A Forest of Trees: Postclassic K'iche'an Identity and the Anthropological Problem of Ethnicity

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Abstract

Individuals and groups throughout the world have noted and continue to define themselves in terms of perceived differences. Nonetheless, ethnicity is a construct limited to complex societies. It is discursive in nature, and hence, is often imposed upon subaltern groups by the dominant members or factions of society that shape discourse. Moreover, it is difficult for the archaeologist, ethnohistorian and ethnographer to distinguish ethnicity from other forms of group identity. Rather than focussing on ethnicity - a conceptual category that might not have existed within Postclassic Maya society - it is both easier and more meaningful to ask general questions about highland identity: (1) How did K'iche'an peoples construct identity?; (2) How did dominant K'iche'an factions use identity to promote hegemonic projects, and how did other groups manipulate identity to resist those projects?; and finally, (3) What sorts of community were made possible by K'iche'an forms of identity, and what kinds of organisation were precluded?

Resumen

A lo largo del mundo individuos y grupos han notado diferencias, y continúan definiendóse sobre la base de tales percepciones. No obstante, la etnicidad es una construcción limitada a las sociedades complejas. Su naturaleza es discursiva, y por eso frecuentemente es impuesta sobre los grupos subalternos por los miembros o facciones dominantes de la sociedad, que le dan forma al discurso. Además, es difícil para arqueólogos, etnohistoriadores y etnógrafos distinguir entre etnicidad y otras formas de identidad grupal. En vez de enfocarnos en la etnicidad - una categoría conceptual que pudo no haber existido en la sociedad Maya del Posclásico - es más fácil y también más significativo hacernos preguntas generales sobre la identidad del altiplano: (1) ¿Cómo construían su identidad las poblaciones K'iche'?; (2) ¿Cómo las facciones dominantes K'iche' usaban la identidad para promover proyectos hegemónicos, y cómo otros grupos manipulaban la identidad para resistir a esos proyectos?; y finalmente, (3) ¿Qué tipos de comunidad eran permitidos por las formas de identidad K'iche', y qué tipos de organización eran imposibles?

During much of the 20th century, Anglo-American anthropologists viewed ethnicity as a collective identity reflecting shared beliefs, behaviours, language, material culture, history and territory. Archaeologists, who often equated archaeological cultures with ethnic groups, focussed on the last three of these features. Ethnicity and culture - viewed either as a set of shared beliefs or as an extrasomatic means of adaptation - were seen as closely allied if not synonymous concepts. For these scholars, ethnicity was the manifest and juxtaposed expression of distinct cultures. Few anthropologists of this period seriously entertained the notion that ethnicity is rooted in biology, but it is fair to say that many considered it to be a natural, and in some sense, primordial expression of culture.

Americanist archaeologists of the 1960s and 1970s rejected the static functionalist view of culture, but never adequately embraced or explained ethnicity as a process. Moreover, experiential or phenomenological aspects of ethnicity have largely been ignored except by historical archaeologists interested in race and slavery (e.g. Singleton 1995, 2001; Farnsworth 2000).

The life history approach, now employed by many biological anthropologists (e.g. Kelley & Angel 1987; Lovell & Dublenko 1999; Cox 2001; Larsen 2002), also may be used to examine how individuals experience their ethnic identity. Nonetheless, anthropology as a whole still lacks a coherent phenomenological approach to ethnicity.

It has only been in the last few decades, since the demise of the culture-concept as the central unifier of American anthropology, that we have come to question ethnicity as a natural category. But we are now practically unanimous in asserting that ethnicity is a socially constructed, fluid, context-specific and frequently contested category. In the last few years, many of us have adopted practice or agency theory as our principal approach to society, and view ethnicity as but one facet of the dialectic between "structure" and "agents". Some scholars (e.g. Dietler & Herbich 1998; McAnany, this

volume) specifically cite Bourdieu's version of *habitus* as useful for understanding ethnicity. But *habitus*, in all versions of the concept including Bourdieu's, refers to the non-discursive aspects of culture. I argue, in contrast, that ethnicity *is* discursive; it is very much a part of the language of claims to property, rights and history. For those who insist that ethnicity is rooted in non-discursive *habitus*, I pose two questions: (1) Why is it so easy for individuals to change their ethnic identity depending on the social context of a given interaction?; and (2) How can hegemonic states impose ethnic identity, and hence, both *techniques du corps* and daily practices, upon individuals and groups? [1]

I also stress that as configured by Bourdieu, both *habitus* and his rather restricted vision of agency refer to the individual, not to the group. For these concepts to be applicable to issues of ethnic rather than individual identity, a collective notion of agency must be employed. Herein lies one of the principal difficulties with the concept of ethnicity: How is it different from other forms of individual or group identity?

I begin this chapter by briefly considering several examples of how ethnicity was studied by 20th century archaeologists and ethnohistorians working in Mesoamerica. These scholars did not explicitly define ethnicity, but saw it as a natural expression of cultural difference. As such, ethnicity - like culture - was objectifiable. Their goal was to identify ethnicity in the archaeological or ethnohistorical record. Theoretical questions focussed not on how ethnic identity was negotiated, constructed, compelled, resisted or functioned, but only on how it was manifested in the realm of material culture. To use a term made popular by the New Archaeology, ethnicity was a subject of Middle Range Theory. With an adequate set of epistemological tools, ethnicity was viewed as something that could be observed or gleaned from the archaeological record. Ironically, some processual archaeologists treated ethnicity as an object, not as a process. It is equally ironic that postprocessual archaeologists, in accepting that ethnicity is contested, fluid and dynamic, consider it to be a process.

Ethnicity and Ancient Mesoamerica

In the late 20th century, archaeological discussions of ethnicity often focussed on the context of migration and the concepts of internal versus external displays of identity. Burmeister (2002), in a cogent yet somewhat anachronistic archaeological study of ethnicity, recently argued that the internal domain (aspects of the behaviour of a migrating group that are generally hidden from members of the host society) is more likely to reflect ethnicity than the public or external domain. This pattern is viewed as common among ethnic minorities who lack political power, especially those who have also been subject to diaspora (e.g. Stein 1998, 1999). Conversely, colonial groups who rule indigenous populations might emphasise their ethnic distinctions in public realms - where it is most important to separate the self from the local other - and downplay such differences within the household. This is particularly true when an exogenous elite class of men take local women to be their partners. In such situations, the public realm reflects clear power distinctions linked to identity, but colonial households are frontiers where foreigners and their children either become assimilated or are subject to creolisation, a form of ethnogenesis.

The internal/external dichotomy has long been considered in archaeological studies of Mesoamerican ethnicity. Spence (1992, 1996), for example, studies the question of ethnic identity within the Oaxaca Barrio of Classic-period Teotihuacan. He emphasises that resident Zapotecs lived in Teotihuacan-style apartment compounds and used Teotihuacan-style serving vessels, yet some cooking vessels and mortuary practices from the Zapotec homeland were retained. In this case, Zapotec identity was manifested most clearly in private and culturally conservative domains: the kitchen and the tomb. The marginal location of the Oaxaca Barrio within the city of Teotihuacan, the decidedly middle status of its architecture and material assemblage, and the internal rather than external pattern of ethnic display all argue that Zapotecs living in Teotihuacan were neither powerful colonialists nor elite conquerors.

[1] The Nuremberg Race Laws of 1935 classified fully-assimilated Christians with three Jewish grandparent as "Full Jews" and created the entirely new ethnic identity (or, more accurately, identities) of *Mischlinge*. Moreover, Aryan Germans married to Jews on 15 September 1935 were classified as Jewish, regardless of their own ancestry, religion or heritage. Was the *habitus* of an Aryan German whose Jewish spouse died on 14 September different from that of someone whose spouse lived beyond that date? This example underscores: (1) the absurdity of *habitus* as a basis for ethnic ascription; and (2) the clear role that the dominant discourse can play in determining, defining and even creating ethnic status.

Very different arguments have been constructed by Kidder *et al.* (1946), Sanders (1977) and Carmack (1981). They all suggest that the lack of household displays of foreign identity in the ancient Guatemalan highlands implies that politically dominant colonists - Teotihuacanos at Kaminaljuyu during the Early Classic or "Mexicanised" Ch'ontal Maya at Q'umarkaj during the Late Postclassic - were men. In both cases, immigrants are assumed to be dominant elite males whose local wives produced highland Maya utilitarian ceramics rather than the Teotihuacan or Gulf Coast forms that would be expected if women also migrated with them to the Guatemalan highlands. It must be stressed that, for both periods, the actual presence of colonists is conjectured rather than demonstrated through biological studies, so the absence of ceramic evidence for migration therefore should not be construed as indicating that only men migrated. In fact, Carmack (1981), who musters the strongest case for migration, cautions that the same ethno-historical documents that describe the origins of the K'iche' ruling families also note that both men and women participated in the migrations.

These studies are both informative and stimulating, but they provide little insight regarding how ethnicity, as a form of identity, functioned in ancient Mesoamerica. Instead, they focus on the methodological means by which ethnic (or other forms of cultural) identity may be observed in or inferred from the archaeological or ethnohistorical record. Three key problems with many 20th century discussions of ancient ethnicity are: (1) the general difficulty of identifying emic categorisations including ethnic affiliation; (2) a failure to realise that ethnic identity is neither static nor uniformly expressed; and (3) archaeological cultures, defined from modern classificatory studies of artefacts, are no more isomorphic with ancient societies than contemporary material cultures are identical to modern ethnographic societies. It is only a few aspects of culture, not the sum of all similarities and differences, which are used emblematically to define emic categories of "us" and "them". Moreover, there is no clear way that archaeologists can identify which categories of material culture have emblematic value. In most cases, we have no way of knowing if prehistoric peoples defined, recognised or declared their identity through, for example, the use of particular pottery designs. This is precisely why archaeological labels such as the "Linear Band Ceramic people" are absurd when used as tags for how people identified themselves.

Two other problems are related to the concept of ethnicity itself. First, ethnicity frequently is a negative attribute used to disenfranchise subaltern groups. Discussions of ancient ethnicity are habitually limited by our own unconscious preconceptions and biases, and discourse concerning contemporary ethnicity often has potentially dangerous political consequences. Second, ethnicity is both structurally and functionally similar to other forms of collective identity, and hence, is difficult to isolate or tease apart as an essential category.

Ethnicity and Identity

The word 'ethnicity' is derived from the Greek noun *ethnos*, used to describe foreign people or nations. In the western world, the words 'ethnic' and 'heathen' were near synonyms until the 18th century. In a multi-ethnic, state-level society, those who are viewed as the most colourful, most different and most "ethnic" are often among the least powerful. Ethnicity becomes a way to categorise the Other as different and inferior. Like biological species, ethnic groups become the objects of study in natural history museums and even, sadly, zoological gardens.

A particular ethnic identity may be imposed (but see below) on subaltern groups (i.e., marginalised or lower-class members of society) by those who dominate society. The criteria for imposing ethnic identity may not be recognised as valid by members of the subaltern groups. Such criteria often are inherently reductionist. The United States government, for example, classifies Nicaraguan immigrants whose ancestors came from Africa, Zapotecs from Mexico and Uruguayans of Italian ancestry all as "Hispanic". It is tempting to view this as a linguistic categorisation, but it is conceivable that individuals from any of these groups might not speak Spanish.

The purpose of ethnicity, like the similar concept of race, often is to deprive people of their capacity for exerting power. Unmarked, dominant groups frequently do not see themselves as belonging to any particular ethnicity, except in two situations: (1) when they believe they possess characteristics that endow them with the right to expand their territory, wealth or power; and (2) when they perceive themselves as threatened by outsiders. The emergence of extreme ethnic nationalism in modern Europe and America reflects both a sense of manifest destiny and the fear of contagion or destruction. Thus, in nation states,

ethnicity may be a form of group identity that the powerful seek to impose on subaltern groups, or is adopted in project-motivated or fear-driven circumstances. It can legitimise social structure, be a tool of resistance or survival or be a means of achieving change.

Manuel Castells: Ethnicity as a Form of Identity

Ethnicity, like race, gender, language, political party and factional affiliation, is but one form of symbolically differentiated group identity. Each individual may have a shifting plurality of identities many of which are collective. In the second volume of his landmark trilogy *The Information Age: Economy, Society, and Culture*, Castells (1997) proposes three distinct origins and forms of collective identity. The first, a *legitimising identity*, is introduced by dominant social actors in order to extend and rationalise their authority and domination. In contrast, *resistance identity* is created by those agents who are devalued or stigmatised by dominating institutions or actors. Groups that share a common resistance identity struggle against existing power structures or try to survive according to principles different from those espoused by controlling authorities. Finally, Castells proposes a third form of collective consciousness that exists when social actors build a new identity that redesigns and redefines their position in society, and therefore transforms existing social structure. This very conscious and transformative variety is called *programme identity*.

Ethnicity as Cultural Totemism

Ethnicity is an emic way of classifying, categorising and even ranking groups of people.[2] Ethnic groups are culturally marked categories. Such classification entails identifying one or more cultural traits or characteristics that contrast groups against each other. In many cases, such traits are used in an emblematic way to broadcast solidarity within a group. But the key point is that such traits - what Schwartz (1995) calls "cultural totems" - must contrast the identity of one group in relation to others within its world. Ethnic distinctions, therefore, cannot be defined within a population that considers itself to be homogeneous; ethnicity entails essentialist and contrasting classification as well as a perceived ordinal hierarchy. Such classification schemes often place one's own group above other ethnic groups. Order may be based on actual power or wealth, but subaltern ethnic groups may believe that they have moral, historical, intellectual or physical superiority.

Another important aspect of ethnicity is that, in the contemporary discourse of cultural claims, it implies collective property rights (for an excellent critique of this notion, cf. Brown 1998). An ethnic group, therefore, may be conceived of as a form of corporate group. Ethnic property may be real - such as territory and the resources found in it - or intangible. Intangible property may include titles, religious duties or obligations, defined occupations or specific and privileged claims to history.

Given the etymology of the term and the fact that ethnicity often implies the existence of both politically dominant and subaltern groups (the unmarked "us" versus the exotic and inferior "them"), it is reasonable to ask if ethnicity can exist without the political structures that organise disparate groups into pluralistic nation states. Schwartz (1995:52) argues that such distinctions do exist in all societies because it is natural for all people to instance the similarities and differences of their social world. In contrast, I argue that ethnic differences may be distinguished from other forms of cultural distinctions because: (1) they exist only in cases where the dominant political discourse defines both hegemonic and subaltern status (i.e. within state-level societies); (2) they are defined and recognised not only by members of the groups judged to be ethnic, but - perhaps more importantly - by the discourse put forward by those in power; and (3) ethnic expression and identity, as well as reactions to them, issue from the conflict over what the dominant discourse should be. Ethnicity, therefore, can be defined as an emergent phenomenon generated by the contention of legitimisation, resistance and programme identities within the context of stratified power. When either hegemonic or subaltern groups appeal to biology to reify ethnicity, it becomes race.[3]

[2] It is not my goal here to question the etic utility of other sorts of categories constructed by anthropologists. I stress, however, that: (1) Such essential categories and the criteria used to define them should not be used to reify emic views of ethnicity or race; and (2) It is extremely difficult to know to what degree the criteria used by the analyst to form essential categories match those used to define emic ethnicity.

[3] Contemporary scientific biology often rejects the concept of human races, therefore, it might be more precise to

This definition specifies the context of ethnicity, but does not explicitly distinguish it from other culturally defined categories of identity such as language group, religion, caste or even gender. Social distinctions may be based on any of the cultural traits used to define these categories, and hence, could form the basis of ethnic differentiation. Or are religion, gender and the like somehow different from ethnicity?

The Societal Scale of Ethnicity

One potential difference between ethnicity and other forms of identity is scale. It is tempting to view ethnicity merely as the largest scale of oppositionally defined identity that operates within the state. Caste, language and religion can be used to differentiate people who share the same ethnic identity, yet each forms a community larger than the family, lineage or clan. But caste, language and religion can also be operationalised at larger levels that crosscut ethnic and even national distinctions. Thus, these categories are manifested at scales that can be smaller or larger than both the ethnic group and even the nation state.

Gender, unlike ethnicity, caste or even - in most cases - language and religion, is unrelated to descent. In this sense, gender is very different from other forms of identity. Moreover, gender distinctions are operational at all scales of human interaction and crosscut family, lineage and ethnic lines. Families and lineages - with notable exceptions, particularly among those with high or very low status - are frequently ethnically heterogeneous. Except under extraordinary circumstances, Ego does not classify father, mother or sibling as belonging to a different ethnicity. An individual living in a village may be expected to know all living members of his family or her lineage, but it would be exceedingly rare to know all members of one's ethnic group. Ethnicity, like the related concept of nationalism, creates an "imagined community" (Anderson 1983) that extends well beyond the experiential. Thus, ethnicity is operationalised on a much larger scale than the family, lineage or clan. Nonetheless, it shares with these identities an abstract level that includes the living, dead and yet to be born.[4]

Ethnicity is also situational and may be manifested at different scales. A pluralistic society contains groups that define themselves in ethnic opposition, and hence, tends to emphasise distinctions. Yet within a larger context, members of those same opposed ethnic groups may seek emblematic cultural totems that create solidarity. For example, university students from Africa living abroad may create ethnic solidarity with people who, at home, would be considered as very different, even coming from different nation states. The cultural totems used to broadcast both group membership and distinction from other large-scale or global ethnic groups would not be the same as those used within the home country. In some sense, then, ethnicity may be nested, and fiercely fought distinctions on one scale of interaction may be less relevant at another scale. Moving in the opposite direction of scale, ethnicity may be emically marked even among groups that, to the outsider, seem virtually indistinguishable. As totemic distinctions become fine grained, they may become more jealously guarded.

A problem with the cultural totem approach to ethnicity proposed by Schwartz (1995) is that it relies purely on cultural - rather than empirical - knowledge. In other words, ethnicity is defined by the understanding produced by culture and society of totemically-marked human relationships. Ethnicity is neither processual, by which I mean configured by the iterative and continual interaction of agents and structure, nor is it phenomenological. In this formulation, ethnicity becomes static and the experiential aspect of identity is lost. The night of 9 November, 1938 saw no changes in the emblematic cultural totems used to distinguish German Jews from gentiles. Yet Kristallnacht changed forever the experience of being Jewish. Both the causes and results of this new experience of Judaism were conscious and deliberate shifts in the dominant discourse and what Roseberry (1996) calls social fields of force. For this reason, I have defined ethnicity in terms of contested discourse. In this instance, the change in discourse had little to do with the resistance identity of Jews. Instead, it was determined by a shift within the dominant discourse of the Nazi programme.

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specify "pseudobiology" or "ethnobiology". What is most fascinating about the concept of race is its appeal to species and categorisation schemes of the natural world as a means of understanding human relations. Therefore, however it is defined, race has a totemic quality. The totemic nature of the concept of race might explain its persistence.

[4] Donald F. Tuzin (personal communication, 2006) points out that, because of descent, the dead and unborn are far more relevant to the family, lineage and clan than they are to ethnic identity. In fact, the family, lineage and clan often *mediate* between ethnic identity and the dead.

Ethnicity as a Rhetorical Device of Hegemony and Resistence

Given that ethnicity is a pronounced way of categorising people within nation states, Roseberry argues that Gramschi's notion of hegemony is particularly relevant to any discussion of ethnicity. But rather than considering hegemony as the monolithic creation of ideological consensus or the passive acceptance of coercion by subaltern groups, he suggests that it is better to view it as "a problematic, contested, political *process* of domination and struggle" (Roseberry 1996:77). The hegemonic process and common discursive framework of society are not completed achievements of the state, but are ongoing projects. Castells' (1997) legitimising and resistance identities, therefore, are nothing more than examples of programme identities, and ethnicity may be used as rhetorical or ideological devices in the service of those programmes.

Recognising hegemony as a project and all forms of identities as project identities, the distinction between ethnicity and other forms of community and group identity become even more blurred. The important questions to ask become:

> How does a particular group or faction vying for dominance construct or present its rules or project? In its attempt to create an "illusory community" (as Marx and Engels expressed it), what other forms of potential community are ruled out, placed out of bounds? Against what other forms of potential community are dominant projects placed? What alternative forms of community are possible *within* a particular hegemonic project? What alternative forms can only develop outside that project, gaining their community-forming power through opposition? (Roseberry 1996:84).

Questions specific to the Postclassic Maya highlands include: (1) How was identity constructed by dominant K'iche' groups?; (2) How did the K'iche' manipulate identity in order to promote their hegemonic project?; (3) Conversely, how did other groups use identity to resist that project?; (4) How did "ethnogenesis" (here defined as the creation of new group identities) promote various projects?; and (5) What forms of community thrived in the Maya highlands as a result?

Identity in the Maya Highlands

The Problem with Language as Identity

Contemporary Maya identity defies simple classification. Linguistic maps of Guatemala divide the country into territories where different languages are spoken. We give those languages names such as K'iche', Kaqchikel or Tz'utujil, names that are derived from the political factions and coalitions that dominated the highlands at the time of Spanish conquest. It is tempting, therefore, to misinterpret linguistic maps as indicating distinct ethnic territories relevant to the Postclassic period. Sol Tax (1937) argued that in the Lake Atitlán region during the early 20th century, identity was based on territory and not on language. But Tax's territorial unit is, for the most part, much smaller than that shown on linguistic maps. Instead, the territorial unit of identity is the *municipio* or township, established in the colonial period. Many individuals from the rural highlands still identify most closely with their *municipio* of origin. In addition to claims to distinct lands and the resources in them, *municipios* have different patron saints and most are typified by unique dress or *traje*.

Today, linguistic distinctions are viewed as important but frequently are confused or considered to be nondiagnostic. For example, I once spoke Kaqchikel to a woman from Nahualá, a K'iche'-speaking *municipio*. She clapped her hands and said: "You speak K'iche', but like the people from Sololá [a Kaqchikel-speaking *municipio*]"! Since the 1980s, the Maya revitalisation movement has led many educated people to see themselves as part of a larger community. This community may be called "Maya" (in opposition to Latino or Gringo) or even "Indigenous" (in solidarity with all Fourth World peoples). Although linguistic renaissance plays a vital and central role in the revitalisation movement (e.g. England 2003), the specific Mayan language that one speaks is irrelevant to either of these two project identities. Nonetheless, I have met many Maya intellectuals who identify as Kaqchikel. Conversations with several have revealed a desire not to differentiate themselves linguistically from other Maya, but to claim historical descent from the people of Iximche', whose resistance to both the K'iche' and Spaniards is described by the *Memorial de Sololá*. These intellectuals use social memory and their history, rather than their particular language, as cultural totems.

Thus, despite the fact that dominant groups tend to employ language as the principal tool to ascribe contemporary Maya to ethnic categories, many of them view their identities and communities as rooted in other factors. For most highland Maya, identity is based strongly in local place and way of life. For the educated elite, the self is part of a larger community that either transcends particular language boundaries or is rooted in historical memory rather than particular language. Essentialising the Maya according to linguistic boundaries that we - as outsiders - recognise is a hegemonic exercise. When archaeologists and ethnohistorians impose ethnic identities upon ancient groups within non-state societies, we do so within the context of our own modern state-level world. We are unconsciously extending the dominant contemporary discourse and our own totemic means of classification into the past. A better approach would be to study the broader question of how past identities were formed and how they functioned, and to leave ethnicity behind.

It is certain that during the Postclassic period, the highland Maya formed their identities in ways that are very different from those used today.[5] If we should hesitate to label modern communities as belonging to ethnic groups called "Kaqchikel" or "K'iche'" (rather than Tax's *municipio* identities or, at the other extreme, the current project identities of "Maya" and "Indigenous"), then we must be especially careful not to assume that speakers of each of these languages all shared an identity before the conquest. Again, Western scholars have named many of these languages after particular political factions. The Kaqchikel of Iximche' and the Chajoma' of Saqik'ajol Nimakaqajpek ("Mixco" Viejo) spoke the same language (what we call Kaqchikel). But ethnohistorical documents reveal that they considered themselves to be distinct peoples, as did the K'iche' of Q'umarkaj and the Achi of Rab'inal. Moreover, it is highly likely that some individuals and groups who belonged to the K'iche' alliance did not speak that language when they first arrived in the Maya highlands, and had origins that were distinct and different from those of other K'iche'. That is, the K'iche' "ethnicity" (when viewed from the state-level perspective of a modern anthropologist) contained groups that appear to us to be "ethnically" distinct. This paradox underscores the problem of interpreting K'iche'an identity in terms of ethnicity. Finally, the linguistic shifts separating modern K'iche'an languages are not deeply rooted in history. At the time of the Spanish conquest, Kaqchikel, Tz'utujil and K'iche' (not to mention Achi, a language defined by political concerns) were much more similar than they are today. Like the modern woman of Nahualá, it is likely that most 15th century K'iche'an speakers would have recognised linguistic differences among the K'iche', Kaqchikel and Tz'utujil, but would have considered those differences to be little more than peculiar regionalisms.

Most importantly, it is not at all clear that language played an important role in the projects that defined various highland identities. As such, language affiliation may have been irrelevant to the formation of collective identity, that is, the process of ethnogenesis. Although K'iche'an languages have been spoken in the central highlands of Guatemala for at least eighteen centuries, the specific K'iche' project identity - shared by several groups with distinct origins who formed a political alliance - began to form only in the Postclassic period. The project of the K'iche' (as well as other groups such as the Kaqchikel) was to establish themselves as the dominant military and political force in the highlands in order to guarantee preferential access to, or control of, resources. These resources included rich agricultural land, rubber, cacao, cotton, labour and long-distance trade routes. As time progressed, the project changed somewhat to include the establishment of class structure. I argue that the second half of this project, what might be called a legitimising identity, was accomplished in part through the process of "nahuaization" (Braswell 2001, 2003b).

The Totemic Nature of Maya Surnames

Anthroponomastics provide many clues regarding how identity was constructed in ancient times. Surnames in both the Old and New World are a relatively recent phenomenon. In many cases they were imposed by religious or secular authorities, but their imposition does not negate the social reality they encode. English surnames often reflect profession, particular place of origin, other geographical features or individual traits: all characteristics related to identity. Irish- and Scandinavian-

[5] Van Akkeren (2000, 2005), in fact, stresses that the K'iche' confederation of the Early Postclassic was very different in identity from that of the early colonial period, when the most famous indigenous highland documents were written.

Americans often have surnames derived from the personal name or nickname of an ancestor, reflecting concepts of lineage and descent. The surnames of African-Americans, in turn, most often are a legacy of slavery. Relatively few surnames of European origin are common nouns that link descent lines to plants or animals.

Many modern Q'eqchi' surnames appear in the *Testamento Chicojl*, *Testamento Tontem* and *Testamento Tux*. These three documents are copies of earlier Q'eqchi' manuscripts dating - apparently - as early as 1539 C.E., that is, before the final conquest of the Verapaz (see Weeks 1997, for translations and interpretations of these documents). The antiquity of Q'eqchi' surnames and the importance ascribed to them strongly suggests that they were not invented by Spanish clerics or administrators. Some of the Q'eqchi' (as well as Ch'ol) surnames mentioned in these documents contain the suffix *-na* ("house"), an important clue to social structure discussed below. But what is most interesting is the meaning of Q'eqchi' surnames. Although a few are derived from various common nouns or properties (such as colour), the vast majority specifically name animals or plants.

Surnames in other highland and lowland Mayan languages are more varied (indeed, many are borrowed from Spanish, reflecting colonial land tenure and labour organisation), but animal and plant names are also quite common and important among modern speakers of K'iche', Tz'utujil, Kaqchikel and Yucatec. The nature of all these surnames in (at least) five languages, therefore, suggests that they were derived from ancient animal and plant totems. These totems may have been the emblematic property of particular lineages, houses, clans or even larger organisations that resembled tribes.

Totemism classifies humans into groups by applying analogies with categories recognised in the natural world. Conversely, totemism is a way of organising the natural world according to principles observed in human society. Thus, the relationship of different species of plants and animals to each other may also be interpreted according to perceived differences in human relations and history. Finally, as Schwartz (1995:49) points out, totemism is also a world view and implies a particular sort of mythology of human origins.

Surnames of the highland Maya, therefore, suggest that the roots of group identity may be found in totemic practices. The natural world both structured and was structured by the categorisation of humans into groups. Traces of totemism may be seen in the origin myths of the *Popol Wuj* and *Memorial de Sololá*, and such totemism was almost certainly ancient by the Postclassic period. Nonetheless, analysis of the sections of the *Popol Wuj* that describe the monkey people of an earlier creation or the bats of Xib'alb'a - to offer but two examples - may one day lead us to understand something about divisions within K'iche'an society and the social or religious roles ascribed to corporate groups named B'atz' ("monkey") or Sotz'il ("bat people").

The names used today for several highland languages - including Tz'utujil, Kaqchikel and K'iche' - are borrowed from particular corporate groups, houses or political factions. These, in turn, were named after their totem: in each case, a plant. Among the many other important totemic names of the central highlands is Tuquche'("oak people"), an important political faction within the Kaqchikel alliance.[6] Especially important are factional names that mention trees. Trees - as in many European languages - are often appealed to as a metaphor for descent and lineage. The K'iche' ("many trees") are not merely one tree, but quite literally a forest.[7] This forest of trees may refer to, among other things, the diverse origins of the nine Great Houses within the ruling K'aweq faction of the K'iche' alliance.[8]

The *Memorial de Sololá* claims that the name Kaqchikel ("red branch people") derives from the colour of the walking sticks given to their leaders, Gagavitz and Zactecauh, at Tulan. These walking sticks play a vital role in the ensuing migration myth, and hence, might be viewed as a badge of social memory and corporate inheritance.[9] But it also is possible that the authors of the *Memorial* are engaging in folk etymology. The Kaqchikel also associate themselves with the West Tulan, one of the four

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[6] The name of a third important faction of the Kaqchikel, the Xajil, may be glossed as "dance people", perhaps a reference to important religious rites that were the corporate property of this group. The third important Kaqchikel faction was the Sotz'il, a totemic name meaning "bat people".

[7] Judith Maxwell (personal communication 2006) writes that authors of the *Memorial de Sololá* occasionally substituted *k'echelaj* ("woods") for *K'iche'*.

[8] Van Akkeren (2000:81-85) and Breton (1999) discuss the importance of the bee as a totem of the linguistic forbears of the Poqomam and Poqomchi.

[9] The walking sticks allow the Kaqchikel to travel over the waters in a manner that echoes the parting of the Sea of Reeds by Moses and Aaron. The Christian authors of the *Memorial de Sololá* deliberately drew parallels between their own history and *Exodus*.

that define the cardinal sides of the world. Although the lowland Maya typically associated west with the colour black rather than red, the word 'Kaqchikel' resonates with the much older mythological conception of the four world trees that hold up the heavens.

Nimja and Chinamit: Highland Great Houses

Within the central highlands of Guatemala the fundamental unit of identity beyond the household was the *chinamit* or *nimja.*[10] Citing a quotation from the *Popol Wuj*, van Akkeren (2006) points out that the two words are used interchangeably. *Nimja* ("great house") has Maya roots, but might best be understood as a literal translation of the Nahua *calpolli. Chinamit,* which is a borrowed Nahua term, means "fenced-in place", which led Carmack (1977:12-13) to interpret it as a feudal estate. But it can also mean "barrio or suburb", and hence, indicates residence and territory. Hill (1984), therefore, regards the *chinamit* as a closed corporate group defined by territorial concerns. Hill and Monaghan (1987) later elaborated on the similarities between the K'iche'an *chinamit* and the Aztec *calpolli.* In their model, the *chinamit* was a largely endogamous community that shared a group identity defined by localised settlement and common rights over land and natural resources. The boundaries of these territories are described in many colonial land-tenure documents, and also play pivotal roles in the highland migration myths that frequently are part of such legal papers. Common boundary markers include rivers and valleys, springs and water holes (especially important in Q'eqchi documents, see Weeks 1997), hills and mountains, forests and trees and caves. Many of these places would have been the locations of important religious ceremonies. In fact, many boundary markers mentioned in early colonial land claims still serve that function and are maintained today by diviners and other ritual practitioners from distinct *municipios*. Thus, Tax's unit of identity - the colonial and modern township - may be derived from or may have replaced a very similar corporate attitude towards territory that has its roots in the *chinamit.*

The *chinamit* also possessed shrines, temples and the physical buildings (each called a *nimja)* where leaders conducted their business (Braswell 2001; Carmack 1981; van Akkeren 2006). Important properties of the *chinamit* included intangible rights and a wide variety of titles (e.g., Braswell 2001:310-311). Following Lévi-Strauss (1987), I propose that the *chinamit* is best understood as an example of a *maison*, and that Postclassic highland political and social organisation is made intelligible by the house-society model (Braswell 2001, 2003a; see also Gillespie 2000a, 2000b). According to his formulation, a house is:

> a moral person holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary descent line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of descent or of alliance or, most often, of both (Lévi-Strauss 1987:174).

The Great Houses of the central highlands meet this definition. They controlled both physical and intangible wealth, as well as rights that were transmitted through both real and fictive lines expressed using the metaphor of kinship. K'iche'an Great Houses were corporate groups - conceptual rather than biological lineages - that contained both commoners and elites. The elite members of a Great House often gave their surname to the entire entity. While elites within a Great House tended to be related, and hence, often chose exogamy, most commoners were not tied by real kinship bonds, and hence, practiced local endogamy. The programme of the Great House was both to guard and to increase its material and immaterial wealth. It achieved this through carefully arranged marriages, through warfare, through trade or through the formation of additional and broader alliances. The often confusing nested alliances and confederacies of K'iche'an Great Houses were the results of this last corporate strategy. In short, the Great House was not only the basic social unit of K'iche'an community and territory, but also may be conceptualised as the fundamental agent that structured (and was structured by) highland society.

The history of the Postclassic period is profitably interpreted in terms of acting and interacting *chinamit* or *nimja* with specific,

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[10] The Q'eqchi' had broadly similar units called the *k'aleb'aal* (literally "maize field thing" but figuratively an *aldea* or rural, residential corporate group) and *tenamit* (any political unit larger than a *k'aleb'aal*, including towns and colonial *municipios*) (Sapper 1891:893; Weeks 1997).

often conscious, agenda and programmes. Lévi-Strauss (1987:178) stresses that the house is a "dynamic formation and cannot be defined in itself, but only in relation to others of the same kind, situated in their historical context". K'iche'an Great Houses, therefore, formed oppositionally defined identities. They were not, however ethnicities. To begin with, it is not at all clear that K'iche'an polities were nation states (Braswell 2001). Since each Great House contained both commoners and elites linked by the metaphor of kinship, the *nimja* or *chinamit* system did not in itself create a subaltern stratum or class. Moreover, no single Great House dominated either the Kaqchikel or K'iche' state. Instead, the fluid nature of nested Great House identity, expressed through factional formation and alliance, tended to oppose the creation of rigid exclusionary categories. Finally, although group membership was often defined by fictive kinship, the K'iche'an Great Houses were in no way imagined communities. Members were neighbours, kinsmen, trading partners, co-workers, leaders, servants and even slaves. It is likely that most members of a Great House knew each other, and its leaders must have been recognisable and known to all. In terms of scale, territory, property rights, obligations and membership - as well as fractiousness, fluidity, agenda, factionalism and even violence - a comparison between the K'iche'an Great Houses and mafia families is not entirely specious.

The "Multiethnic" Quality of the K'iche'

A key aspect of the Great House system of K'iche'an peoples was the ability to form larger factions that included multiple Great Houses. A specific Great House could easily agglutinate with or subsume another similar corporate unit. These even larger structural units would also be called *chinamit* or *nimja*. Scholars have called these nested *chinamit* identities lineage-clusters (van Akkeren 2000:24), moieties, major lineages, principal lineages and minimal lineages (Carmack 1981:Table 6.2). In creating a hierarchy of carefully nested categories - similar in structure to Linnean taxonomy - anthropologists have engaged in their own form of totemism, that is, of interpreting the social realm in terms of the structure of the natural world. What is lost in these careful anthropological schemes is the paradox that only one emic unit of identity - the *chinamit* - is expressed. The anthropologically defined levels of identity were not seen to be hierarchical (like township, state and nation), but were conceptually equal. A Great House, therefore, can contain itself as well as other Great Houses.[11] The Kaweq Great House, for example, was composed of nine Great Houses, including one dominated by the Kaweq themselves.

The Kaqchikel and Chajoma' seem to have been comparatively homogeneous polities. But just as membership in a particular Great House was determined as much by fictive as by actual kinship, larger Great Houses within the K'iche' polity might not share what anthropologists would consider to be a single "ethnic" origin. What united the factions of the K'iche' polity was not a common place of ancestry, history or even language. Instead it was a shared programme of political, military and economic gain or domination. Van Akkeren (2000, 2005, 2006) has discussed the remarkable synthetic quality of identity within the K'iche' polity in a series of noteworthy publications. He argues that three Great Houses within the Kaweq Great House (the Kaweq proper, Chituy and Kejnay) were forged by immigrant Itza'. A fourth *chinamit*, the Nim Ch'okoj, may have come from Yucatán, where that name (as well as the kinkajou to which it refers) is also known. A fifth *chinamit*, the Kooja, were an ancient and royal Mam family, which van Akkeren (2005) argues had its roots at Takalik Ab'aj during the Classic period. The Tz'ikin *chinamit* was one of two powerful Tz'utujil Great Houses (van Akkeren 2006), which may, in turn, have had distant Nahua ancestry (van Akkeren 2005). Two additional *chinamit*, the Toj and the Q'anil, also appear to have come from Pacific Guatemala, perhaps from the Cotzumalguapa and Río Nahualate regions. Van Akkeren (2005) links the Toj specifically with the Toltecs of Tula, and argues that they were originally called the Atonal. The Q'anil, he suggests, may have come from Tochtepec on the Gulf Coast. Finally, the Tepew Yaki ("Sovereign Mexicans") are closely related to the ballgame and are explicitly noted as having Nahua ancestry. Van Akkeren (2006) argues that they may be Postclassic newcomers to the Maya highlands. The point is, the Kaweq *chinamit* was not a "major lineage" in the sense argued by Carmack (1981:Table 6.2). Rather than sharing common ancestors, it was formed by a wide variety of

[11] The etic conceptual problem posed by this nested yet non-hierarchical system echoes Bertrand Russell's celebrated paradox and Ludwig Gottlob Frege's (1903) infamous response.

peoples representing several important highland Maya linguistic groups, as well as more recent Maya and non-Maya newcomers. These groups were all absorbed into, yet at the same time changed, the much larger indigenous K'iche' society. At the beginning of the K'iche' project in the 11th century, many of these groups would have been distinct outsiders from beyond the highlands. But by the 15th century, they had all become K'iche' speakers and were members of the ruling Great Houses of that polity.

Van Akkeren (2005) does not clearly differentiate between the Pipil and other groups in Pacific Guatemala who spoke Nahua. Campbell (1977), however, has demonstrated that the Nahua borrowings in K'iche'an languages could have come neither from classical Nahuatl nor from the Pipil language. Instead, he argued that such loan words must be derived from other Nahua languages, including some spoken on the Gulf Coast: a key piece of evidence in Carmack's (1981) reconstructions of K'iche'an migration myths. More recently, I have argued that Campbell's linguistic data are also consistent with a Chiapan Nahua origin for loan words (Braswell 2003b). We know next to nothing about the Nahua dialects spoken in the coastal and piedmont regions of Guatemala to the west of Pipil territory. It is quite possible that these people spoke versions of Nahua that were closely related to their counterparts in Chiapas and it is clear that the Maya considered these Yaki to be distinct from the Pipil. Thus, although I am skeptical of reconstructed migration roots that trace K'iche' Great Houses to the Gulf Coast (let alone to Tula or to Babylon), I am perfectly comfortable with van Akkeren's arguments for Late Classic and Early Postclassic connections between the highland Maya and the Nahua speakers of the adjoining Pacific coast and piedmont.[12]

The Amaq' – Legitimising Faction or Resistance Identity?

Although the *chinamit*, *nimja* or Great House was the fundamental building block of K'iche'an society, another larger identity group is mentioned in ethnohistorical documents. This group was called *amaq'* by the Kaqchikel. Hill (1996) interprets the *amaq'* as an alliance of Great Houses, formed and strengthened by exogamous elite marriages. From this perspective, the *amaq'* is a large-scale legitimising identity. Weeks, however, writes that the *amaq'* is:

> ...given variously as a collection of families, clan or lineage segment, or pueblo in general. The *ama[q]'* is probably not a discrete localised unit, but rather a dispersed social unit. Such groups may be only amorphous constructs but remain useful for the study of social groups (Weeks 1997:88).

Weeks is correct that there are no indications that the *amaq'* formed a clear territorial unit or identity, in the sense that both Postclassic Great Houses and modern *municipios* do. Nor is there any mention of the material or immaterial property associated with the *amaq'*, and kinship - real or fictive - is not mentioned as a criterion for membership. The word *amaq'* has a sense of something that endures, that does not change. Finally, there is a distinctly rural aspect to this category; the *amaq'* are not described using the metaphors of large houses, walled in places or any other aspect of urban identity that may have been borrowed from central Mexico. I have struggled with the concept and have considered the *amaq'* to be a large faction that crosscut territorial and kinship relations (Braswell 2001). I am now inclined to view it differently.

Carmack (1981:59-81) sees *amaq'* as an ethnic term denoting the rural dwellers of the central highlands *before* the ancestors of the ruling Great Houses migrated to Guatemala from, so he argues, the Gulf Coast. To Carmack, therefore, the *wuq amaq'*, often translated as the "seven tribes", were the numerous native country dwellers who were ethnically distinct from and often enemies of the small group of "Mexicanised" Ch'ontal Maya who colonised the highlands in the Postclassic. In other words, the *wuq amaq'* were the rural commoners dominated by the newly arrived K'iche' leaders, the linguistic forebears of modern Kaqchikel and K'iche' speakers, and the principal biological ancestors of the Maya of the central highlands.[13] If Carmack's interpretation is correct, *wuq amaq'* may be considered a resistance identity shared by native farmers who

[12] The semantic realm of the borrowed Nahua words, which includes common local plants and animals, implies that connections between the highland Maya and their Nahua neighbours were both protracted and intimate. Chiapas and southwestern Guatemala, therefore, are logical candidates for the homeland of these Nahua speakers.

[13] Van Akkeren (2000:76-85) links the term *wuq amaq'* as used in the *Título Totonicapán* with the Poqom of the valley of Rabinal. He also discusses the central Mexican connotations of the term within the context of a posited Teotihuacan presence at Kaminaljuyú.

sometimes organised and fought against the ruling colonial K'iche' lineages. Modern inhabitants of San Martín Jilotepeque assert that their ancestors (the Chajoma' and Kaqchikel) did not build the many ruins found in their *municipio*, including the impressive hilltop site called "Mixco" Viejo. Instead, they claim that ancient sculpture and structures were made by the *Jicaque* - an ignorant and ethnically distinct people who inhabited the region before the arrival of Kaqchikel speakers. While I am disheartened both by this pejorative and by the lack of continuity with the past that it implies, it is possible that the category *Jicaque* distantly reflects the much older identity of *wuq amaq'*.

Both van Akkeren (2000, 2005, 2006) and I (Braswell 2003b) have questioned the specifics of Carmack's (1981) reconstruction of migration routes. I remain convinced that the leading *chinamit* of both the Kaqchikel and Chajoma' consisted of people whose ancestors had been in the central highlands and piedmont for at least 1,200 years before the Spanish conquest. Nonetheless, Carmack is clearly right to stress the diversity of identities represented within K'iche'an territories. The native resistance identity of *amaq'* is perhaps as close to the concept of ethnicity that we may find among Postclassic K'iche'an peoples.

Identity as Process: The Network Society of the Highland Maya

So far, I have discussed the underlying concepts of highland Maya identities and how such identities were structured. I have treated the subject as static and unchanging. Although all identities are related to the project of determining discourse, Castells' (1997) notions of resistance, legitimising and project identities are particularly useful for interpreting Postclassic identity in processual terms. In this section, I briefly consider two examples of changes that occurred in highland Maya identities during the Postclassic period.

The Xajil: History of an Identity

One of the leading Great Houses of the Kaqchikel was the Xajil, whose history is described in the *Memorial de Sololá*. This document describes their mythical origins and migrations, and how they, along with other Kaqchikel-speaking groups, served the K'iche' as warriors in many battles. Because of their great service to the king K'iq'ab', the Kaqchikel leaders Jun Toj and Wuqu' B'atz' were elevated to royal status and were granted the titles Ajpo' Sotz'il and Ajpo' Xajil. The *Memorial de Sololá*, admittedly an official history, describes this transformation and the events leading up to it in terms of a project identity. The Kaqchikel, because of their great service in war, achieved social status parallel to that of the paramount K'iche', a status that could be granted only through the recognition of the legitimising authority. But the K'iche' lords (with the exception of their weakened and disgraced leader K'iq'ab') were uncomfortable with the new social order and decided to humiliate the Kaqchikel. The legitimising identity of the K'iche' was therefore reaffirmed, and the wars between the Kaqchikel and K'iche' began. In the end, both groups asserted themselves as rival legitimate authorities, in command of distinct polities and capitals. This brief example illustrates how project identities can transform social structure, creating new legitimate authorities and identities, and how power structures react when they perceive threats posed by previously subordinate groups. But ethnicity and cultural identity seem incidental to these political events.

Elite Identity and "Ethnogenesis" in the Central Maya Highlands

By the late 15th century, the complex network of highland society was crosscut by a new form of elite identity. Within groups such as the K'iche' and Kaqchikel, Great Houses with distinct and disparate histories were assimilated by a constructed identity that fomented and enabled the forging of a unified elite class. Moreover, this identity created social proximity among elites from different territories and polities, while at the same time defined social distance between classes within the same polity. I have used the words "nahuaization" and "ethnogenesis" to describe the construction of this new identity (Braswell 2001, 2003b), because it was achieved by borrowing traits, including aspects of language, religion and material culture, from Nahua peoples of Mexico and the Pacific slopes.

The construction of a composite elite identity during the last century of pre-colonial history represents an acceleration and escalation of cultural processes that began in the highlands during the Early Classic period. At that time, local elites at Kaminaljuyú adopted a foreign cult focussed on warfare, Venus and the storm god. This cult was manifested most strongly in apical elite burial customs, but also in palace

architecture. Although the ruling elite of Kaminaljuyú were Maya, the centre of the world cult certainly was Teotihuacan. Participation in the cult imbued the leaders of Kaminaljuyú with the exotic, which helped create social distance between them and commoners (Braswell 2003c).

State-level, class-based society, however, did not emerge in the central highlands during the Early Classic period. Although it is not clear if the K'iche', Kaqchikel, Tz'utijil, Chajoma' and Mam polities were states, class endogamy and status differences increased throughout the Postclassic period. At the time of conquest, there were three distinct strata in highland society: the *ajawa'*, the *alk'ajola'* and the *muna'* (nobles, commoners and slaves) that practiced class endogamy. The appearance of at least two, and possibly three, distinct classes was at odds with the traditional *chinamit* form of organisation, where all members of the corporate Great House maintained real bonds of kinship and fictive ties of affiliation. With the appearance of complex political and social structure, new mechanisms were required that would maintain class boundaries and widen the gap between classes, despite the prevailing metaphor of kinship and the house characteristic of the *chinamit*. Moreover, within the factionalised fabric of rival Great Houses, competition between elites for limited titles escalated, which only hastened the development of new forms of identity.

Elites can justify their elevated status by a number of strategies, two of which are the monopolisation of esoteric knowledge and the adoption of a foreign or pseudoexogenous identity. The creation of a hybrid Nahua-K'iche'an identity during the Late Postclassic period, therefore, served to create social distance between the classes. At first, this new international consciousness served as a project identity, but as social distinctions became more fixed and polarised it became a legitimising identity that relegated subaltern status to members of the *alk'ajol* class. History, too, was written to document that the *wuq amaq'*, indigenous commoners who spoke K'iche'an languages, were distinct from the ruling warrior classes before their legendary departure from Tulan. Documents such as the *Memorial de Sololá* acknowledge differences between K'iche'an Great Houses but associate all the ancestors of ruling elites together at Tulan. By the time the *Memorial de Sololá* was written in the early colonial period, the project identity of K'iche'an *ajawa'* had been transformed into a legitimising identity that justified in historical and cultural terms the subjugation of commoners, including non-elite members of the ruling Great Houses.

Conclusions

Both ethnicity and the more general conception of identity are dynamic processes rather than static objects. Curiously, most archaeologists and ethnohistorians who study the Maya highlands have considered ethnicity from a static rather than processual perspective. The study of ethnicity, therefore, becomes an essentially epistemological problem, one that can be solved by adopting the proper Middle Range Theory. More recently, many scholars have adopted a view of ethnicity rooted in Bourdieu's notion of *habitus* as conditioned structure. *Habitus*, however, cannot be directly observed and agency is manifested only in the experience of subjectivity. Bourdieu's particular visions of *habitus* and agency, in fact, are not sufficiently removed from structuralism to be useful to the archaeologist. Bourdieu's theory not only fails to provide an epistemological tool for observing and identifying ethnicity, but also belies the possibility that such a tool exists. Configurations that are broader than Bourdieu's (including Mauss' earlier notion of *techniques du corps*) all define *habitus* in terms of the non-discursive aspects of culture. *Ethnicity by its very nature is discursive*, and I see no reason to think that it is anchored either in the body or in daily practice in the manner implied by the concept of *habitus*.

In this chapter, I have argued it is natural for people to define themselves in oppositional identity groups. But ethnicity is not a primordial category. Instead, the creation of ethnic categories is unique to pluralistic complex societies, and emerges as part of the discursive process through which hegemony and subaltern status are negotiated and contested. That process is the conflict between programme identities (in which I lump both legitimisation and resistance identities) within a context of stratified power. Archaeologists and ethnohistorians who interpret non-state societies in terms of ethnic divisions contextualise the past within a present-day frame of reference and frequently impose ethnic distinctions derived from current discourse regarding descendant populations upon that past. The past Other is therefore relegated to a subaltern status and,

being past, cannot even project a resistance identity. The present Other, in a closed circle of logic, maintains its ethnic status in part because of the apparent historical authenticity of a subaltern identity. The hypostatisation of modern linguistic categories such as K'iche', Kaqchikel and Tz'utujil as Postclassic ethnicity is but one example. The reification of Achi, a Postclassic political identity, as a distinct modern language is an example of an equally misleading but opposite process.

It is far better, therefore, to leave ethnicity behind and to consider the more general category of identity. Insofar as possible, we should study the way emic identities were constructed, defined and manipulated in order to promote specific programmes. Borrowing ideas about the origins and functions of different sorts of identities from Castells, I have endeavored to illustrate how identity was used to transform, maintain and even resist highland social structures during the Late Postclassic period. What, then, can we say about Postclassic highland identity?

The Construction of Postclassic Highland Identity

Many modern surnames - as well as family, lineage or Great House names mentioned in colonial documents - are common nouns whose semantic realm is the natural world, particularly animals and plants. It seems likely, therefore, that in antiquity highland Maya group identity had a strongly totemic quality. By the Postclassic period, however, many aspects of clan or tribal society had been replaced by the creation of a house society built upon social units that continued to use many of these same totemic names. Kinship metaphors and totemic names, therefore, may have become vestigial by this time, and we should wonder to what degree they were deliberately manipulated by elite rulers.

The Great Houses of the K'iche'an world contained commoners, nobles and slaves. The language of group affiliation was drawn from kinship. Commoners, in fact, were even called *alk'ajola'* or "sons". But the basis of Great House membership was more determined by local residence and participation in the corporate group than by actual kinship. Great Houses controlled real estate (such as land, natural resources and communal structures), labour and intangible wealth (titles, religious obligations and historical rights). Their property was jealously maintained and passed down through the generations. The K'iche'an Great House system, therefore, is best thought of as an example of Lévi-Strauss' house society, and each Great House functioned like a "moral person" or agent. The Great House society of the K'iche'an world was fractured by both vertical and horizontal stresses: the need for solidarity against other groups and the growing need for class distinctions.

The Great Houses are related to central Mexican concepts of *chinamitl* and *calpolli*. Although K'iche'an capitals were not cities in the same sense as Tenochtitlan, Tula or Teotihuacan, the Great Houses shared an identity that was urban and opposed to that of the *amaq'* or rural tribes. Carmack (1981) suggests that the *amaq'* were derived from the original K'iche'an-speaking settlers who arrived in the central highlands during the Classic period. Many of these people were absorbed as commoners into the Great Houses, but others resisted incorporation.

The Manipulation of Identity and the K'iche'an Project

Two important aspects of Great House society are their potential for "multiethnic" (when viewed from outside) composition and their ability to form larger confederations and alliances. Although the Kaqchikel and Chajoma' seem to have been relatively homogeneous in terms of language, place of origin and history, the leading Great Houses of the K'iche' were alloys forged from diverse roots. According to van Akkeren (2000, 2003, 2005, 2006), important leading Great Houses contained not only K'iche' commoners and nobility, but also the descendants of Mam, Tz'utujil, Itza' and Nahua speakers. A common hegemonic programme fueled by the desire to accumulate more power and property bound these Great Houses together. Larger alliances were also formed among Great Houses that shared the same hegemonic project. The flexibility of the Great Houses of the K'iche', which allowed the formation of corporate agents that included many groups that originally spoke distinct languages and had diverse origins, was its principal strength. The transition from a totemic and clan-based society to a Great House society, therefore, allowed the creation of new and novel communities bonded together by a programme identity.

The Great House system was flexible enough even to allow a programme of ethnogenesis. As time progressed, nobles began to search for a

way to distinguish themselves from the commoners with whom they were linked by fictive or real kinship. In so doing, they adopted an international, cosmopolitan and urban Nahua-K'iche'an identity. That identity certainly had historical roots among a few of the K'iche' Great Houses (such as the Tepew Yaki), but was largely borrowed from central Mexicans and nearer neighbours to the southwest. This process of Nahuaisation continued well into the colonial period, when many K'iche'an leaders strove to identify themselves more closely with the still-important Mexica elite class. As Nahua became a *lingua franca* for the new Spanish regime, the project of becoming Nahua maintained its importance.

Modernity and the Project of Mayab

I close by stressing that contemporary politics of indigenous identity also are better understood in terms of Castells' three processual and agentive categories than by using the outmoded concepts of primordial or natural ethnicity. Indeed, many Maya are tired of being called *naturales*. The identity "Maya" and the related concept of "Mayab" have long and complex histories; they have been applied as apparently neutral scholarly categories, as racist pejoratives and even as positive terms. Throughout the colonial, revolutionary, independence and modern periods, indigenous people who saw themselves as distinctive were classed together as Maya by dominant authorities. Even today, most speakers of highland languages do not consider themselves "Maya", and many Yucatec and Mopan speakers have trouble conceiving that highland Guatemalans could possibly consider themselves as such. Indeed, Maya and Q'eqchi' identities are frequently viewed as mutually exclusive in southern Belize. But the racist sense of Maya as a congregated and presumably homogeneous ethnicity forced upon many disparate groups has been reconstructed first as a resistance identity, and now, for many educated Maya elite, has become a forceful project identity that seeks to change economic, political and social discourse in southeastern Mexico and Central America. It seems to me fitting that nowhere has this new project identity been as successful as in Kaqchikel- and K'iche'-speaking regions of the central Guatemalan highlands.

Acknowledgments. I would like to thank Donald F. Tuzin and Joyce Marcus for their critical and discerning comments on an earlier draft of this paper. I also thank Judith Maxwell for her help with a few key translations and her perceptive comments on Kaqchikel social structure.

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