Performing the community: representation, ritual and reciprocity in the Totonac Highlands of Mexico

Govers, C.J.H.

Citation for published version (APA):
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Anthropological fieldwork provides the privilege of living among people in places quite unlike one’s own. Away from home, anthropologists may find trust and support and develop truly lasting friendships, and I was fortunate enough to find such a congenial place. I therefore feel deeply committed and indebted to the people of the small Mexican mountain village of Nanacatlán. This book could not have been written without their hospitality, understanding, and friendship. Throughout the years I spent among them, their support turned my research into a source of inspiration and pleasure. Here I can only refer to a few people who were directly involved, and realise that I can by no means do justice to all who have been crucial to my fieldwork.

Guadalupe Ortega and Elios Bravo welcomed me into their home and family with care and affection. Irene Castañeda became my assistant, interpreter, and friend; step by step she and her husband Pedro Ramos as well as their relatives, made me understand Totonac ways of living. I remember dearly the late doña Celia Manzano, and the late Gustavo Ramos and Lucinda Posadas, who provided me with a place to stay during the first weeks. Don Felix Ramos shared his knowledge and wisdom of past and present, and I gained many insights from Lorenzo Velázquez and Magdalena Ramos, as well as Alibert Jimenez. Through them I was accepted into their circles of relatives, godchildren, compadres and comadres, and last but not least their children and grandchildren. Therefore, I dedicate this work to the Nanacatecos who show such a remarkable flexibility towards life.

Though our profession’s methodology focuses on acquiring an increasing familiarity with the details of other people’s lives, I have always considered it crucial for anthropologists to reflect on their own ways of living as well as those of others. Ethnography offers the opportunity to study large-scale processes in small places. Conversely, it has been anthropology’s strength to show that macro-social processes are often not as universal in their consequences as we often tacitly, or ethnocentrically, presume. In this study I attempted to understand how this Totonac village experiences the forces of globalisation. Rather than being swept away or undermined by commercialisation, migration, frequent state interventions, and increased media exposure; the community was able to thrive and even revive what they call local traditions (costumbres).

This work owes much to the inspiring and critical staff at the Department of Anthropology of the University of Amsterdam. I am especially grateful to my thesis supervisor Jojada Verrips, who has lent me his ear and given valuable directions and insights throughout the years. His careful reading and passionate comments made for stimulating discussions of the chapters. The Anthropology Department of
Utrecht University has also been part of my research from the very beginning. I am indebted to Rudolf van Zantwijk’s extraordinary familiarity with the Sierra Norte of Puebla and Mexico, and Fabiola Jara Gomez who paved the way to the Escuela de Antropología e Historia (ENAH) in Mexico City and without whom I never would have ended up among Totonacs. At ENAH, Elio Masferrer and his staff received me with enthusiasm throughout the years and Elio graciously pointed me towards Nanacatlán, where he had been doing fieldwork. I especially want to mention Lourdes Baez and José Andrés García for their stimulating discussions and Carlos Garma for sharing his work and insights with me. Miguel Ángel Martínez and his team of the Biological Institute of UNAM (Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México) were like ENAH part of a project on the Sierra Norte de Puebla. Their impressive work in the Sierra provided me with indispensable ethno-botanical information on (medicinal) plants of Nanacatlán. During my regular visits to Mexico City I was more than welcome to stay with Gladys Nock, and later on with Lourdes Baez and her sister Martha.

Fieldwork in Mexico (in 1989, 1994, 1996, and 1997-98) has been financially supported by the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research (WOTRO), the University of Amsterdam (UvA), the Rudolf Lehman Fonds and the Society for Scientific Research in the Tropics (Treub-Maatschappij). I am grateful to my previous (SISWO) and current (NWO/WOTRO) employers for allowing me to take leave for fieldwork and writing.

A major source of inspiration came from discussions and insights from colleagues and I want to acknowledge the main influences on my work. I greatly appreciated the weekly seminars of Johannes Fabian and, for too short a time, the late Bob Scholte. The course on the Increase of Rituals and Feasts that Jeremy Boissevain taught in the mid 1980s was my first introduction into this rich field of study. The Centre for Latin America Research and Documentation (CEDLA) facilitated the monthly meetings of junior researchers (OLA) to whom I owe a lot for their careful comments. I was fortunate to be part of the monthly seminars of the WOTRO programme on Globalization and the Construction of Communal Identities. In ALER (Asociacion Latinoamericiana para el Estudio de las Religiones) I always looked forward to meetings with colleagues from Latin America and Europe. In Groningen the Centro de Estudios Mexicanos (CEM) organised valuable workshops. It was a pleasure to work and write with Hans Vermeulen of the Institute of Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES, UvA) who so generously shared his knowledge on ethnicity and nationalism. After many years of relative quiet in Totonac highland studies, my work coincides with that of Nicolas Ellison (2004) and William Smith (2005), who both did their fieldwork in the nearby village of Huehuetla. To mention other people by name would add too many additional pages, but I appreciate each and every one of them.

Several people were directly involved in this publication. Mr. H. Streefkerk made the beautiful maps and drawings. I thank Michael Maier for editing the English text, Eric Vocking for the graphics and lay-out, and René van der Haar for
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

checking its bibliography. Antoon Hoogveld generously shared his literature on food, and Birgit Meyer carefully read the first chapter and challenged me to sharpen my argument. I owe the series editors for their support.

I have always felt the encouragement of family, friends, neighbours, and colleagues. My colleagues at WOTRO and the International Department of the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) deserve special mention because they so patiently put up with the chaos that invariably accompanies the process of thesis writing. Additionally, I found friendship in many places from Mexico, Honduras, Indonesia, and the UK to France and lately India and Curacao.

Closer to home large families and dear friends fortunately turn even small occasions into major ones! I do appreciate everybody’s patience with yet another period of neglect, as well as for drawing me away from work when I was overdoing it; I am especially grateful to Lida Roos, Margreet Bersma, Birgit Meyer, Hanny Govers, Iris Hinfelaar, Joop Govers, Joris Hüsken and Jessica van Hout. I am looking forward to spending more time together. I remember my late mother-in-law Riet Hüsken with affection. My father, the late Jan Govers, would have been proud to see this study conclude. My mother Marietje Govers-van den Berg has always been an example of enthusiasm and vitality, and encouraged me to go my own way. Frans Hüsken shared his insights, visited me in Mexico, traced crucial articles and books and read the manuscript with his usual care. He was most vital to this study by his firm belief in its completion and his very presence.