AN ETHNICITY TO KNOW

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Abstract

Having an "ethnic identity" is an idea that seems straightforward, but what it means to be "ethnic" has been a topic of much debate and discussion. The criteria that distinguish an "ethnic group" are also fluid and dependent on context. Under these conditions, how can "ethnicity" be a useful concept in archaeology? In this chapter I explore the utility of the concept of "ethnicity": My conclusion is that the utility of the concept lies not in distinguishing ethnic identities or groups - which may prove to be elusive - but in the process of exploring ancient Maya social dynamics and economic tensions to determine whether the potential existed for the establishment of ethnic identities.

Resumen

El concepto de poseer una "identidad étnica" parece claro, pero lo que implica ser "étnica" ha sido el enfoque de mucho debate y discusión. Los criterios a base de que se distingue un "grupo étnico" son también fluidos, y dependientes en contexto. Bajo estas condiciones, ¿de qué modo puede "etnicidad" servir como un concepto de utilidad en la arqueología? En este capítulo examino la utilidad del concepto de "etnicidad". Llego a la conclusión de que la utilidad del concepto consiste no en distinguir identidades étnicas o grupos - que podrían resultar impalpables - sino en el proceso de examinar la dinámica social y las tensiones económicas entre los antiguos Mayas, con el fin de determinar si existía el potencial para el establecimiento de identidades étnicas.

This chapter is an attempt to grapple with the concept of ethnicity and the question of its relevance to an understanding of ancient Maya social dynamics. I begin by considering the roots of our use of the term and its historical context. I then consider ethnicity and its material correlates and finally, ethnicity and the Maya. My conclusion has a positive side, but only if we view "ethnicity" in a critical light.

"Ethnicity" cannot be applied readily or uncritically to Maya social dynamics. This is partly because the criteria we would need to determine the existence of "ethnicity" are problematic enough in the case of living and interacting groups (Banks 1996), let alone in the case of those long dead. Second, "ethnicity" has been defined and used in so many different ways by different researchers (Banks 1996, Barth 1969, Cohen 1978) that use of the term cannot serve in itself as explanation. Simply to employ "ethnicity" to describe a phenomenon or to use the related term "ethnic" to describe a group is obfuscation, because each person who reads or hears these terms has different ideas about what they mean. To add to this, even in the anthropological literature it is often unclear whether the researcher is using "ethnicity" or "ethnic" solely as an analytical tool, or whether one or the other term is meant to describe a concept that actually exists in the minds of the subjects (Banks 1996:36).

However, if archaeologists are careful to define the way they choose to use "ethnicity" or its correlates, and if they are explicit about why they are using it, then it is possible that recognising the existence of an "ethnicity" or defining a group and describing it as "ethnic" will not only increase our understanding of the particular historical circumstances, but might also "take us toward an understanding of specific culture histories and general evolutionary processes of culture growth and change" (Cohen 1978:383). My own view, which develops in the sections that follow, is that proving the existence of an ethnicity is less important than the exercise of evaluating the utility of "ethnicity" in a given historical context. By this I mean that the exercise itself can serve as an analytical tool in reconsidering the ways in which resources were appropriated, distributed, and/or generated in the ancient Maya world at different periods of time, even if ethnicity as a phenomenon remains elusive.

I emphasise resource use and appropriation because "ethnicity" in my view has its greatest utility as a term in describing dynamics of state-level societies. Most anthropologists who apply ethnicity in this way use it in the context of nation states (Banks 1996:45), but competing Maya city-states and super-states as well as the Aztec empire are all amenable to analysis in which the existence of ethnicities or ethnic

groups is considered. I see ethnic identity - or, rather, use of the term "ethnic" by us to describe an identity - as useful only if it is meant to capture or describe a form of agency on the part of the Maya. In this case the agency would be that of a group asserting and maintaining an identity (a political act) to improve its positioning, particularly with regard to economic relationships, within society (see Cohen 1969 in Banks 1996:33). Thus ethnicity in this sense is assumed to describe something recognised by both the analyst (us) and the actors (the Maya group) (Banks 1996:36). If ethnicity is not used in this sense - for example, if "ethnic" merely covers cultural practices as represented in the material culture inventory or lineage as represented in skeletal evidence or hieroglyphic inscriptions - then it has questionable utility because other terms such as "culture" or "identity" do just as well. By this I do not mean to say that how people think of themselves as a group must always be goal-oriented (Bentley 1987 in Banks 1996:45). I am saying that "ethnicity" as a concept is useful only if it is applied to situations in which how people think of themselves as a group becomes a standpoint, and hence a potential stimulus to change.

What is "ethnicity"?

The meaning of the word "ethnic" connotes something different from the words "culture" or "identity" in that use of "ethnic" is embedded in dynamics of exclusion. To define a group in terms of an ethnicity implies the existence of those who do not share in this ethnicity. Both culture and identity involve elements of exclusion, but they put connotative emphasis on inclusion and are less divisive than ethnicity in their construction. Put another way, I could say that identity is how I construct my sense of self[1]; culture is what I do under the influence of my family, peers, and social group; and ethnicity defines the special circumstances in which I use my identity and my culture to distinguish myself from others (see also Cohen

1978:397). I argue further that these special circumstances are purposeful and entail not just difference but reaction. All three concepts require difference; but identity and culture can exist as states of mind, whereas ethnicity is a platform for action.

It is important to note that "ethnicity" as it has been used in sociology and anthropology is generally associated with distinctively modern historical processes (Cohen 1978; Sokolovskii & Tishkov 1996:190). As such it should not unguardedly be transferred to cover Precolumbian or pre-modern social and cultural dynamics. However, the term subsumes components that can potentially describe pre-modern circumstances, and I explore this potential below.

Given that ethnicity is distinct from culture and identity, and that ethnicity is associated with modern historical processes, the question arises: Is there something that constitutes ethnicity that does not constitute having a cultural identity? My answer to this question is "yes", and I suggest that ethnicity arises only under specific historical conditions of interaction between social and cultural identity.

The roots of ethnicity

When we consider applying the term "ethnic" to group particular traits, we are not simply practicing description - as in describing the sizes of houses, or the kind of thatch people used, or the decoration on a pot. In reality, we are attempting to explain these traits, because using the term "ethnic" carries with it the implication that the people associated with a trait, or with several traits, actually define themselves in terms of possessing the trait. Therefore it goes without saying that there exist people who either are not associated with the trait, or are associated with the trait but do not define themselves as a group by it.

"Ethnic" has its roots[2] in the Greek *ethnikos* (ἐθνικός), the adjective for *ethnos* (ἔθνιος) which means "people" or "nation". Homer used the word *ethnos* to denote a group of people or body of men; he even referred to the *ethnos* of the dead. This sense of *ethnos* as a group is retained in our terms "ethnography" and "ethnology", and as a concept it has great utility when it implies "group" without committing to the

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[1] I refer to identity broadly as sense of self. In this context it is not necessary to opt for whether sense of self is considered the process by which an individual internalises "core" cultural information and then uses this primary internalisation to structure new information, or whether sense of self is considered contingent and derived from processes of socialization, in which case no core sense is considered to exist but instead a sense that is constantly altered by changes in social situation (from discussion in Rowlands 1994:132).

[2] All definitions discussed are derived from *The Oxford English Dictionary*, the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, and http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/lexica.html; Greek spelling from Agapi Filini, personal communication.

distinctions that constitute the group. Edmonson (1960) uses *ethnos* in this sense when he says, "For many or even most Indians the subjective ethnos was most likely a sib, a clan, a village, a moiety, a cult, or a lineage …" (Edmonson 1960:189).

However, *ethnos* came to be used among the Greeks to apply to what in English would be termed foreign nations or gentiles. This is interesting, because our term "nation" carries with it the importance of place or territory. The word "nation" itself is derived from the past participle of the Latin *nasci*, which means "to be born". Therefore, although "nation" can be used to refer to a people who share common customs, history, and frequently language, the implication is that the people who comprise a nation share a place of origin, even if the people no longer hold hegemony over that place, as in the case of the First Nations of North America.

The original Greek terms *ethnos* (ἐ`θνιος) and *ethnikos* (ἐθνικός) seem to have recognised that a people could exist as an entity without birth in, or hegemony over, a particular place, although it is virtually certain that memory of a place of common origin, whether real or imagined (see, for example, the traditions of the central Mexican *altepetl* in Lockhart 1992:16), was (and is) critical to the creation of a particular *ethnos*. Whatever its origins, *ethnos* as a term came to be used by the Greeks to characterise non-Greeks. Therefore exactly what made the foreign people a group was not nearly as important as the fact that they were non-Greek, which is why the term *ethnos* is problematic. It came to be used not as a term of inclusion - as in a people's definition of themselves - but as a term of exclusion. It reflected the Greek view of who was not Greek.

In fourteenth-century England, *ethnykis* (Middle English) was used to refer to gentiles, meaning heathens or non-Christians, because the plural form of *ethnos*, *ta ethne* (τά ἐ`θνη) or foreign nations, was used in the translation of the Bible from Hebrew to Greek to refer to non-Hebrews. Again, we have a version of the term "ethnic" used by a group to differentiate those who are not considered part of the group. "Ethnic" has not been used in the sense of "heathen" since the early eighteenth century. It has broadened and come to mean "a member of a particular group of people sharing a common and distinctive racial, national, religious, linguistic or cultural heritage".[3] This definition is interesting because it covers all the possible

criteria people might employ to define themselves or to define others! If any one or all of these criteria can potentially define what is "ethnic", then the implications are not only that people make up their own categories (Glazer & Moynihan 1975:xiii) but also that some other dynamic is at work besides common culture or identity. Glazer and Moynihan (1975) in *Beyond the Melting Pot*, a study of "Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish" in New York City, were optimistic in the first edition of their book in 1960 that ethnic groups were based largely on common culture and common descent, and that these groups would assimilate into the larger American culture and society through time. But in their 1975 edition they commented, "Perhaps the meaning of ethnic labels will yet be erased in America. But it has not yet worked out this way …" (Glazer & Moynihan 1975:12).

The persistence of ethnic labels is due partly to the fact that new ethnic identities arose as others dissolved or re-formed. That is, "new we/they distinctions become possible" (Cohen 1978:400). Religion, for example, declined as a focus of ethnic identification for Irish- and Italian-Americans (Glazer & Moynihan 1975: xxxvi) whereas African-Americans redefined their ethnicity along racial lines (1975:xiii). But the important question is not really what the lines of definition were, or are, but rather why "ethnicity" is so resilient as both a concept and a social phenomenon. This resilience harks back to the Greek meaning, because it owes its integrity to its use primarily as a term to reflect "otherness". By this I mean that the dynamic at work besides common culture or identity is a dynamic of exclusion in which groups, such as the immigrant populations in New York City, use their exclusion as a platform for agency or action.

Before I close this section by emphasising again that the utility of "ethnicity" lies in its use as a term with roots in "otherness" - in the sense that one's group is seen against a backdrop of another group or other groups - I acknowledge that terms derived from *ethnos* have been used more neutrally either to stand for how a group defines itself, or to stand for inclusion. In addition to the example provided above in which *ethnos* is used to describe the phenomenon of group identity (Edmonson 1960:189), the word "ethnocentrism" has also been employed to describe expressions of group solidarity at the level of the hamlet or township or even lineage or domestic group (see Bricker 1981:177-178). Perhaps more significant,

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[3] *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language.*

"ethnicity" and "ethnic" have been appropriated as terms of inclusion to describe one's own group membership. As such, ethnicity on the surface of it can be said to be related to a sense of identity and belonging. However, appropriation of "ethnic" to describe one's own group membership is a purposeful and political act that draws its meaning from economic and social conditions at a particular time and place. It is a reaction by a subordinate group to a dominant group, and although "ethnocentrism" can be interpreted more broadly to represent any sort of group-level solidarity, use of the term "ethnic" as in "ethnic group" or "ethnic conflict" invariably entails conditions of domination and subordination (Bricker 1981:129-154, 177). Therefore use of both "ethnicity" and "ethnic" draws meaning from a context in which particular social groups exercise dominance and others are subordinate.

Ethnicity and material correlates

I consider myself to be ethnically Italian, even though my grandparents on my father's side were from Northern Ireland, and I have French great-grandparents. Nonetheless, I choose to see myself as ethnically Italian because I was raised by my Italian grandparents, and I still cook and eat in a way that makes me at home in the Mediterranean, but not in America, despite the fact that I was born and raised in the United States. On the other hand, my language is English, and I have appropriated English culture, English heritage, English landscape and English literature as my own. When I moved to England, I may have been identified as a foreigner or a colonial, but I felt at home. This example suggests rather strongly that ethnicity can have no incontrovertible material correlates because ethnicity is both relational and a state of mind.

How is ethnicity relational? Individuals and groups who are using ethnicity to define those they exclude from their own group - that is, to define the "other" - will focus on a particular range of traits as "ethnic" that are different from the traits named by people who have appropriated "ethnic" as an inclusive term. For example, I grew up in the 1950s, at a time when real Americans would define Italian-Americans in the following ways: greasy hair, garlic, pierced ears, pasta, Mafia. My family would have used wholly different criteria to define us ethnically as Italian: music, opera, literature, family relationships, fine cuisine. Therefore "ethnic" is a highly charged word. It represents

tensions and relationships rather than a material reality that is obvious to everyone.

Ethnicity is not only relational; ethnicity is a state of mind. In my own case, if the material culture of my existence were completely preserved, an archaeologist might be able to conclude from my kitchen equipment and from food remains that my cuisine was Italian, and probably southern Italian at that. If books and compact disks were preserved, it would be clear that I used English as a language. My DNA would show that I had no English genetic material, however. Isotope analysis of my teeth and bones would show that I had grown up outside of England, but had never lived in Italy. Yet, I would define myself as ethnically Italian, because: 1) It is a political statement derived from growing up as part of what was then a minority group in America; and 2) Food is and always has been a defining part of my existence. Would this "living to eat" be considered a defining trait of Italian-ness? Not entirely, because this attitude towards food is also characteristic of France and Spain, and almost certainly reflects a tradition with greater spatial range and time depth than can be said to be solely Italian.

If ethnicity is a state of mind, and if it is rooted in history and in the tensions that characterise domination and resistance, or in the tensions that characterise the majority and the minority, then ethnicity perforce is constructed, contextual, relational (Sokolovskii & Tishkov 1996:192) but can even be ephemeral. When we turn to the ancient Maya, we have to consider that these characteristics make use of ethnicity problematic. There are two main impediments to its use: The first is whether ethnicity is relevant, since we do not know whether hegemonic tensions existed and if they did, we have to ask who comprised the dominant group that was exclusionary, or who comprised the inclusive group or groups. The second impediment is that if we toss all caution to the winds and decide that some part of ethnicity, such as cultural identity, might be relevant, and we focus on Maya sites or Maya texts to determine whether some of our artefacts or some of our texts reflect criteria of inclusion or exclusion, we would still not know the *relationship* of these objects to the people who used them. We can posit that the artefacts or the dialects comprise what we would expect in the case of defining a cultural identity, but we do not know how or whether the particular Maya who made the objects we excavated or who wrote the texts we decipher would have used the material to define

themselves ethnically, because ethnicity is relational, constructed and contextual and has no incontrovertible material correlates.

Is there an ethnicity to know?

Does this leave us at a dead end with regard to the ancient Maya, or can the term ethnicity be used to discern dynamics that might otherwise lie hidden?

What makes ethnicity meaningful is its definition in the modern sense. If we use the term casually or water it down as simply "cultural identity", then, like so many terms borrowed by us archaeologists, it will lose its subtlety and its explanatory value. The modern meaning of ethnicity is the group to which an individual would say he or she belonged, if asked. Since we cannot ask this question of the Maya of the past, we cannot know their ethnicity. However, *we can consider that there might be an ethnicity to know.*

First, we have to ask those questions we have always asked about whether it is possible to detect dynamics that reflect how people construct their identity or identities, as long as we keep in mind that identities are not ethnicity. To refer back to my own case, all the evidence an archaeologist might examine in my home - the language I used in writing, the books I read, the pots I cooked with, the food remains I discarded over time - could legitimately be inferred to represent dynamics of inclusion, because these things are involved in my construction of a sense of belonging and could be inferred to constitute my cultural identity. However, we have to keep in mind that there is no clearly recognisable relationship between my cultural identity or identities and my ethnicity.

Archaeologists are relatively practiced at recognising the dynamics of cultural identity, but how do we detect ethnicity? Can we simply assume that there is an ethnicity to know? In the example of my own modern case, the answer is "yes" because we know that the political context existed in which ethnicities were constructed in America as acts of resistance. Were ethnicities ever constructed in the Maya lowlands as acts of resistance?

Ironically, it seems to me that to get at ethnicity in the past, rather than ask about cultural identity we have to ask first about social identity. What was a person's status? Was he or she a receiver and distributor of resources, or a producer of resources? I have an ethnicity because my immediate ancestors found themselves with the potential to move from a peripheral, labour-providing, exclusionary position to a more central, share-in-the-resource position of inclusion. My ethnicity is a reflection of the history and character of this shift. It represents the tensions of loss and gain - of adherence to a past that is rooted in a place at the same time that place is no longer relevant. The goal was a new social niche, and the stimulus was an opening in the hegemonic social armour. Did situations like this exist among the ancient Maya at any time in the pasts we study? Is it a question we should be asking? Is there, among the ancient Maya, an ethnicity to know?

Why elites (and modernity) are important

It is unfortunate, as noted by G. Marcus (1992), that "the development of concerns with elites as a theory is that they have devolved very much as a part-theory, in reaction and as a supplement to more encompassing and abstract schemes of nineteenth-century Western social theory. Elite theory stands or falls empirically on whether or not the salience, or even the existence, of a postulated elite group can be demonstrated" (G. Marcus 1992:297). To this extent the emphasis not only in the social sciences but also in archaeology has been on "typological experiences" (G. Marcus:298) - that is, a concern with the applicability or inapplicability of concepts of class, stratification, elites or status groups (D. Chase & A. Chase 1992; Giddens 1973). This has entailed a concern with what has been called the traditional-modern contrast (G. Marcus 1992: 300), such as the inapplicability of Marxist perspectives to non-capitalist class-stratified societies (Giddens 1981:47). Among Mayanists, the basis of elite power or the processes of domination in modern state societies are seen as ill-fitted to conditions in Mesoamerica (McAnany 1993:68; G. Marcus 1992:300-301). Nonetheless, G. Marcus (1992) observes that discussions of modern processes of domination can "provide a set of analytical images or a framework for envisioning elite domination in extremis that might fruitfully be used to construct hypotheses with which to interrogate archaeological materials …" (G. Marcus 1992:300).

One of the foci of Marcus's research was the relationship between elites and the institutions they control and the connection in turn between such a relationship and non-elites, whose lives were controlled through these institutional

processes (G. Marcus 1992:298). One of the questions that drove his research was whether the elite perspective included society at large or was limited to elite institutional politics. That is, were elites cognizant of how far-reaching the effects of their decisions may have been within their institutional domains, or of the outcomes of the games they played within these institutional domains (G. Marcus 1992:298)? The picture I paint in this chapter and develop further in relation to warfare elsewhere (Graham & Golson 2006) - based partly on evidence such as that from the Petexbatun (e.g. Demarest 1997; Demarest *et al.* 1997) but also on evidence from Lamanai - is that elites, at least up until the time of the Maya collapse, saw only as far as their institutional politics. I also follow G. Marcus (1993) here in that my concern is not the identity of the elites or the gradations that may exist in manifestations of status, but the dynamic that develops as the result of elite versus non-elite interests, which exists no matter how one identifies or classifies the elites or non-elites either in person or in the archaeological record (see also J. Marcus 1992: 221 on endogamy and elites).

An analytical focus on the dynamics of elite versus non-elite interests puts the traditional-modern contrast in a different light. McAnany (1993:68-69), for example, in discussing the economics of wealth among eighth-century Maya households, draws on Giddens' (1981) criticism that expansion of the forces of production is not the basis of power in non-capitalist economics. Power is instead generated and maintained through the domination of authorisation structures, or control of the social world rather than the technological-resource realm (Giddens 1981:47 in McAnany 1993:68). However, sociologists such as Giddens have little conception of what technological development might constitute in a world without metallurgy and, as noted by McAnany (1993:68), Giddens may be expressing an overly non-materialistic view of the past. Even most of us archaeologists are not likely to recognise the full implications of what the Maya would have considered an advance in technology if we tripped over it. Much more important, however, is that what is "social" as defined by Giddens can have a history that includes control of resources, both economic and spiritual (although here I emphasise the former). In modern England, there are upper-class families with no wealth or land but who nonetheless have social power because of their status. This is because at one time in the past they were wealthy owing to control of land and resources, and the memory of this is socially sanctioned in their titles and in their historical relationships with their peers. Thus their power appears to be based in control of the social world but in fact is rooted in a past in which they had considerable economic power.

I use this example not to say that Maya elites all owned land at one time; I use it to demonstrate that social power can be deceptive if viewed as synchronic rather than diachronic. Social power almost always stands for something that takes on meaning as a result of history. Therefore, before we assume that social power in the Maya world is not based in control of technology or resources, we need to examine the history of social power and its expression. I suggest that social power translates into economic power in the Maya world, but this relationship has been obscured by us because of our conflation of the growth of Maya states with the expansion of so-called territorial boundaries. In other words, it is easier for us to envision how power works in situations such as the British and French expropriation of Native American territory in North America, or the German conquest of Poland or the Japanese invasion of China. In these cases the conquering entity had little regard for the occupants of the land invaded and instead was interested in acquiring the territory and any resources it generated. If economic power among the Maya and indeed in Mesoamerica in general was based not on the accumulation of resources through appropriation of territory but on the accumulation of resources through the appropriation of obligatory relationships (i.e., tribute), then social relationships *are* economic relationships. In other words, there is a complex history entailed in social relationships that was recognised by the Maya but has been repeatedly missed by us because, operationally, we think in terms foreign to Maya dynamics.

We think: 1) Appropriate territory with its resource potential; 2) Realise this potential either by subjugating the populations on the territory or by moving people in (Demarest 1997:220); 3) Appropriate the attendant resources. What I suggest is that Maya dynamics were more like: 1) Appropriate people with their resource potential, i.e., tribute; 2) Realise this potential through various degrees of wealth transfer (i.e., appropriate tribute obligations); 3) Appropriate the attendant resources. Land was certainly involved, but not as the primary basis for action or interaction. This topic deserves discussion in much more detail than I devote to

it in this context because it has a number of implications for our understanding of warfare, defences, boundaries, and what has been called "territorial control" (Marcus 1993:145). My point here, relevant to the development of ethnicities, is that the pre-modern Maya, despite their non-capitalist stratification and their social capital, were nonetheless subject to economic tensions not at all dissimilar to tensions exhibited in "sociocultural systems of modernity" (G. Marcus 1992:300).

Who are the elites?

Drawn from A. Chase and D. Chase (1992), the term "elite" as I use it comprises those who run society's institutions, those who generally govern society, and those whose demands affect production and distribution. I am not entirely comfortable with the idea that elite ancestors were supernatural (J. Marcus 1992:222) except in retrospect in descendant elite inscriptions, but supernatural sanction was certainly involved in rulership. In historic times, despite claims to the contrary (see Sharer 1993:95 on the "virtual disappearance" of the Maya elite class during the Spanish Colonial era), Maya elites dominated administrative positions (Restall 1997:62-72). Indeed Nahua, Ñudzahui and Maya nobility were all able to hold on to their dominant position as a group, and dynastic rulership was largely maintained (Restall 1997:62-63). Among the Maya of Yucatan, the positions of *batab* (governor), *escribano* (notary), *alcalde*, *regidor* and other post-conquest offices (see Restall 1997:Table 6.3, p. 70) were filled by nobles or elites. Elites within each community or *cah* (Restall 1997:13-40) had privileged access to political office (Restall 1997:65). Thus, the elite versus non-elite dichotomy was clearly deeply rooted in Yucatan. Even if archaeological evidence shows that wealth or poverty can be acquired by elites and non-elites alike (D. Chase & A. Chase 1992: 312-316), thinking in terms of the tensions that existed between elites and non-elites as an analytical tool (G. Marcus 1992) succinctly captures the dynamics that permeated Maya social relations.

Therefore the hierarchical division between elites and non-elites in Mesoamerica (J. Marcus 1992; Sharer 1993:93), although at one level a simplification, is nonetheless critical in any consideration of the potential for ethnicity, because the answer to the question of whether there is an ethnicity to know lies in whether we can define an emerging Maya social dynamic that does not fall easily on either side of the elite-commoner divide, and whether this dynamic made a difference. I do not mean to argue against the existence of subdivisions among elites or among non-elites or that there were no gradations of socioeconomic differentiation, all of which has been documented (Chase & Chase 2004; Palka 1997:303; Sharer 1993:93). In fact it is these very gradations or subdivisions that probably facilitated the raising of an ethnic consciousness. However, if we take up the hypothesis that my modern model generates, for the sake of argument, then neither craft nor culture nor profession nor origins in a place is sufficient on its own to give rise to an ethnicity; on the other hand, wealth that might accrue in accordance with these factors is indeed important, but this means that economic tensions - not craft or culture or profession or origin per se - are the trigger.

As in modern times, and despite all the apparent complexities and class subdivisions that exist, we can nonetheless generalise about dichotomous tensions that exist between those who employ and those who are employed; between those who control resources and those who must give something in exchange for the resources they use; or between those who own property and those who rent or lease property. In central London, buying property still involves leases of one hundred to two hundred years after which the "purchased" property reverts back to the Duke of Westminster or to whoever acquired the land in times past! In the Maya past, the right to control or to generate resources and the obligation to produce or to exchange labour for resources provided the dynamic that structured or even subsumed all other dynamics and must be reckoned with first and foremost in any consideration of a rising ethnicity.

Social identity and a case for elite solidarity

Smith (1986), in his discussion of the role of social stratification in the Aztec empire, downplays the role of terror in the maintenance of the empire, which on the surface of it would seem to weaken bonds between the elites of central Mexico and elites from beyond the basin, and instead emphasises the critical role of co-operation among elites. Calnek (1982:60) likewise stresses that the "loyalty of subject states", which I take to refer to the economic obligations among vying elites, was sought primarily through indirect means such as inter-

dynastic marriages, and that force was applied only when necessary. Despite what might be called persistent factional competition among city states (Brumfiel 1989), all elites stood to benefit from competition and its consequences. Rebellions did not necessarily result in wars but in effect constituted periodic refusal by city-state lords to pay tribute to the Mexica and then negotiation to see if they could get a better deal. When no deals could be cut, or marriages arranged, or the Mexica were not too busy elsewhere, warfare resulted, in which case the aim of each side was to re-establish economic relationships in its favour but in accord with the rules by which elites traditionally appropriated resources (Calnek 1982; Smith 1986).

Details on exactly how rights to tribute changed hands between or among elites (Aztec or Maya) are never very clearly articulated in the literature. Certainly one potential mechanism of wealth transfer was the act of capturing rival elite warriors in battle (Freidel 1986a), which opened the door to accessing tribute - or to trade via tribute (Freidel 1986b) - paid to these warriors. Conquest-period Aztec accounts indicate that killing warriors on the battlefield or during retreat was not acceptable practice (Clendinnen 1991), although Hassig (1988:116-117) describes it as part of warfare. How death on the battlefield affected the mechanics of the tribute system is not known, but if Clendinnen (1991) is right, then battlefield deaths may have confused rather than facilitated tribute transfer, which is why live captives were so important.

Whether capturing non-elites (commoners) was in anyone's economic interest is not at all clear. In Aztec times, commoners served a role in warfare (Hassig 1988). Roys (1943) describes slaves in Yucatan as captured commoners, but the idea that wars were fought primarily to obtain slaves to sell is highly suspect and tainted with Spanish prejudice (Roys 1943:65). In such an environment, no commoner would ever have wandered far from his house, but since commoners were the resource providers, I suspect that the *encomenderos* who reported that Maya wars in their *encomienda* territories were fought primarily to obtain slaves (Roys 1943:68) were told this to put them off. No elite Maya *batab* with any brains would have cared to reveal the basis of his economic power and positioning, especially since such economic power and positioning after the Conquest were in constant danger of being appropriated and further eroded by Spaniards (Restall 1997). Therefore the moti-

vations for warfare described in the documents and reported on by Roys seem to have been generated by the Maya because they knew what the Spaniards would like to hear, and what would satisfy their expectations. I expect that the motivations were far more complicated, and that they involved a desire for resource gain at the level of elite interaction. In fact, I would go so far as to say that commoners captured in warfare were what the Americans in the Iraq war have called "collateral damage": a *consequence* of warfare rather than the motivation for its undertaking. It may well also have been the practice of making the best of a bad situation in which capture of elites and hence access to further tribute rights fell below expectations.

In the case of both the Aztecs and the Maya, the meaningful economic and social dynamic in society was the division between elites and non-elites (J. Marcus 1992) - between those with the rights to receive resources, and those with the obligation to produce resources. An argument has been made for the emergence of a "middle class" at Caracol where, through time, an increasing number of people found themselves at the resource-receiving end (Chase & Chase 1996:71). However, a variety of economic forces could have produced this result, including a fast-reproducing elite class and/or one that extended its rights (as in the case of Motecuhzoma I) to include illegitimate offspring of nobles (Rounds 1982:72). Nonetheless the impetus behind a "middle class" is a factor to be reckoned with and will be considered again later in the chapter. Here, I stress that in terms of justifying rights to resource appropriation, elites from Tikal or Calakmul or Caracol or Teotihuacan, despite competition and indeed because of the very nature of competition, had more in common with each other than they had with non-elites in their respective communities (Haviland & Moholy-Nagy 1992:59). The view that this commonality was long-lived and deep-rooted receives support from the fact that whereas the suite of prestige goods "consumed" by elites (Blanton, Fargher & Heredia Espinoza 2005:273) changed over time - for example, the Late Post-classic Mexica added turquoise to the category that subsumed jade [Izeki 2006]) - such goods maintained their elite exclusiveness over the entire pre-Hispanic sequence (Blanton, Fargher & Heredia Espinoza 2005:273). I am echoing insights originally expressed by Freidel (1986b: 419-420) on the creation in Mesoamerica of a "superculture" that bound elites over great

distances and that was in operation since the Middle Classic. The only difference is that Freidel sees a Classic to Postclassic shift from wars over trade routes and markets to wars for purposes of tribute extraction (Freidel 1986b: 427), whereas I am pushing wars over tribute extraction back in time as well.

The conditions for the rise of ethnicity

Did the fact that elites shared common interests work for or against the development of an ethnicity among elites? I argue that it worked against the development of an ethnicity among elites, but it may have created conditions in which an ethnicity had the potential to further non-elite interests. However, to deal effectively with the potential for an ethnicity among non-elites - or the potential of an ethnicity to cross-cut traditional boundaries - it is important to consider the political, social and cultural dynamics that helped to structure elite versus non-elite interaction, because the way non-elites were affected invariably involved elite agendas. The landscape is one in which elites continued to buttress their socially advantageous position at the same time that they competed to appropriate more wealth. Despite the fact that elites shared common interests, they engaged in competition that resulted in wealth transfer, and this competition drove the dynamics of stability versus change in Classic, Postclassic and early colonial times. Competition was without doubt disruptive, but elite struggles were played out largely at the elite level both before and after the Spanish conquest (Martin & Grube 2000; Restall 1977; Roys 1943).

A stable base for resource extraction

Excavations at Lamanai which focused specifically on periods of transition (Graham 2004) suggest that the combination of elite co-operation versus competition created conditions for the persistence of a relatively stable base for resource extraction. It is this stable extraction base on which the Spaniards capitalised after the Conquest; and it is this stable extraction base which, in particular historical circumstances, may have provided the necessary leverage for a cultural identity to become an ethnicity on the part of at least some non-elites.

Before turning to the evidence from Lamanai, I will address the question of why elite common interests worked against an ethnicity. I will then address the dynamics of competition and co-operation that gave rise to a stable base for resource extraction that permitted some regions, but clearly not all (Demarest, P. Rice & D. Rice 2001), to withstand collapse.

What need had elites to be "ethnic?"

If there existed, as I have argued, a pan-elite social identity or, in Freidel's words, "the establishment of political economies linking distant societies" (1986b:420) in the Maya lowlands - that is, an awareness among elites that they have rights to receive and redistribute resources but do not labour to produce the resources - then operationally there is no reason to expect elites to respect what we might call cultural or even political boundaries such as community or polity. By community I mean a named place or settlement where a group of people have a history of living together and interacting. By polity I mean a place that comprises one or more communities from which decision-makers are drawn who stand in a hierarchical relationship of governance. I stress that neither of these terms, community or polity, entails details on the structure of economic relationships. Communities and polities generally cross-cut the economic divide between elites and non-elites.

The irony is that if we could ask someone from Teotihuacan or Tikal how he saw himself as part of which group, he would not be likely to answer in terms of his social identity as in, "Oh, well, that's easy; I'm an elite." He would be more likely to identify himself in terms of what we would indeed think of as a cultural identity, although such an identity might have political overtones. He would draw from criteria that might incorporate lineage, certainly, as well as other traits such as language or community or family practices. It could include the polity or community in which he lived (such as Tikal) but could also centre on real or perceived roots in a polity of family origin (such as Teotihuacan) (Martin & Grube 2000). But does such a perceived cultural identity potentially constitute an ethnicity? If I am right in emphasising the pivotal role of an implicit elite social identity in maintenance of the tribute/trade/economic system among the Maya, then the answer is decidedly "no". Elites were in control and formed the dominant socio-politico-economic group. Although their perceived cultural identities probably served to moderate factional competition and most certainly functioned in display, which probably included the theatre of hieroglyphic monuments, what need had they to be ethnic?

What we have come to call polities (e.g. Chase & Chase 1998), such as Tikal or Dos Pilas, were identified among the Maya by elites' individual and family statements about themselves and about the places with which they associated themselves. We think of polities as units predominantly of political control. Polity names or identities, because they are expressed culturally, may actually mask economic relationships. Probably because we tend to think of polities as territorial, aggrandising, land-annexing units, and we associate resource acquisition with land acquisition, we conflate political statements with economic control. If we turn again to the Aztec empire, we find that there were city-state lords who collected tribute from people who lived closer to the centres of *other* city-states; in other cases, settlements subject to nearby city-state centres were interspersed, making it difficult to draw a boundary around the territory of a polity (Smith 2003:151). Smith calls this a ruler-centred conception of polity. Even the Spaniards, who called the *altepetl* a *pueblo*, which means "people", rather than calling it a *ciudad* or *villa* or *aldea,* seemed to recognise by this designation that the meaning of the altepetl as an entity arose from its identification with a group of people rather than a bounded territory (Lockhart 1992:15). "Polities were defined not in terms of territory or space - as they are in the modern world - but in terms of personal obligations" (Smith 2003:151). Obligatory relationships powered loyalties to overlords; such loyalties were not effected by territorial annexation to an overlord's city-state (Calnek 1982:57).

During the early colonial period in Yucatan (Restall 1977; Roys 1943) and in the Maya frontier regions of Belize (Jones 1989) and Peten (Jones 1998), Spanish chroniclers seem to have assumed that Maya dynamics were driven by forces rooted in maintaining territorial boundaries or in quests for land annexation, but such forces simply cannot explain the complexities of movements and alliances that characterise this period. If obligations similar to what has been described for the Aztec empire were also operative among Maya cities or polities, then we might expect far-flung relationships to be common, not rare, and rooted in economic ties (Roys 1943:68-69). Marriage alliances alone would have created conditions in which tribute owed elites originated in towns far from elite residence (e.g. Freidel 1986b:419). If we consider that the stimulus behind warfare was primarily economic - hunger for tribute and not a thirst for hearts - then it is also reasonable to infer that capturing warriors in battle was only the beginning. This must surely have been followed by intense and rather complex negotiation regarding how tribute would be paid, collected and distributed. Although the term "spoils" is commonly used to refer to the economic gain that results from warfare (e.g. Calnek 1982:58), this tells us nothing about the actual mechanics of wealth transfer. Even Hassig's (1988) statement that among the Aztecs, "Victory did not involve the destruction of the target polity's army but their acquiescence in becoming tributaries of the Aztecs" (1988:21) gives no indication of how the individuals involved actually managed tribute. Tribute payments - which may have included rights over trade routes or receipt of trade items - seem to be the way such wealth transfers were effected, at least before the Spanish conquest (e.g. Sahagun 1950-82:ch.41, f.86v, 87) but also for some time afterward (Restall 1977). *Tribute was not appropriated by annexing territory*. This reinforces the idea that material correlates of a polity, such as land or territory, may have had no direct relationship to wealth or power.

For example, let us say a lord from Chau Hiix, in northern Belize, captures a lord from Nohoch Ek. The Chau Hiix lord can now claim the Nohoch Ek lord's tribute. The Nohoch Ek lord lives in the Belize Valley, which is rich agriculturally. Much of the tribute he receives from his lower lords and commoners turns out to be foodstuffs. The Chau Hiix lord may have enough tribute in foodstuffs. In his climb to power, however, he owes favours to those who have helped him, particularly a young lord from the neighbouring city of Lamanai. This young lord joins with the Chau Hiix lord in this particular battle against Nohoch Ek (perhaps as the result of marriage to one of the Chau Hiix lord's sisters). The young lord is new to the game and could use the tribute in foodstuffs, perhaps tobacco, to distribute to those who have helped him. He comes from a family that is known for its scribal talents. So the Chau Hiix lord allows some tribute in foodstuffs from Nohoch Ek to go to his supporter from Lamanai, but he extracts from his supporter the services of a scribe, who then moves from Lamanai to Chau Hiix to provide services to the Chau Hiix lord, which opens up the opportunity for him to marry into the Chau Hiix lord's family. There is also the question of whether the captured Nohoch Ek lord owes tribute to Xunantunich, the largest political centre in the

upper Belize Valley region. If so, once he is captured, what happens to this tribute obligation? If he is ultimately killed, it would depend on the nature of his tribute. If it was substantial, perhaps Xunantunich would then decide to wage war on Chau Hiix with the goal of regaining tribute. Certainly the Chau Hiix lord would have to consider all the options and decide whether "sacrificing" the Nohoch Ek lord would bring on war from Xunantunich. If war with Xunantunich was undesirable, the Nohoch Ek lord might have been ransomed, or simply allowed to return to the Belize Valley to work out for himself how to make up to Xunantunich for what tribute he lost to Chau Hiix. It seems almost certain to have been economic options - and not religion per se - that decided the fate of the Nohoch Ek lord on the sacrificial altar at Chau Hiix.

This imaginary scenario is based on how tribute systems and wealth transfer in non-territorial annexing states or empires might work. My emphasis is on trying to imagine or envisage the process of wealth transfer without recourse to terms that give the appearance of explanation but in fact obscure process, such as "spoils of war" or "conquered territory" or "expanding polities" or "territorial control".

If economic power was not directly linked to control of territory but instead to obligatory relationships among people, which could be extracted through force, this is not to say that people did not see themselves as having roots in a place, or that place is unimportant, but only that place was simply one of a number of criteria that were used to establish an individual's identity and hence his relationships with others. What we have done, I think, is to put too much stock in "place" as an economic parameter. People were the parameters; places came with them. All tribute had a history and represented an intricate network of relationships built up over time that involved goods with origins in places near and far. A man's or woman's rights to tribute do not seem to have been lost as they moved, although such moves may have stimulated negotiations resulting in tribute shifts. Being captured in war seems likely to have been an important mechanism for tribute appropriation.

The landscape of the Maya included towns and cities whose elites' identities were drawn from several dynamics. A social identity arose from elites' rights to extract tribute as a class. Cultural identity would have been drawn from family, lineage and community, and involved real or perceived associations with places. The

effects of the shifting nature of tribute extraction are harder to characterise. Tribute certainly had faces: the faces of those one had captured in war, of one's marriage partners, of those with whom one negotiated, had at one time lived, or were born alongside. Although the implications of tribute extraction may sometimes have affected cultural identity (as in acquiring tribute rights through marriage, in which case the offspring's cultural identity would differ from that of either of the parents individually), in most cases the details of the dynamics of appropriation are more likely to have been masked rather than revealed by social and cultural identity claims. Because I have argued that ethnicities arise only under particular historical conditions in which a weakened or fluid social structure allows claims to cultural identity to be used as leverage in altering economic relationships, it follows that Precolumbian Maya and indeed Mesoamerican elite dynamics would not have given rise to ethnicities among elites.

It also follows that any search for material culture indicators of ethnicity would be problematic. Elites among the Maya were far more likely to invest in material culture indicators that reinforced their social status (Blanton, Fargher & Heredia Espinoza 2005:273) rather than in material culture indicators that reinforced whatever cultural identity they may have shared based on distinctive religious, racial, linguistic or cultural phenomena, although as I have noted above, cultural identity had important roles; but ethnicity was not one of them.

Cultural identity, ethnicity and non-elites

Did perceived cultural identity (lineage, language, family, place) potentially constitute an ethnicity on the part of non-elites? If there is an answer, it does not lie in positing that a particular range of material culture traits or language attributes constituted a cultural identity per se, but instead lies in recognising the social context in which cultural identity is constructed. By this I mean the historical context of elite-commoner dynamics. We need to look at the complex relationships between and among elites and commoners through time, and to consider whether any leverage would ever have come from any non-elite group or sub-group positioning itself as "ethnic".

Given Lamanai's archaeological record, which comprises a lengthy occupation that extends to Spanish colonial times (Graham

1987, 2004; Pendergast 1981, 1993), social distinctions and emerging social dynamics are becoming an increasingly interesting question. Stratigraphic excavation at Lamanai has produced vessels from a wide range of elite Classic to Postclassic contexts. Howie's (2006) detailed microscopic and chemical examination has resulted in the knowledge that technological aspects of these same vessels, particularly regarding potters' choices of raw materials and their manipulation, reflect conditions of long-term stability relative to the kinds of changes that elite tastes underwent. Paste recipes are complex and reflect detailed knowledge of local and non-local environments. They are not the same for all vessels, of course, and recipes changed through time, but the nature of the changes reflects a stable context of complex knowledge and practice and therefore argues strongly for community continuity, even into the Postclassic. In addition, monumental construction (see Graham 2004) from as early as the sixth to at least the eleventh century reflects stability in labour supply and organisation but changes through time in construction styles and techniques. What we seem to have at Lamanai is a stable non-elite sector and a comparatively fluid elite sector. The evidence suggests that elite demands or tastes changed in response to stimuli that affected elites, and elite demands then affected resource production but did not actually disrupt it.

If we accept the hypothetical model I have proposed above concerning elite dynamics, then changes in elite material culture at Lamanai, even from the Classic to Postclassic, can be seen as a rather predictable re-orientation of elite priorities as the result of negotiations, new marriage alliances, or wars. In fact, a closer look at Lamanai's history reveals re-orientation of elite priorities on a regular basis from at least the end of the Early Classic, and possibly earlier.

If warfare was stimulated by economic concerns and, as in the Aztec case, warfare was a last resort of elites vying for tribute (Smith 1986), it makes sense that warfare in Mesoamerica rarely entailed violence to communities in the sense of non-elites' or commoners' households being raided or commoners themselves being systematically killed (Hassig 1988:105). Mesoamerican warfare entailed violence generated by and aimed at elites. Exactly how commoners functioned in war is not entirely clear. Hassig (1988) states that "the bulk of the army was made up of commoners who were sent into battle as auxiliaries …" (Hassig:37).

This and his description of actual battles indicates that commoners did not play a primary or decisive role (Hassig 1988:97-102).

If one of Lamanai's Terminal Classic rulers was captured and later killed in the temple of a rival city, then the captor could well have claimed access to the Lamanai ruler's tribute. Other nobles probably fought and captured some of Lamanai's male elites, but still others may have been captured themselves and brought to Lamanai. Negotiations must have followed war, particularly if Lamanai's nobles captured nobles from the rival city. After complex negotiations concerning how tribute transfer would be manifested, the victorious ruler may or may not have moved to Lamanai, but his and his victorious nobles' new rights to tribute almost certainly entailed a *re-orientation of Lamanai's economic priorities.* As far as non-elites were concerned, however, it was business as usual: i.e., production. In other words, it was the products that changed, and not the producers.

What the collapse tells us

If we consider the possibility that elite solidarity became a force in Mesoamerica as early as the Classic and probably earlier, then what seems to be a unique period of instability in the Classic to Postclassic transition is the result of a cumulative chain of events and conditions which included: a constantly expanding elite class, competition for new resources, movement of peoples into central Mexico from northern regions that caused shifts down the line, and access to resources that crossed cultural and linguistic boundaries.

It was not until modern times that the word "Maya" was used by indigenous peoples in Yucatan, Belize and Guatemala to identify themselves as a group. In the past, there is evidence that although common languages were recognised, people whom we now term Aztec or Maya tended to identify with their community or local town, which would be the *altepetl* or *cah* (Lockhart 1982:369; Restall 1997:3, 24-27). This makes it difficult for us to know who was considered foreign and who was considered local, but helps us to understand that under these conditions the economic landscape must have been a fluid one, and that cultural and linguistic boundaries were crossed with facility. Where elites attempted to extend their tribute rights through warfare, they did not have to travel far. Conquered or captured elites were not, however, put to work in the fields or

enslaved; if they were not killed, they could be ransomed and/or returned to their community, where they presumably continued to extract tribute. The burden of re-orientation of production, therefore, fell to non-elites, who continued to have to produce under local or foreign lords.

This brings me to the collapse phenomenon, which is a critical juncture at Lamanai as elsewhere in the lowlands. If ethnicity is constructed, relational and contextual, then whatever dynamics were channelled by polity or community or cultural or language priorities - that is, dynamics involved in the construction of cultural identities - were not the dynamics that constituted an ethnicity on the part of elites. If they had been, we would not be likely to have seen a Classic collapse, because ethnic tensions - that is, cultural identities that crossed the elite/commoner divide or that challenged earlier social divisions in some way - would have provided a potent transformative force to counteract the tribute scramble that characterised the Late Classic. But ethnic tensions did not materialise, at least in places that experienced collapse. Instead, the pan-Mesoamerican phenomenon of elite opportunism had a virtually pan-Mesoamerican effect. In George Marcus' framework, the elites never saw the big picture - they saw only as far as their institutional politics took them (G. Marcus 1992:298).

At the same time, our Lamanai window onto non-elite stability, particularly during the time of the Classic collapse, is highly suggestive of a society poised on the verge of social transformation. Non-elites were not doing anything different from what they had been doing over the past several hundred years, which was to provide a stable base for tribute extraction. This stability, which carried Lamanai through hundreds of years of elite competition, may have served as a platform for significant change during a period when elite social identity was almost certainly in crisis. But from what did such a stability arise? Why should Lamanai have been different from Tikal or Dos Pilas or Aguateca or any other of the southern lowland sites that seem to have experienced collapse (Pendergast 1986)?

Were there stirrings of an ethnicity on the part of non-elites? Had access to water-borne trade and commerce at Lamanai throughout its history of occupation provided opportunities in which many non-elite Lamaneros had the potential to bridge the elite-commoner divide (see Freidel 1986b:427)? Did the elite-commoner divide and perhaps elite group membership itself reflect characteristics particular to the Lamanai community? Had Lamanai's inhabitants generated alternative access to resources, perhaps through trade and exchange, but been unable to carve a niche in the Preclassic or Early Classic hierarchy owing to the impenetrability of old elite social solidarity? As Lamaneros watched the old elites literally do themselves in, fighting over the diminishing tribute pie, had the opportunity arisen to draw from their cultural repertoire and claim an ethnicity, and hence capitalise on the new social tensions and weakened social structure? Non-elites had always been the excluded "other". Had the time finally come for at least some of the "other" to become ethnic? Did they draw from a distinctive religious or racial or linguistic or cultural or even professional heritage - either real or imagined or appropriated - to become ethnic, to be strengthened by ethnic identity, and to make the first real inroads into old elite hegemony with the birth of another social dynamic?

My chapter perforce ends with these questions rather than with a proposed answer. We know that Lamanai survived well into the Spanish colonial period, but the nature of its Postclassic occupation needs further study. Continuity from Classic to Postclassic times is documented (Graham 1987, 2004; Pendergast 1981, 1985, 1986, 1990) but we await identification of carbonised cache remains and subsequent radiocarbon dating to assist us in timing the periods of transition. If a stable base for resource extraction helped communities to survive, what sorts of resources did Lamanai command? Access to commerce and trade must certainly have been a factor, but evidence indicates that commerce and trade may have structured Lamanai's history from its earliest occupation. In the Classic period, burials and caches were modest (relative to nearby sites such as Altun Ha or to Peten sites such as Tikal or Petexbatun) in terms of accompaniments. Vessels with standardised features resembling mixing bowls and manufactured for the purpose ere used in Early Classic caches (Pendergast 1981:40). Lamanai's two Middle Classic tombs contained a raft of organic materials, but only one vessel in one case and two in another (Pendergast 1981:39-40). The lone vessel in the male's tomb and one of the vessels in the woman's tomb are Tzakol 3-style polychrome dishes, red-and black-on-orange. The one vessel in the woman's tomb is plain, but the lone vessel in the male's tomb has a stylised hummingbird in the centre (Fig. 1a). The second vessel from the woman's tomb is a

black-slipped, slab-footed cylinder vase. The style of polychrome or dichrome painting - a large dish or shallow bowl with animal decoration in the centre - also characterised Late Classic and Terminal Classic caches. In the Late Classic, vessels placed in caches were dichrome black-on-red with animal motifs in the centre (Fig. 1b,c); in the Terminal Classic they reverted to black-and-red on orange or buff, but the practice of placing figures of animals, or sometimes flowers, in the centre remained (Fig. 1d).

a   **b**

c   **d**
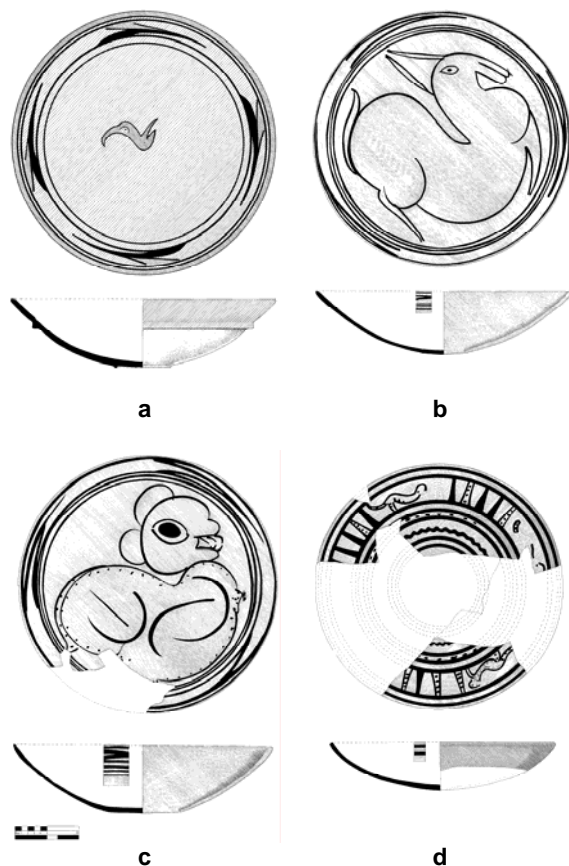
Fig. 1: (a) Vessel (LA 322/22) from Tomb N9-56/1. Probably Dos Arroyos Orange-Polychrome: Variety Unspecified (K) (Gifford 1976:179, Fig. 100); (b) Black-on-red vessel (LA 240/1) from Cache N10-9/8; (c) Black-on-red vessel (LA 244/1) from Cache N10-9/9; (d) Polychrome vessel (LA 1863/2) from Cache N10-12/7.

As was common at Lamanai, the major portion of cache deposits comprised organic materials. One can make a case for artistic display at Lamanai that was clearly modest in comparison to artistic traditions common at most Maya lowland Classic sites. One could also say that the cache vessels conform to what could be considered a strong local stylistic convention (Howie, personal communication 2006). What the implications were for social dynamics is thus far difficult to say, but the picture that is forming

is that hierarchy at Lamanai - that is, elite versus non-elite dynamics - had a distinctive quality. One option, as I hinted in the foregoing paragraph, is that social identities at Lamanai were constructed uniquely or locally or opportunistically, so that cultural identities at Lamanai had the potential to give rise to ethnicity.

Notwithstanding my statements about Lamanai's cache and tomb repertoire, the site's stela repertoire, though meagre, puts Lamanai within the range of normal elite display and identity criteria (Pendergast 1988). On the other hand, there are indications of a stable resource base that operated if not outside of elite interaction and factionalism then at least in tandem with it, and resource production with-stood the disruption from elite competition that had such devastating effects elsewhere. Postclassic elites ushered in new demands and new criteria for display as manifested in aspects of Buk-phase pottery decoration (John 2006), but styles and forms were not devoid of ties to the local past (Graham 1987; John 2006). Production values changed - but production did not falter (Howie 2006). As early as Late Classic times there were chinks in the hegemonic armour, and conditions were ripe for ethnicities to arise. Whether or how they did remains to be explored. More important, how-ever, than knowing whether groups existed that defined themselves ethnically is asking the question about whether there is an ethnicity to know. In the process, even if the test of ethnicity fails, we will have confronted issues of social, cultural and economic interaction that we might otherwise have missed or glossed over.

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