationships and conflicts in spheres of trade that portray the reality of the artisans' lives beyond their work as weavers and traders. She attributes recent intensification of craft production in Mexico to several factors: 1) land loss, 2) consumer tastes 3) government's investment in tourism 4) increase in tourism.[20] In her words, "la reinvención de una artesanía coincide y se relaciona con el proyecto estatal de la conservación del patrimonio cultural y de generación de empleo a través de la promoción mercantil de la artesanía."[21] In this passage, she links the artisan trade with the governments agenda to increase tourism. Her work is a recent example of the study of group dynamics in artisan trade.

Artisans

Artisans participate in the international exchange of their crafts in different ways that affect the level of control that they have over their work. Rosenbaum and Goldin separate Maya artisans into three main categories, to which I add one more, that describe the contemporary situations of these artisans.[22] It is useful to see these categories as levels that mark a decreasing amount of artisan control, keeping in mind that these represent only an outline of possibilities. The first level includes independent artisans who create textiles for members of the same group, such as for close family members or for sale to community members. The creation of these textiles is guided by personal and community concepts of aesthetic value. I added a second level for artisan's who sell directly to tourists and are therefore inclined to follow current trends but have more control over their work. At the third level, artisans participate in the international market through an intermediary who demands certain items, colors and designs in order to fit trends. In this case, the artisan may be subject to deadlines and supervision, and has no control over the finished product or interaction with the consumer. The fourth and most extreme type of the three models proposed by Rosenbaum and Goldin is the capitalist workshop, where the producer works with more complex machines and has no control over when and what to produce. These places are dominated by men rather than women and create stratification between the owners and the workers within a community. These levels indicate that the addition of an intermediary between the artisan and the consumer can decrease and even eliminate the amount of control that artisans have over their work. While these categories are useful in outlining types of artisan participation in the market, in actuality, artisans are commonly involved in several of these types of trade at once.

Consumers

Types of consumers of international artisan crafts in San Cristóbal range from college-age backpackers to older travelers, coming from Europe, the United States and other parts of Mexico. In sum, they are individuals with purchasing power who belong to Western culture and are attracted to these crafts because of their cultural value. Consumers' limited definition of the artisans' role masks the spectrum of ways that artisans participate in the trade. The artisan's role as an exotic "other" is a key component of consumers' definition of authentic artisan crafts and forms the basis of the international artisan craft trade that is part of the fair trade movement.[23] Craft goods such as the huipil form an integral part of the growing economic sector of fair trade. SERRV International, the largest fair trade organization in North America, had approximately 10.5 million dollars in revenue for 2006.[24] Members of these types of organizations face a double-edged sword in order to preserve the meaning of traditional garments and sell culturally identified products that satisfy customer tastes.[25] These organizations seek to maintain the artisan tradition in tact while the very nature of their work transforms it. The culture of the artisans is fundamental to both edges of the metaphorical sword, but Western consumers' understanding of the artisans' culture is a form of cultural essentialism. Anthropologist Elizabeth M. Brumfield explains this term as the "fiction that non-Western cultures are static."[26] Western consumers in the international craft market tend to view culture as a static entity. In this view the artisans are marginalized from continuous processes and interactions with different groups.

It is important to understand the role of the intermediary and the consumer in different types of organizations and how members of these components of the trade view the products. Nash notes that what characterizes the tourist market and the international exchange of cultural products is that the value of the product is determined in part by the culture of its producer.[27] Consumers in the international craft trade seek unique products that have a connection with

human labor and that represent a particular culture. For this reason, entrepreneurs in this market appeal to these perceptions by advertising their products in particular ways.

Intermediaries

It is evident that the role of the intermediary can serve to eliminate artisan control because the artisan is disconnected from the consumer. I will outline the range of intermediaries involved in the artisan trade. Rosenbaum and Goldin describe mail order catalogs as one of the main sources of Maya artisan products available to customers abroad.[28] The largest consumers of these products are adolescents and young university students who are characterized by seeking low prices and not being attentive to quality. Descriptions on online catalogs invent stories and/or emphasize primitiveness to attract customers. These mainstream networks spur the loss of creativity and spontaneity in the work of artisans by providing orders of predetermined colors and shapes for their products based on the consumers' tastes. The intermediary imposes consumer trends on the Maya artisans without giving them the opportunity to portray themselves as they wish through advertising and their products. The products displayed in these catalogs are often in the form of western products with a Maya look; for example, a huipil transformed into a pillow cover.

Another sector of this market described by Rosenbaum and Goldin is the alternative trade organization (ATO) that emphasizes social responsibility over profit.[29] These organizations work directly with the artisans and provide help buying good quality materials and offering training. They seek to educate both the producers and consumers about the market. Their websites advocate the appreciation of Maya culture and awareness of international issues. However, Rosenbaum and Goldin do not specify the degree of control obtained by Maya artisans involved in these organizations, and it seems as though the artisans are not involved in the portrayal of

their culture. Here, the appeal to the consumer is the opportunity to do public good. The consumers involved in these markets are mostly older, college-educated people who have traveled to Latin America and are conscious of their choice to buy from these sources.

A third type of source neglected by Rosenbaum and Goldin but described by other scholars are cooperatives. Gabriela Vargas-Cetina, who has studied the cooperative movement in Mexico, describes a "classical cooperative" as "an organization that is run by its members, who have equal participation in investments, gains and losses."[30] A classical cooperative would ideally be controlled by the Maya artisan members that compose it, allowing them to mediate their interaction with the global culture and have direct contact with consumers. However, Vargas-Cetina argues that an idealized view of contemporary associations that call themselves cooperatives do not follow these guidelines and may, in fact be closer in definition to an ATO (described above) than a cooperative. It is important to look at the structure of these organizations to measure the degree of control that members hold by participating in these cooperatives.

A good example of this is Sna Jolobil, the oldest and most successful cooperative in Chiapas that was established in 1977 by the American scholar Walter F. Morris. During her study of cooperatives in Chiapas between 1995 and 1999, Vargas-Cetina found that the focus of Sna Jolobil was not on its members as in a classical cooperative.[31] Membership was instead variable and the director of the organization had patron-client relationship with other members rather than a democratic one. Despite these differences people are attracted to these organizations by their title as cooperatives. Some scholars also overlook these differences in their analyses. Nash acknowledges the differences but states that women have not asserted their rights to decision making that the organization allows because of Maya patriarchal structures.[32] Vargas-

Cetina would argue that these women do not participate in decision making because they are not aware of their rights, while Rosenbaum and Eber argue that these women simply are not interested in decision making.[33] The positive and negative effects of organizations such as this one must be considered in light of how these organizations function, their aims, and how there are perceived.

Case study

The goal of my work in Chiapas was to understand how artisans view their work and their role in the market in order to show a different picture that is not considered by consumers and intermediaries. I use my analysis of my fieldwork in San Cristóbal, Chiapas, to demonstrate that intermediaries in the exchange of the huipil promote consumers' limited vision of culture and the role of artisans. First, I focus on the way the huipil is presented as a cultural product in store advertisements and displays in San Cristóbal to attract consumers. Then I explore how the huipil influences the consumers' idea of the artisan as an "other" because the huipil is a key marker that distinguishes Maya women from other members of society in San Cristóbal. Finally, I show the interplay between consumers' idea of an authentic other and the artisans' evolving culture. The huipils worn by Maya women are transformed by the craft market, and in turn, transform consumers' idea of authenticity. However, this interaction between consumers and artisans is not recognized by the consumers' limited view of authenticity.

Setting

My fieldwork took place in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas and surrounding communities in the mountainous region of southeastern México. After the capital Tuxtla Gutierrez, San Cristóbal is the second largest city of the state and is home to a population of a

majority of *mestizos*,[34] a growing number of indigenous Maya, and a small group of residents originally from the United States and Europe. Through his anthropological work in the area, Pierre Van den Berghe has defined San Cristóbal as “a colonial city with a conservative elite and a highly hierarchical class and ethnic structure.”[35] The presence of defined ethnic groups and a large tourist base make it an ideal setting for my study for two main reasons: first, the city serves as an interface between Maya artisans and foreign tourists who make commercial exchanges in various markets and stores; and second, it is a central point of communication for several Maya communities in the area.

For its size, the city contains a large number of hotels, bars, and other tourist services which demonstrate the importance of tourism to the local economy. In 1994, Van den Berghe calculated that out of the 100,000 inhabitants, six to eight percent were directly impacted by tourism through the sale of goods and services to 136,000 tourists visiting per year.[36] Van den Berghe’s research focuses on ethnic-tourism, which is defined by the goal of the tourist to experience a unique, remote and traditional culture. A little over half (55%) of the 175 tourists who responded to his survey stated that they were attracted to the city because of “the Indians and their cultural products.”[37] In more than 10 years, the population of the city has grown to 142,364, according to the 2005 national census, but I was not able to find more recent information about the tourism industry specific to San Cristóbal.[38] My experience with thriving tourist services in San Cristóbal indicates that tourism continues to be an important economic sector. These qualities make San Cristóbal a great setting to study the interaction among ethnic groups through the exchange of artisan crafts to tourists.

Methodology

The focus of my work was framed by my desire to investigate examples of active participation of the artisans involved in the international trade of their crafts. In an economic climate where the tastes of western consumers seem to dominate and control the design of handicrafts, I sought to find instances when the artisans themselves had creative control over their work and therefore the opportunity to define their culture and contribute to the trade. As my project unfolded, I realized that limited views of culture and authenticity obscure examples of artisan agency. Four main sources of my fieldwork help me explore how Western consumers' are caught in the trap of cultural essentialism. Although each is not completely exclusive of the other, they can be defined as follows:

1) I analyzed primary sources such as pamphlets and flyers promoting the sale of crafts and/or informing the reader about cooperative groups and fair trade principles.

2) I conducted fourteen formal interviews and several informal conversations with textile artisans at different levels of involvement in the trade, different age groups, and associated with different organizations. I also spoke with local mestiza shop owners and a local anthropologist working with textile artisans.

3) I observed spaces of interaction among participants in the trade, such as streets, markets, stores and organizations. I sought to understand the climate of exchange and characteristics of huipils for sale and those worn by the Maya women within San Cristóbal and in surrounding indigenous communities.

4) I participated as a volunteer at a nationally owned non-governmental organization. This experience allowed me to see first-hand the way the organization functions, its goals, and its role in the community. It also gave me the opportunity to visit more remote communities to speak to members of artisan groups.

The main limitations of my research were time and experience. I collected the data in a period of three weeks, enough to observe and experience the processes involved in the huipil trade. Being one of my first attempts at ethnographic fieldwork, it was subject to some false starts. Nonetheless, I believe that my overall observations combined with a theoretical framework from other field studies of the international craft trade give me the background to make some general claims about the nature of this exchange.

Analysis

In addition to the qualitative data derived from the interviews, I use quantitative data from four artisan groups associated with the NGO Fundación. It is important to note that generally, the composition of these groups fluctuates yearly; however, while these numbers may not represent permanent standings of these groups, they do represent general trends in the composition of artisan groups. The range of ages of the women involved with Fundación was from 14 to 60 years old, with the majority in their early 20s. Over half of these women were married with children and formally educated up through primary school. Groups are commonly composed of women related to each other, which is expected since these groups form out of communities.

An interesting trend that emerged during my study is the profile of the group leaders. In some groups, this woman was the older, more experienced artisan, while other groups were represented by younger single women. It is important to note this difference because a group representative is responsible for taking finished orders back to the NGO where they can be prepared for display in the store. This task requires that the representative travel from her community to the NGO headquarters, right outside of San Cristóbal, a difficult feat for a married

woman with children. The rest of the group members can work from their homes, frequent locally held meetings and rarely have the need to travel so far.

My interviews with the artisans focused mainly on their perceptions of their work. I got a sense that they have a clear understanding of the differences between the huipils they make for personal and community use (insider) and those made for sale to outsiders. This difference is evident in the amount of work that goes into the two types. Artisans may spend more than 200 hours to make an insider huipil that will cost 300 to 800 pesos. In contrast, artisans spend around 12 hours on a mock blouse that will sell for 100 pesos. The weavers stated that simply it wasn't practical to make traditional blouses for sale because the consumers don't value them the way they do and would not be willing to pay as much. Additionally, only a few weavers have the skills to make the most intricate huipils on a backstrap loom and are paid by their fellow artisans for these garments.

It is important to note that when asked to talk about their traditional garments, the artisans did not point to the clothes they were wearing, as I and other outsiders might expect. Instead, they describe the garments used in ritual activity which are characterized by the use of particular colors and natural materials. They describe changes in their clothing in terms of practicality and taste. The "plastic" shirts that Chamula women wear have replaced the wool huipils traditionally worn in that community because they are easier to wash and last longer. There were patterns in the way various colors were combined and many added some of the bright colors used in their crafts to their own huipils. Their huipils showed that their stylistic choices were based on both community ideals and outside influences.

Discussion

What is an artisan craft? The huipil as a cultural product

Defining an artisan craft is an essential part of studies related to the international craft market. A simple analysis of language points to different understandings of the meaning of artisan crafts.[39] A pertinent example is the difference in definition of artisan crafts in Spanish and English. In Spanish the word *artesanía* is defined as the work of an artisan and implies in its name its association with an art form. In English the terms used in its place are *craft* and *handicraft*, disassociating the work from the concept of art or its creator the artisan and instead emphasizing the process of its creation by hand. In the context of international trade, the association of crafts to different parts of the world attaches the culture of the artisan to the value of the craft. Customers are not just buying a blouse; they are buying a Mayan blouse, a huipil. The propaganda used to attract customers to the huipil and similar products reinforces the cultural dimension of the products. I collected 5 pamphlets from different stores and cooperatives based in San Cristóbal. I found several cultural markers in the use of language, images and content of these documents. The names of the stores are usually in Tzotzil or Tzeltal, the local indigenous Mayan languages. Customers can quickly recognize that the products found in the stores titled “Nail Ch’en”, “Jolom Mayaetik” or “Kitzin” are most likely Mayan without knowing the meaning of those words. Images of Mayan iconography, huipil motifs, and photographs of the weavers wearing their traditional garments add vibrant colors and designs. The content describes the artisan groups and their traditional techniques. All these elements emphasize the cultural value of the products.

Similar strategies are employed in the structure of the stores themselves. Store displays are organized like museums with large photographs of the weavers and descriptions of the processes involved. At Sna Jolobil, a popular cooperative store by the artisan market, huipils for

sale are displayed on the wall by region. Associating products to particular villages emphasizes their uniqueness and the cultural differences among the artisans. Customers will first see the huipils on the wall and then the napkins, pillow cases, and bookmarks with similar motifs and colors. The range of products points to the spectrum of consumer needs. These products are placed together so that the consumer can identify similar cultural markers among the various types of crafts.

One way that anthropologists approach the definition of crafts is based on the consumers' intentions. In her classic book dedicated to Mexican artisan crafts, Marta Turok defines four categories of crafts based on the interest of the consumers involved: massive tourism, interior decoration, collector, and art gallery.[40] Her definitions are useful in understanding the different types of artisan crafts found in Chiapas that range from mass produced napkins and blouses based on traditional designs and symbols to more unique, high-quality items that claim to be a closer representation of traditional textiles. Her analysis also points to the influence of consumer interests in the transformation of the crafts. For example, a craft created for massive tourist sale will have different levels of quality and represent different types of cultural symbolism than an item aimed to form part of a collection.

Despite the differences, the cultural dimension of all the products within the range of artisan crafts makes them unique and attractive to the Western customer. The value of the crafts' cultural dimension explains why tourists are willing to buy low quality blouses with huipil motifs and expensive examples of "traditional" huipils. Customers believe these products are authentic artisan crafts because of their cultural elements. However, the strategies that highlight the culture of the artisans to promote their crafts emphasize a limited view of culture. They present the artisans as a group removed from the rest of society where traditions remain unaltered. For

example, the Kitzin store pamphlet states one of its goals is "favorecer la conservación de la identidad cultural de los productores."[41] It is implied that the artisans' culture must be protected from outside influences. Cultural essentialism makes the artisan crafts more attractive to consumers but also obscures artisans' role in the transformations of their crafts.

Who is the artisan? The huipil marks the artisan

In his study of tourism in San Cristóbal, Van den Berghe defines ethnic tourism by the tourists' desire to experience a cultural other. The great irony of ethnic tourism, he points out, is that it is self destroying.[42] In other words, the authenticity sought by ethnic tourists is put into question by their very presence. This otherness is represented by the *touree* (his term), a member of an exotic culture, who in her interaction with the ethnic tourist becomes a part of the spectacle without choice.[43] The consumers of artisan crafts are the same people as those Van den Berghe describes as ethnic tourists. Cultural otherness is a defining aspect of artisan crafts that is contingent on the culture of the artisans.

The San Cristóbal artisan stores and markets serve as places of interaction between consumers interested in buying culturally identified products and the artisans who represent a remote exotic culture. Customers can interact directly with weavers who are stationed at the stores. Although most stores are run by mestizos or foreigners, Maya women are hired to guide the consumer, do weaving demonstrations, or run the store. These women wear their traditional garments, including a huipil and faja. In the artisan markets, such as Santo Domingo, consumers buy from indigenous women whom they may perceive as the artisans themselves. Numerous tourist agencies in San Cristóbal offer tours to nearby indigenous communities to give visitors the opportunity to visit a Mayan household. Men are rarely visible during these visits, as they no longer wear their traditional garments. Instead, Maya women are strategically placed in the

spaces where consumers form their ideas about Maya culture and where artisan products are for sale. Their presence helps consumers confirm the authenticity of the crafts they buy.

A process called culture: huipil transformations

Consumers' limited view of authenticity blinds them from recognizing that the interactions between consumers and artisans help to define an artisan craft. My interviews with Mayan weavers involved in the craft trade revealed that their traditional clothes are subject to changes in trends. The artisans in San Andres Larrainzar explained that their color scheme has evolved from black and red to a wider range of colors, including purple, yellow, green, and blue. I could see that these new colors were incorporated in the designs of the huipils they wore. Similarly, the artisans from Chamula showed me that the colors they wore originally were green and white, but that they have begun to wear purple, blue, and pink. In Zinacantán, the original red and white stripes have been replaced by vivid tones of purple embroidered flowers. Chris Goertzen explains that dark purple, a color with "no historical precedence" was introduced as "an enlivened black" on artisan crafts to sell to tourists.[44] Changes made in the process of accommodating for consumer tastes have now become a part of the clothes worn by the weavers.

Anthropologist June Nash depicts changes in the artisan work of the potters of Amatenango del Valle, Chiapas. Twenty-two years after her initial fieldwork, Nash returned to Amatenango and found that water storage jars were used as planters in Mestizo homes. These crafts have been further transformed into dove-shaped pots and a series of small clay animals, some of which are not local to Chiapas. These transformations demonstrate the artisans' role in "shaping and diffusing an ideology embedded in stylistic ideas and practices."[45] Nash recognizes that the artisans' ideology is not static, as it can be shaped. Furthermore, the non-native clay animals indicate that the potters are connected to the world outside their local sphere. Although

the original function of the water jars has been transformed, they reflect changes in the needs of the artisans and their interaction with others. Furthermore, the clay doves and animal figurines are now crafts representative of this community.

As a volunteer at the NGO Fundación León XIII, I had the opportunity to observe the process in which artisan crafts are created. This organization has a team of women who work closely with eight groups of weavers from the surrounding indigenous communities. Members of the organization visit these groups regularly to discuss their projects. During our visit to San Andrés, we introduced the weavers to the designer recently hired by the organization. She taught the women to sew together pieces of woven wool to form decorative roll pillows with enlarged huipil motifs. The group discussed colors and designs most likely to attract Western consumers. These artisan crafts are sold in Kitzin, the organization's artisan store in San Cristóbal. The process of creating these crafts highlights how the weavers incorporate new skills and tastes from their interaction with people outside their communities.

In her study of artisans' involvement in craft trade in Chiapas, anthropologist Ramos Maza identifies the creation of "textiles nuevos"[46] emerging from the interests, creativity, and skills of the indigenous, mestiza and foreign women involved.[47] She cites the example of the Aguacatenango blouse, a popular artisan craft. It incorporates elements of the huipil, such as embroidered motifs on a white background, but it is designed specifically for western consumers. The Aguacatenango blouse is decorated with simple designs and made of industrial material, making it easier for innovation and diversification. Visitors now consider the Aguacatenango blouse an artisan craft typical of the area although it is not representative of any particular indigenous group.

Contradictions: Negative versus Positive Influences

One of the negative impacts of the international exchange of artisan products is the role of intermediaries that separate the producers from the consumers. In this process, producers lose control of the end product, which in turn, is not viewed in context or transformed so that it loses its original meaning. Rosenbaum and Goldin use an example of a commercial exporter who cut a woven huipil into pieces and sewed them on western clothing to sell in a catalog.[48] The symbols that were woven in a particular composition to portray a Maya myth lost their meaning in the process. In losing their cultural meaning, these products are reduced to what Nash refers to as "commodities," and are therefore devalued.[49] These scholars are referring to a form of "cultural" devaluation that is linked to monetary devaluation, which can be explained by the difference between the cost of production (labor, skill and cost of raw materials) and what the consumer pays (price).

Devaluation is most visible in the decline in quality of backstrap loom weaving as artisans struggle to maintain a competitive edge by copying products that have succeeded in the market and producing faster and at lower costs.[50] Most exports are made on treadle looms, which are operated by men and thus, marginalize women, who are mostly backstrap loom weavers. The work of a backstrap loom weaver is devaluated because it is bought at the same price as the treadle loom products although the skills and time required to work on a backstrap loom are greater. In this case, the devaluation of a craft that is traditionally a source of female identity and power has negative effects on the economic and cultural status of women in the Maya communities.

According to Rosenbaum and Goldin, the principal problem with the international trade of Maya crafts is not the sale of different items or the influence of new materials, but rather that artisans can lose control over what they produce so that the craft is no longer theirs. When

artisans lose control of the creative process involved in creating their products "community and culture no longer operate as frames of reference."[51] This occurs in mail-order catalogs operated by intermediaries who control all aspects of the artisans' weaving production and infringe on a system in which a weaver controls her choices, materials and schedule.

While acknowledging the conflicts that may arise, Nash points out that women's involvement in organizations such as cooperatives has helped them gain autonomy and leadership roles which have led to changes in the social structure of Maya culture.[52] She uses as an example the rising number of single Maya women who support themselves. The extra money that these women obtain may not be significant to their growing political power, but their experience in working with global organizations has allowed them to improve their lives. Cooperatives have expanded women's political interests and the opportunity to evaluate their culture with new moral ideas. After indigenous uprisings that occurred in Chiapas in 1994, Maya women began to define which Maya traditions were good and bad.[53] These new moral values are the influence of their participation in an international culture, and most importantly, this movement is one that they are choosing for themselves.

Several scholars agree that participating in the global market has allowed Maya people to continue defining themselves as an ethnic group. Nash and Vargas-Cetina recognize the role that cooperatives such as Sna Jolobil can have in reviving ancient designs through education and training. Rosenbaum and Goldin, as well as other scholars, recognize that the changes that the international market has influenced on traditional textiles makes them more affordable and accessible than the more traditionally elaborated forms, allowing Maya people to continue using these textiles. Also, the money that artisans earn from the sale of their products can be used to embellish their own traditional clothes. When Rosenbaum and Goldin state that "changes in

forms of production and exchange are concurrent with changes in Maya culture and conceptions of self," they apply it to the way a lack of creativity changes artisans from viewing themselves as active artists to passive workers.[54] I also see this quote applied in a positive way, to the women who have the ability to question their traditions and propose change that is positive for them.

Conclusion

My analysis of the huipil as an example of the exchange of artisan crafts demonstrates that the current role of the intermediaries is to control the trade by promoting a limited view of authenticity. The interaction between consumer and artisan in defining an artisan craft is not a part of the consumers' limited view of authenticity. The huipil and other artisan crafts are defined as products of a culture that has not changed through time and is separate from the rest of the world. The cultural value of the artisan crafts rests in the otherness of the artisan. To the consumers, the authenticity of the craft results from the connection they make between the craft and the artisan's cultural otherness. This perspective masks the ways that artisans participate in the trade. My work challenges the notion of cultural essentialism embedded in the international craft trade and opens up spaces to acknowledge the contributions of participating artisans. In my research, the huipil is symbolic of a culture that is ever-changing through the social interactions of its members and their exercise of creativity in the crafts that represent them. This idea challenges the notion that particular ethnic groups, such as contemporary Maya, have unchanging and separate cultures disconnected from the global culture.

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Notes

[1] Patricia R. Anawalt, "Textile Research from the Mesoamerican Perspective," in *Beyond Cloth and Cordage: Archaeological Textile Research in the America*, ed. Penelope B. Drooker and Laurie D. Webster (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2000) 216.

[2] Susan Kellog, *Weaving the Past: A History of Latin America's Indigenous Women from the Prehispanic Period to the Present* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 8.

[3] Brenda Rosenbaum and Liliana Goldin, "New Exchange Processes in the International Market: The Re-making of Maya Artisan Production in Guatemala," *Museum Anthropology* 21, no. 2 (1997): 73.

[4] June Nash, "Introduction: Traditional Arts and Changing Markets in Middle America," in *Crafts in the World Market: The Impact of Global Exchange on Middle American Artisans* (Albany: State University of New York, 1993) 3.

[5] Kellog, *Weaving the Past*, 113.

[6] Rosenbaum and Goldin, "New Exchange Processes," 76-77.

[7] Patricia Marks Greenfield, *Weaving Generations Together: Evolving Creativity in the Maya of Chiapas* (Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press, 2004), 29.

[8] Linda Asturias de Barrios, "Weaving and Daily Life," in *The Maya Textile Tradition*, ed. Linda Schele (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1997), 78.

[9] Greenfield, *Weaving Generations Together*, 31.

[10] Asturias de Barrios, "Weaving and Daily Life," 67.

[11] Walter F. Morris, *Living Maya* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., Publishers, 1987), 69.

[12] Ibid., 113.

[13] Walter E. Little, *Mayas in the Marketplace: Tourism, Globalization, and Cultural Identity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2004) 61.

[14] Little, *Mayas in the Marketplace*, 162.

[15] Asturias de Barrios, "Weaving and Daily Life," 81.

[16] Eric Wolf, "Aspects of Group Relations in a Complex Society," *American Anthropology* 58 (1956): 1066.

[17] Ibid., 1067.

[18] Ibid., 1070.

[19] Ramos Maza, Teresa, *Género, Identidades y Relaciones Sociales: Mujeres Rurales y Urbanas en la Producción de Artesanía Textil en Los Altos de Chiapas*. Doctoral Thesis. (Mexico City: Casa Abierta al Tiempo, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, June 2007).

[20] Ibid., 61.

[21]"The reinvention of an artisan craft coincides with and relates to the state agenda to conserve cultural heritage and generate employment by promoting the market of artisan crafts." (My translation) Ibid., 97.

[22] Rosenbaum and Goldin, "New Exchange Processes."

[23] The Fair Trade Federation is based on the following seven principles: fair wages, employment advancement, environment sustainability, public accountability, long-term trade relationships, safe and healthy working conditions, and technical and financial assistance (Grimes 2000: 13).

[24] SERRV International 2006 Annual Report. Electronic document, http://www.agreatergift.org/uploads/media/2006AnnualReport.pdf, accessed on December 11, 2006.

[25] Martha Lynd, "The International Craft Market: A Double-Edged Sword for Guatemalan Maya Women," in *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternative Trade for the Global Economy*, ed. Kimberly M. Grimes and B. Lynne Milgram (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2000), 71.

[26] Elizabeth M. Brumfield, "Cloth, Gender, Continuity, and Change: Fabricating Unity in Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 4 (2006): 872.

[27] Nash, "Introduction," 10.

[28] Rosenbaum and Goldin, "New Exchange Processes," 75.

[29] Ibid., 75.

[30] Gabriela Vargas-Cetina, "Anthropology and Cooperatives: From the Community Paradigm to the Ephemeral Association in Chiapas, Mexico," *Critique of Anthropology* 25, no. 3 (2005): 229.

[31] Ibid., 235.

[32] Nash, "Introduction," 11.

[33] Vargas-Cetina, "Anthropology and Cooperatives," 241.

[34] Mestizo is a term used to refer to a non-indigenous Mexican with connotations of superiority to indigenous people, similar to the term Ladino.

[35] Pierre L. Van den Berghe, *The Quest for the Other: Ethnic Tourism in San Cristobal, Mexico*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1994), 13.

[36] Ibid., 52, 75.

[37] Ibid., 91.

[38] INEGI: Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática 2005, Census Report. Electronic document, http://www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/sistemas/conteo2005/localidad/iter/, accessed December 3, 2007.

[39] I generally refer to artesanías as artisan crafts in English in order to emphasize both the artistic/artisan and hand-made aspects of the work.

[40] Marta Turok, *Cómo Acercarse a la Artesanía* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdes Editores, 1988), 144.

[41] In English: "to conserve the cultural identity of the producers" (my translation).

[42] Van den Berghe, *The Quest for the Other*, 9.

[43] Ibid., 9.

[44] Chris Goertzen, "Crafts, Tourism, and Traditional Life in Chiapas, Mexico," in *Selling the Indian*, ed. Carter Jones Meyer and Diana Royer, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2001) 249.

[45] June Nash, "Artisan Production in Preconquest and Post-colonial Society: Changes in Transmission of Cultural Information in Commodities," *Museum Anthropology* 21, no. 2 (2007): 12.

[46] In English: "new textiles" (my translation).

[47] Teresa Ramos Maza, "Artesanas y Artesanías: Indígenas y Mestizas de Chiapas Construyendo Espacios de Cambio," *Liminar* 2, no. 1 (2004): 50-71.

[48] Rosenbaum and Goldin, "New Exchange Processes," 78.

[49] Nash, "Introduction," 10.

[50] Ibid., 75.

[51] Ibid., 75.

[52] Nash, "Introduction," 9.

[53] June Nash, *Mayan Visions: The Quest for Autonomy in an Age of Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 182.

[54] Rosenbaum and Goldin, "New Exchange Processes," 80.