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## Foodscapes, Foodfields and Identities in Yucatán by Steffan Igor Ayora-Diaz

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**Ayora-Diaz, Steffan Igor. *Foodscapes, Foodfields and Identities in Yucatán*. New York: Berghahn, 2012. xii + 311 pages. Hardcover, \$95.00.**

In this five-chapter treatise from anthropologist Steffan Igor Ayora-Diaz is the story of the Yucatán region's struggle against the hegemonic culinary takeover of a national Mexican cuisine rooted in Mexico City and the legacy of the Spanish Empire (New Spain). Ayora-Diaz, a native of Yucatán, explores the dialectical tension between the post-colonial narrative of Mexican nation building and a counter-narrative from a part of Mexico that was never part of New Spain. Using food (flavors, ingredients, recipes, procedures, techniques, etc.), the author illustrates the vigor with which native Yucatecans have stood up to the homogenizing forces of nationalism. What the reader expects to find is a rationale for Yucatán's regional identity rooted in distance from Mexico's highland core, the peninsula's unique physical geography, and the influence of indigenous Mayan culture. Instead, the following factors surface as the primary explanatory variables for understanding Yucatecan cuisine and, consequently, Yucatán's distinct regional identity: the region's urban elites and immigration streams as they developed during the henequen boom (henequen is a fiber crop used to make rope), its proximity to the Greater Caribbean, and its embrace of cosmopolitanism.

The title of Ayora-Diaz's book is really a synopsis of the book's content. The first two components of the title, foodscapes and foodfields, offer a formula for understanding the third, identities in Yucatán. Foodscape is defined as "an arena where food values are deployed to affirm similarities and differences between local and foreign culinary traditions" (pp. 13-14). With this concept, we can see how Yucatecans could view Mexican national cuisine—tacos, beef dishes, sour cream, etc.—as a foreign influence. The term foodfields, however, is unindexed, undefined and a bit misleading since it has nothing to do with agriculture. Rather, it comprises two parts: the culinary field and the gastronomic field. The culinary field is the place where ideas about Yucatecan food are planted and where regional dishes and meals (expressing much hybridity) are harvested. It is open to creativity and outside influence and is as much cosmopolitan (e.g., influenced by French haute cuisine and Syrian-Lebanese contributions) as it is regional (e.g., heavy on pork and fowl, Seville orange and achiote seeds). Overlapping with the culinary field is the rule-driven gastronomic field. It is the place where iconic regional dishes are refined, prepared, and offered commercially in restaurants and, more recently, in tourist resorts. By combining ingredients from both fields, the culinary and the gastronomic, the reader will come away with a deeper understanding of "identities in the Yucatán" as they have been molded by local, national, regional, and cosmopolitan ideas about how to prepare and consume food so that it affirms modernity yet remains true to what is imagined and constructed as local tradition.

This book, in the guise of a case study of cuisine, offers a post-modern critique of the European blueprint for nation building, a recipe for merging nation and state that is now in trouble all over the world. The regional cuisine of Yucatán becomes a stand-in for Yucatecan identity and a bulwark against internal cultural colonialism. Evidence presented for understanding the negotiation between the core (New Spain) and periphery (Yucatán) comes from ethnographic fieldwork and an examination of texts. It includes personal observation, conversations (not interviews) with cooks and consumers, journals of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century travelers, cookbooks and menus. In fact, one entire chapter is about cookbooks and their role in institutionalizing Yucatecan cuisine. Another is about restaurants and the institutionalization of Yucatecan gastronomy. The analysis also uncovers the ongoing cultural negotiation in the foodfields of the Yu-

catán Peninsula between the dominant culinary values of the Mérida core and the local culinary traditions of its hinterland.

For anyone interested in using food as a marker or shaper of national identity, Ayor-Diaz provides a model case study and guide to the literature. Yucatán and its relationship to Mexico is analogous to regionalisms in other parts of the world, ranging from Catalonia to Taiwan. Companion studies of the relationship between politics and the foodfields of unassimilated regions would make fine topics of investigation for scholars in anthropology, geography, political science, communication, and food studies. In the meantime, go to your local Mexican restaurant and try ordering *queso relleno* (stuffed Edam cheese) or *cochinita pibil* (marinated pork baked in banana leaves). If you have read this book, the response you get will take on new meaning.

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