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## "The Only True People"

Bethany J. bin Beyyette

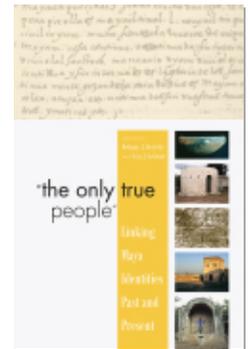
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## Introduction

*On Constructing a Shared Understanding of Historical Pasts and Nearing Futures*

BETHANY J. BEYYETTE

The invention of the Maya' could be attributed to Maya scholarship: the archaeologists, anthropologists, etc. who started to use this label for cultural horizons and continuities that interested them. Some of their numbers implicitly ascribe to these continuities an imagined Mayan essence transcending history. (Schackt 2001:11)

This goal of this volume is to evaluate views of Maya history and prehistory and more accurately characterize the uniqueness of the people called Mayas by exploring the construction of their identities, past and present. This volume brings together scholars representing a wide variety of Maya studies, including archaeologists, linguists, ethnographers, ethnohistorians, historians, epigraphers, and sociologists. Each author evaluates the distinctiveness of identifiable socio-cultural units, which we collectively refer to as "ethnicities." Together the contributors investigate ethnicity at a number of Maya places from the northern reaches of Yucatán to the Southern Periphery, from modern day to the Classic period. Each author challenges the notion of ethnically homogeneous "Maya peoples" for his or her region and chronology and has been asked to define how his or her work contributes to the definition of "ethnicity" for ancient Maya society. By addressing the social constructs and conditions behind Maya ethnicity, past and present, the volume contributes to our understanding of ethnicity as a complex set of relationships among people who live in real and imagined communities, as well as between people separated by cultural and physical boundaries.

How do we explore the histories that have contributed to ethnic formations of Maya peoples? We propose that the best way to understand and identify different

identities is through the study of diachronic cultural processes in a regional perspective that acknowledge identities through the use of language, community, history, myth, and politics, as well as the material reflections of these, such as dress, pottery styles, political emblems, scripts, and architecture. Contributions in the volume go beyond issues of materialization and create a two-way discussion that applies ethnographic conceptualizations of ethnicity to the archaeological record, as well as identifies the contributions of archaeological research for a better understanding of contemporary Maya identities.

Archaeologists and anthropologists currently raise two major issues with the conceptualization and utilization of ethnicity. The first problem concerns the simple definition of *ethnicity*. How do different ethnic groups define themselves? To what scale, scope, and manner must they differentiate themselves from others to be members? How does expression change in the time-space continuum? How do these expressions alter anthropologists' external analytical explorations of ethnicity? There is no clear understanding of what ethnicity is for all of human society, and many authors err in not clearly defining what they mean by the term when discussing the topic. The second problem focuses attention directly on identifying ethnic differences. Even if we can define what ethnicity means and meant for present and past society, when and how is it expressed? When is ethnicity marked by overt expressions of group membership, and, conversely, when is it hidden from view? What are the processes that transform ethnic identities and their expressions?

It is not the intended goal of this volume to reach an overarching single definition of what contributes to Maya ethnic identities and how they are expressed, as these varied according to history and place. The goal is to conceptualize the processes behind ethnogenesis and ethnoexodus, as suggested by Cocom and Rodriguez (this volume). The chapters in this volume are written by ethnographers, historians, ethnohistorians, sociologists, linguists, epigraphers, and archaeologists from a variety of different anthropological and *ethnic* backgrounds, including European, American, Cherokee, Mexicano, and Yukateko. No two authors share identical views of Maya identity and ethnogenesis; nor do they rely on the same approaches and literature. Yet each shares the aim of better understanding human behavior and the forces that have shaped the history and future of Maya peoples. This volume is a multidisciplinary investigation into the possibilities of a multilingual and multiethnic landscape, past and present.

#### DEFINITIONS

It is common in anthropological discussions to use the term *ethnicity* to describe social identity. Kunstadter (1979) defines an "ethnic group" as a set of individuals

with mutual interests based on shared understandings and cultural values. Ethnic identity is described as a permanent and fundamental aspect of human identity (Banks 1996:185), as well as a strategic conscious construct used to manipulate groups for social, political, and economic ends. Characteristics that unify groups under a common ethnic identity include common descent (van den Berghe 1986), shared experiences and social practices (Geertz 1973:109), and shared cultural attributes such as dress, bodily adornment, architecture, and language.

Most ethnographers, linguists, and ethnohistorians consider cultural differences, the maintenance of these divisions, and the functional role in both social and political landscapes as evidence of ethnic formation. Yet from an archaeological standpoint, “ethnicity” is not commonly used in reference to material culture and the people who produced it; nor is it given much explanation in theoretical discussions of the organization and complexity of ancient societies. Most anthropologists would agree that *ethnicity* expresses a shift to multicultural, multiethnic interactive contexts where attention is focused on group dynamics marked to some degree by social and cultural commonality. Cohen (1978) defined ethnicity as a series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness, similar to a social distance scale. In Cohen’s model, ethnic boundaries are not stable and enduring. Although each group continually strives to maintain distinctiveness, identity remains fluid and shifting.

Knapp (2001) divides anthropological approaches to ethnicity into three categories: primordialist, instrumental, and situational. The primordialist view holds that ethnicity is a permanent and essential condition of human nature. As such, the members of the group have a deep-rooted sense of identity. The instrumental approach states that ethnicity is a construct created to bring people together for a common (political or economic) purpose. It is motivated, goal-driven. Situational ethnicity is one in which members essentially choose their group affiliation, based on need or want.

The deep-seated differences in these theoretical approaches are numerous. Among those discussed in this volume is the distinction between groups rooted and tied to specific geographic locations (Barth 1969) and those that are not spatially bounded (Appadurai 1991; Brettell 2006). While older models position ethnicities in their homelands, later approaches consider people living outside their homelands. In the modern era, these are most often transnational groups and diaspora. However, the application of diaspora is relevant to historical approaches as well, as these are communities of people displaced from their homelands as a result of economic, social, and political forces. Gupta and Ferguson (1992) caution against conceiving “communities” as distinct entities or places, as these are often the result of cultural misunderstanding.

Another theoretical difference is the application of goal-oriented identity expression. When is ethnic display socially, politically, economically, or otherwise beneficial? Bucholtz and Hall (2005) discuss identity as encompassing both macro-level demographic categories and local cultural positions. They explore how people position themselves in opposition to certain others and evaluate the identity positions that are available. From this, they question which identities are chosen, note the active participation, and indicate for what reasons. These are referred to as relational identities. Knapp's (2001) instrumental approach also posits ethnic identity as an active construction aimed at a certain goal.

This is closely tied to situational ethnicity, which is also geared at specific needs or wants of the community but is perhaps more fluid and changing. Investigating situational constructs of ethnicity is different than goal-oriented approaches, as these approaches also take into consideration the times and circumstances when either outside or state-level governance removes the ability to construct distinct identities. Here it is not merely a question of when it is beneficial to display ethnicity or, as is often the case, multiple ethnicities but also when the right and ability to do so has been denied.

No single approach has sufficient explanatory power to account for the complexities of ethnicity and ethnic group formation (Hostettler 2004). Is ethnicity deep-rooted or goal-oriented? Is it controlled by elites, or do members situationally place themselves into groups? To polarize approaches to ethnicity and identity oversimplifies the issue. To understand group membership, we must understand basic principles of group membership, why groups expand or contract, and when membership is exclusive or inclusive (Cohen 1978).

#### DEFINING BOUNDARIES

A problem faced by those studying ethnicity is the issue of "unit." Ancient ethnic groups tend to be thought of in terms of majorities, yet contradictorily they are tied in modern times to notions of minorities, especially remote tribes, and indigenous peoples of the Third World. There is a problem not only with scale but also of the components of group composition in time and space.

Groups, be they political, social, economic, religious, or ethnic, are neither isolated nor self-contained; they are created and sustained through interaction and shared markers of affiliation (Barth 1969). All form a kind of supra-ordinate, multi-dimensional entity. The difference between these types of group affiliation is more an issue of scale than of different kinds of formation processes.

Ethnicities are anchored to geographic locations (Dietler 1994), as one of the markers for ethnic membership is claiming a shared ancestral homeland. Yet they may be found dispersed away from this homeland. Although they may be deeply

rooted geographically (and even socially), they are not timeless (Carrier 1992), and evidence of shared belonging may be visible in multiple geographic locales. Researchers must continually remind themselves they are studying *these* people in *this* time and not inaccurately impose named ethnicities on particular groups (ibid.; Cohen 1978).

As with many things anthropological, the key to understanding identity is *context*. The understanding of context must begin with first discerning and apprehending local culture histories, mythic histories, power relations, and the politics of historical construction (Cohen 1978; Friedman 1992; Santos-Granero 1986; Staats 1996). There is a Western tendency to divide myth, history, and political discourse (Warren and Jackson 2003), but if we are to understand the formation, growth, and disintegration of specific identities, this tendency must be abandoned.

Context determines the type of in-group markers, overt or covert, that are displayed or made visible. If the context is framed in terms of situational advantage of differences, more overt markers may be expected. If context is framed in terms of dominance and discrimination, covert identity markers are more likely to be enacted, posing a problem for some anthropologists who may not be able to as readily identify covert markers. Overt markers are such things as dress, language, action, and style. Covert markers include blood, heritage, and history. Both types of markers, although not equally identifiable, are equally important. Behavior, ideas, material culture, and values must first be understood in their own contexts before we can deconstruct their significance (Cohen 1978).

#### ANTHROPOLOGICAL STUDIES OF MAYA ETHNICITIES

In this section, I discuss contributions to ethnic studies by ethnohistorians and ethnographers, followed by a detailed discussion of ethnic studies in archaeology. Archaeology is the most contested sub-discipline of anthropology in which to examine topics of ethnic identity. The heavy focus here on archaeological formation of ethnic affiliation and attribution results from the controversy of ethnic studies as a viable topic of research for archaeologists. This volume is framed by cultural approaches to ethnicity, which are in themselves complex and at times problematic, and their application to investigations of ancient ethnicities.

#### ETHNOHISTORIC AND ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDIES OF MAYA ETHNICITIES

Ethnohistoric and ethnographic accounts indicate that the historic Maya area was composed of multiple competing ethnic and political groups with distinctive

senses of social identity. While there are examples of groups that shared superordinate identities across different Maya polities, there is no evidence that people held an explicit identity as “Maya” (Restall 2004). What evidence is there for group and individual identity? Restall states that one is the community, or *cab*. Another is patronym group. Although not specifically addressed in Restall’s paper, language is another strong indicator of shared identity. Language is particularly powerful because it unites people beyond locality and creates feelings of shared belonging across different Maya communities. Further, Gabbert (2004) notes that while there are not different names for competing ethnic groups, there are different Mayan language terms for commoner and foreigner (*macehual* and *dzul*, respectively). The term for foreigner alludes to differences in lifestyle and status, particularly expressing the social distance to the speaker. This distinction can be recognized in a variety of ways, including dress, surname, and language.

Farriss (1984) addresses the effects of Spanish Colonial rule from the perspective of the Yukatek Maya. She explores the ways Yukatek Maya were able to sustain their traditional cultural lifeways longer than other Maya groups prior to the eighteenth century. This is an important piece because it recognizes important cultural differences between Maya groups. It also distinguishes different Maya practices and gives a glimpse of the diversity of Maya traditions in historic times.

Wasserstrom (1983), in contrast, cautions against being overly rigorous in defining cultural boundaries. He argues that the cultural diversity in Chiapas is far overestimated and frankly a-historical. He is criticized for his “obliviousness to native peoples’ own interpretation of their historical circumstances” (Gossen 1985:576) and what I would argue is naïveté about the very real cultural boundaries that result from differential access to wealth. That said, he is right in his criticism of overreliance on Colonial records, which are not unbiased documents, and he makes the case for the use of regional analysis when clear boundaries have yet to be drawn by scholars.

While most ethnographies contribute to the discussion of identities, some specifically address the complexities of Maya identities. Watanabe (1992) explores the Mam-speaking Maya of Western Highland Guatemala. He describes how Chimaltecos locally define themselves in contrast to other Maya in the region and explores contexts that led to cultural change. Wilson’s (1995) work with the Q’eqchi’-speaking Maya of Alta Verapas contributes to the discussion of post-Colonial cultural change, and explores ethnogenesis in an effort to create a pan-Q’eqchi’ ethnic identity in the modern era. Finally, Montejo (2005) examines identity politics among the Maya in Guatemala and presents different forms of “resistance leadership” that have arisen in an attempt to maintain cultural traditions. He provides an excellent discussion of Maya diversity in terms of ideology and approach to identity construction.

Although ethnic groups can arise independently through phylogenetic processes involving parallel descent of genes, language, and culture (Kirch and Green 2001; Ortman 2012; Shennan 2002), in multicultural landscapes they arise through the cultural interactions that result in the combining of bits and pieces of preexisting practices into novel arrangements (Moore 1996:30). Hill's (1996) volume on ethnogenesis in the Americas provides an in-depth study of Arawak peoples. This volume was the inspiration for the present book, as it brought together scholars from various fields and addressed ways of being Arawak from modern, ethnohistoric, and archaeological perspectives. It also provides an excellent overview of ethnogenesis, the building of cultural and ethnic identities by colonized or otherwise oppressed people. The volume provides a synthesis of struggles to exist and shared experiences of powerlessness and marginalization of cultural minorities. It also highlights the regaining of self-determination of indigenous peoples and the contexts that present opportunities for change. Voss (2008) continues the discussion of ethnogenesis, applying it archaeologically to the people who lived and worked at El Presidio de San Francisco. She presents ethnogenesis as not only a useful concept for archaeologists but a recognizable pattern to be observed in the archaeological record through the investigation of landscape, architecture, and material culture. Hu's (2013) more recent work nicely summarizes past and present archaeological approaches to ethnogenesis, providing an excellent overview of the contributions of scholars who have attempted to apply this difficult concept to the archaeological record.

What has been lacking in Maya studies is a proper contextualization of ongoing overt political struggles of modern and pre-modern Maya groups (Castañeda 2004). Modern peoples of southern Mesoamerica have different pre-Conquest histories and geographies. They also have different histories of conquest, colonization, independence, and incorporation into larger nation-states (see, for example, *ibid.*). Yet archaeologists, linguists, and some social anthropologists have used the general term *Maya* to lump together members of more than thirty related but distinct language groups (Grofe 2005:1) distributed over a wide area and a variety of different environments. Embracing the encompassing and distorting label of *Maya* imposes a unified ethnic history on people who have not necessarily thought of themselves as "Maya," neither in the past nor in the present (Hostettler 2004:193). As a result, both Western and non-Western people have assigned and taken for granted a single identity to a heterogeneous population (*ibid.*:189). Assuming an essential unity of ethnic, cultural, and social identity among all Mayas is a Western construction. While not denying a pan-Maya movement that has been in the works for several decades, we must realize that this movement is a new kind of cultural politics (Castañeda 2004). Maya identities have been and continue to be politically, not historically, rooted (Restall 2004).

## ARCHAEOLOGICAL STUDIES OF MAYA ETHNICITIES

In literature concerning Maya archaeology, the ancient people of southern Mesoamerica are frequently and inappropriately viewed as a single ethnic identity. Ethnic continuity is often left unquestioned across vastly different highland and lowland landscapes and three millennia of prehistory, which archaeologists characterize as socio-political dynamic. In contrast, the “Maya” are compared with a variety of different yet competing “Mexican” groups of the north, be they Olmec, Zapotecan, Teotihuacano, Toltec, or Mexica. This distinction alone confuses concepts of pre-Columbian identities and ethnicity with modern-day nation-states. After over a century of research in the Maya area, the Maya remain “mysterious” and living outside of time (Castañeda 2004).

Understanding the multiethnic fabric of Classic period Maya societies has not been an area of intense interest in archaeological research. Some archaeologists are beginning to realize that regional variations indicate a multiethnic environment, despite similarities in elite material culture. While there were many similarities among sites, contexts, and the built environment, there were also significant regional variations in architecture, ceramic assemblages, iconographic styles, and hieroglyphic writing (see, for example, Sabloff and Henderson 1993; Morris 2004:9). These variations existed not only during later Maya prehistory but throughout the Preclassic, Classic, and Postclassic periods as well.

Greater familiarity with Jones’s (1997) work on the archaeology of ethnicity would greatly facilitate more open conversations about identity research in archaeology. As argued here, Jones (*ibid.*) points out that the first issue in archaeological explorations of ethnicity is often definition. There is no single concept of ethnicity, and Jones explores subjectivist versus objectivist approaches as well as primordialist versus instrumentalist approaches, citing lack of consensus by socio-cultural anthropologists as a primary source of contention. Yet Jones emphasizes the importance of observable patterns as socially and culturally meaningful and therefore accessible as spheres of investigation. We attempt to address this problem in this volume by having each author explicitly contextualize ethnicity for his or her own examples to provide a more clear understanding of how identities can be constructed and reconstructed from archaeological data.

Volumes such as *The Kowoj* by Rice and Rice (2009) are invaluable contributions to the archaeological study of identity, as the contributors use archaeological, bioarchaeological, historic, linguistic, and ethnographic data to reconstruct the Kowoj. This volume is broadly integrative and provides a clear image of Kowoj people and society, and it should be a model for scholars in all regions. Similarly, Sachse’s (2006) volume on Maya ethnicities explores ethnic identity construction from the

Preclassic to the modern era. Graham's (2006) chapter is especially pertinent to this discussion, as she investigates how the concept of ethnicity can be useful to archaeologists. While she maintains that finding ethnic groups archaeologically may remain elusive, the archaeologists in this volume have striven to provide data that do allow for the recognition of ethnic groups in the archaeological record.

Archaeological investigations can be expected to contribute to our understandings of ethnicity. First, ethnicity studies in archaeology can contribute to studies of the structural relationships that exist between elites and commoners, centers and their supporting communities, dominant and subordinate regional polities, and intra-regional populations. It is important to define the ways structures of power and control can be identified archaeologically, both in terms of primary power brokers and those whom they control. At the smallest scale of analysis, elites can be defined in contrast to commoners, since they are generally considered influential agents concerned with power and control (G. Marcus 1983), but they existed in larger dynamic networks with other subordinate, dominant, and foreign elites for which they must have displayed or hidden conflicting identities. Examining the function ethnicity may have played in the past will better define the relationship that existed between groups within their sphere of influence. Previous downplaying of diversity by scholars, attributing ethnicity only to political and ecological factors, is unproductive and overlooks the dominant and subordinate relations in the formation of ethnicity.

Archaeology can also contribute to studies of ethnogenesis, a term used to describe the historical, not just contemporary, emergence of a people who define themselves in relation to a socio-cultural and linguistic heritage and the process of building new ethnic identities (Hill 1996; Voss 2008; Hu 2013). Ethnogenesis is also an analytical tool for developing critical historical approaches to culture as an ongoing process of conflict and the struggle of existence and people's positioning within and against a general history of domination. Though there is little disagreement about hierarchical ranking of settlements (in modern or pre-Colonial contexts), the degree of community autonomy versus centralization is still in question. While kinship-based segmentary structure (McAnany 1995; Carmack 1966; Fox 1988; Fox, Cook, and Demarest 1996; Hayden 1994; Southall 1956; Vogt 1969) and centralized, non-kinship-based structures (Chase and Chase 1996; Farriss 1984; Hassig 1985) seem to be competing models, in fact both may be correct (even complementary) when geographic heterogeneity and chronological depth are taken into consideration (Demarest 1996; J. Marcus 1993).

The role of political economy and the degree of polity centralization in Mesoamerica continues to be a principal research focus, requiring broad regional surveys such as those conducted by Sanders (Sanders and Price 1968; Sanders, Parsons, and Santley 1979), Blanton and colleagues (1993), Flannery and Marcus (1983), and

Culbert and Rice (1990). A more recent approach to political economy highlights the concept of social heterarchy, examining the interdependencies that manifest within and between members of a group (Crumley 1995; Scarborough, Valdez, and Dunning 2003; Tourtellot et al. 2003; King and Shaw 2003; Hageman and Lohse 2003). Heterarchy can exist within preexisting hierarchies (see, for example, Feinman, Lightfoot, and Upham 2000 for an example outside Mesoamerica). Taking ethnic diversity under consideration can heighten our understanding of the variability and complexity that existed amid a society in which technology was fundamentally limited and environmental settings are diverse.

Finally, studies in ethnicity will also contribute to small site and commoner studies, especially in frontier or border regions. Trends in small site/community studies include agency and activities of commoners, understanding social and economic diversity among households, households in articulation with the broader social universe, and domestic versus prestige economies at the local level (Robin 2003). Community studies are critical to contemporary archaeological approaches to understanding political economy and development. Related to this, there has been a recent shift away from elite members of the culture (which have been the subject of most academic inquiry) to the lives of the non-elite Maya (see, for example, edited volumes by Scarborough, Valdez, and Dunning [2003] and Lohse and Valdez [2004]). Studies of commoners have focused on how material goods, daily activities, family structure, and rituals provide important information about commoner life, organization, and variability (Arroyo 2004; Robin 2016; Vogt 2004). The effect of community life, *group affiliation*, population size, and mobility on elites' ability to control the commoner population is also of central importance (Inomata 2004; Yaeger and Robin 2004). This, of course, is directly tied to how elites acquired the ability to extract labor and goods from commoners (Costin 1991; Lucero 2003). Models that account for salient identity networks tell us not only about commoner lives and the ways they impacted and articulated with the political economy but also how they formed communities of practice.

The problems facing studies of the ethnic past are not unique to Maya studies. Berdan and colleagues (2008) contributed a volume on the multidisciplinary survey of Nahua in Mexico. Similar to this volume, the authors approached ethnic identity using archaeological, ethnohistorical, and contemporary ethnographic data. On the subject of the archaeology of Amazonia, anthropologist Alf Hornborg (2005) strongly criticized archaeologists for studying what was commonly referred to as "Arawak peoples." He asked archaeologists to "abandon notions of essentialized, bounded 'peoples' as coherent, persistent entities to be identified in the archaeological record" (ibid.:596). Like the term *Mayan*, the term *Arawak* actually refers to sets of related languages that (among Arawak speakers) have diffused

throughout prehistory along the waterways of the Amazon. As Hornborg points out, there are many languages in the Arawakan language family, and it is misleading to imagine that *anyone* who speaks an Arawakan language is a member of a defined set of “peoples.”

Jonathan Hill, whose primary research interest also lies in Amazonia, reminds us that anthropology is only one of many competing ways of representing culture and history and that by broadening our theoretical approaches, we open new avenues of historically informed research and action (Hill 1992). It is important to consider both present and past identity construction and abandon using a-historical models that reify indigenous peoples as passive and without interests and as defined by the modern post-Colonial landscape. As anthropologists, we all strive to create accurate syntheses of peoples’ cultural, political, and historical struggles to exist (Hill 1996). Instead of denying peoples’ past because it is difficult to research or subject to more open-ended questions, it is our responsibility to construct a shared understanding of the historical past that enables indigenous peoples to better understand their present conditions.

#### QUESTIONS TO BE EXAMINED

This volume is the result of the 106th Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in Washington, DC, which took place in 2007. When organizing this volume, we asked that each contributor consider one or more of three overarching topics we wished to address, as outlined below. Most important, all authors were asked to be explicit in their descriptions, clearly stating their own definition of ethnicity or identity in the context of each unique personal study.

The first topic was definitions, scales, and dimensions. Almost any cultural-social unit, indeed, any term describing social structures and relations, can be referred to as an ethnic group. This situation still holds today, as many participants in the 2007 AAA symposium tacked back and forth among identity, social networks, and ethnicity with few qualifiers. Others looked for new ways to address ethnicity in an attempt to frame the discussion of ethnicity beyond cultural units and social boundaries. In this edited volume, we asked the cultural anthropologists to take the lead and discuss some of the essential, instrumental, and situational parameters of ethnicity they encounter in their own work.

The second topic addressed the identification of critical points in time and place in which ethnogenesis likely occurred in the past through contextual studies. Archaeologists, linguists, and ethnohistorians are in a unique position to question the common assumption that ethnogenesis is a contemporary phenomenon,

essentially an outcome of modern, Western nation building. Certainly, Maya groups as we know them today emerged during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in response to Spanish political and social strategies. Nonetheless, incorporation of structurally dissimilar groups into a single political economy is not limited to the modern era. On the contrary, ancient Maya populations experienced multiple cycles of statecraft and subsequent balkanization. Can all of us—ethnographers, linguists, ethnohistorians, and archaeologists alike—comment on formation of ethnic groups in situations of interaction as opposed to situations of isolation, as has often been previously assumed?

The final topic directly involves the identification of archaeological contexts that are valuable for investigating ethnicity. Material styles play an active role in expressing ethnic membership, but the relationship between material culture and ethnicity is not straightforward (DeBoer 1984, 1990; Dietler and Herbich 1998; Hayden and Cannon 1983; Hodder 1982; Janusek 2004; Stark, Heller, and Ohnsergen 1998). We recommend a cautious approach to object-based studies in which styles are placed in their contexts of production, consumption, and significance. Style is not simply decorative techniques and motifs but also a result of specific bio-mechanical, technical, and ritual processes. Here, the contexts of identification are critical for identifying diacritics. Without a focus on significant context, material styles may not be very informative for the archaeologist interested in ethnicity and ethnogenesis. Archaeologists are faced with the difficult challenge of sorting out which contexts are beneficial in reconstructing the social past. They draw on mythologies, artwork, cultural traditions (usually in the production of certain types of artifacts), language, and historical and contemporary correlates. But most important, they must focus on contexts of identification: specifically, those contexts where there can be identification.

What is the value of identity? What unit of identity is being examined? What contexts are favorable for identification? What approaches will we as archaeologists use for identifying differing identities? We must take into account the meanings of identity, geographic variation, historical and political instabilities, and socio-cultural diversity. In doing so, we accept and affirm the heterogeneity and cultural diversity of Maya peoples.

Once we find ways of detecting this heterogeneity, we have not completed our inquiry but rather just begun it. No single theoretical approach can sufficiently explain the complexity we see in ethnic group formation and maintenance. The most promising approach for this kind of research is multidisciplinary (Hostettler 2004). We must form multiple working hypotheses and continue to question accepted interpretations of archaeological data.

Part I of this volume contains chapters written by sociologists, ethnographers, ethnohistorians, linguists, and epigraphers. In looking at modern and post-Colonial

Maya populations, this section is designed to outline the variety of theoretical and methodological techniques useful in examining ethnic differences and provide suggestions for archaeologists who have far greater impediments to study this complex topic. First, Samson explores the use of the term *Maya* in relation to Guatemala's Maya Movement. He evaluates the differential appropriation of the ethnic term *Maya* by indigenous peoples in Mexico and Guatemala, suggesting that differences result from the relationship of the state to those populations. Samson then examines ways of framing pan-Mayanism in local, national, and transnational contexts. In chapter 3, Castillo Cocom, Rodriguez, and Ashenbrenner explore "ethnoexodus," the removal of oneself from a particular construction of identity, and how social agents move fluidly between identities. They critically assess racial and ethnic categorization and related social terminology (habitus, ethnos, genesis) as inextricably tied to Western narratives. They reflect instead on the concept of *iknal*, where one is physically/habitually present but not actively engaged in games of social status, a concept they argue is at the core of Maya thinking.

Hofling's chapter examines the evolution of Itzaj and Mopan identities in Petén Guatemala. Both Itzaj and Mopan are members of the Yukatekan branch of the Mayan language family. He evaluates linguistic evidence of ethnic differences and periodic contact between the two groups. Hofling also revisits the meaning and use of the term *Maya* and examines the relationships of toponyms to ethnic or linguistic groups.

The chapter by Restall and Gabbert begins to bridge present with past constructions of ethnicity. The authors explore the genesis of the term *Maya* and the effects of early Spanish ethnoracial concepts on social order. They review the history and usage of the term *Maya* in Yucatán, then explore the nature of Maya identities during the Conquest and Colonial periods.

The final chapter in Part I completes the bridge to Part II, which is dedicated to archaeological explorations of identity construction. In this chapter Macri questions how languages found in written hieroglyphic records can provide insights into various forms of social organization. She examines linguistic variations reflected in Classic period Maya texts, in both their chronological and geographic contexts. Macri provides evidence from several linguistic features for the development of regional social/ethnic groups and suggests that data such as those presented in this chapter should be matched with parallel developments in portable objects, architecture, burial customs, and demography.

Part II of this volume is dedicated to archaeological works that analyze data in the context of identity formation and identification and includes chapters by archaeologists, biological anthropologists, and epigraphers. While frontiers or

borderlands are especially productive areas of research on the topic of identity, not all chapters in Part II are from areas considered ancient frontiers. My reason for highlighting this distinction is to show that almost any region in the Maya area can be a good location for investigations into the anthropology or archaeology of identity, if the right contexts are analyzed. LeCount's chapter serves both as an introduction to the archaeological study of Maya ethnicities and a case example. Her research in the upper Belize River valley suggests a frontier between the Petén and the polities of the coastal plain of Belize. In this chapter she identifies the micro- and macro-processes significant for the formation of ethnic groups and suggests means of identifying their archaeological signatures. She argues for the emergence of distinct regional populations that were disconnected from the broadly recognized international elite culture during the Late and Terminal Classic periods.

The chapter by Marken, Guenter, and Freidel concerns work in Chiapas, a region not strongly associated as a Maya frontier. They begin by explaining how current models of ancient Maya social organization can be enhanced by evaluating input from approaches to ethnic group formation and maintenance. The authors then begin an inquiry into the interplay between ethnic identity and class identity during the Classic period at the site of Palenque. They draw heavily on the analysis of ancient written texts and suggest ways epigraphic, iconographic, and ritual symbols could have been used to highlight class and ethnic differences.

The final two chapters in this section are from the Southeast Periphery, an important frontier at the southern reaches of the Maya realm. Unlike the chapters by Marken and colleagues and LeCount, the ethnic differences in this region are not simply inter-Maya ethnic divisions but a complex interplay among local Maya, intrusive elite Maya cultural assemblages, and local non-Maya. Canuto and Bell investigate how identities were formed, tolerated, and maintained in the El Paraíso Valley in western Honduras. They compare two sites located between Quiriguá and Copán over time and suggest that the Late Classic "Mayanization" of the Copán region was related more to political fission between these two centers than to enculturation of local non-Maya peoples. Finally, Storey examines how archaeological approaches to ethnic identity can be based on both cultural and biological traits. Bioarchaeology, she argues, contributes to studies of identity and ethnicity through biological relatedness and archaeological context. Using them both, she analyzes burials from Classic and Late Classic Copán to investigate whether Mayas can be identified separately from non-Mayas.

These studies indicate that it difficult to elicit evidence of ethnicity in the archaeological record, but this does not mean it *cannot* be found. Hodder, following Cohen (1978), states that social identity and ethnicity are best evidenced in

the archaeological record when investigated as “the mechanism by which *interest groups* use culture to symbolize their *within-group* organization in *opposition* to and in competition with *other interest groups*” (Hodder 1979:452, emphasis added). Archaeologists may never be able to identify specific ethnic groups in the archaeological record for same reasons that ethnographers have criticized static concepts of ethnicity. But what we can identify is change and material characteristics of change in the material record. We can observe shifts in how people view themselves, their neighbors, and others.

It is clear, as Restall and Gabbert (this volume) point out, that the image of a timeless Maya ethnic community is an illusion. This brief outline and chronological overview of approaches to ethnicity and past directions of research in Maya studies only touches on the complexity of the topic. As there is no agreement on the definition and usage of the term *ethnicity* in Maya studies, specific contextualized definitions are necessary. The interpretive benefits of different approaches must be explored and empirically tested to progress ethnic studies. The need for the interdisciplinary perspective pursued in this volume has, I hope, been demonstrated. The real contribution of this volume is not that there are different Maya ethnic groups but rather that it *is possible to explore* ethnicity in the past (including the archaeological past) as well as the present by approaching ethnicity from an interdisciplinary perspective and to provide a number of methodologies for understanding the multiplicity of Maya identities.

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