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# Cultural Logic and Maya Identity

## Rethinking Constructivism and Essentialism[1]

by Edward F. Fischer

Ironically, as many Western scholars have turned to constructivist theories to explain new ethnic movements and forms of identity politics, the subjects of their studies have begun to embrace a form of essentialism to justify their political legitimacy. This article presents a critical rethinking of constructivist and essentialist approaches to identity formation and maintenance. Drawing upon Maya ethnotheoretical models of identity, I introduce the analytic concept of cultural logic—generative principles realized through cognitive schemas that promote intersubjective continuity and are conditioned by the unique contingencies of life histories and structural positions in political-economic systems. I show how the concept of metaphysical balance in Maya cosmology illuminates the working of a uniquely Maya cultural logic, and I find in Maya cognitive models of the heart and soul a theory that mirrors that of cultural logic.

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Essentialism is a dirty word in anthropology these days, used to denote an insidious neocolonial strategy of social containment that makes "simplistic or universalizing assumptions about domination and uncritically assumes the possibilities or impossibilities of resistance based on a particular form of collective identity" (Knauft 1996:255; Obeyesekere 1997). Heretically questioning the traditional bases of ethnographic authority and advocating rhetorical empowerment for the subjects of study, scholars working in the constructivist tradition have forged an intellectually and politically liberating style of analysis built around antiessentialist critiques (Spivak 1987, 1994; Bhabha 1990, 1994; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; García Canclini 1995). This line of thought weds Geertzian ethnographic phenomenology to the sort of self-referential textual criticism advocated by James Clifford, seeking to break down neat categorizations (and the political dominance they reify) by showing the complexity of forms and polyvalence of symbols from which such categories are distilled. From a strong constructivist stance the concept of culture itself becomes suspect as an essentializing category (Abu-Lughod 1991). In studies of identity politics, constructivist theory has focused on ethnicity (in a Barthian sense) rather than culture *sui generis*, working within an antiessentialist tradition pioneered by Benedict Anderson (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm (1983) to show how "invented traditions" are strategically deployed in the creation of "imagined communities."[2] Antiessentialist constructivism has itself become the target of recent subaltern critiques coming both from within the academy and from the subjects of anthropological inquiry. Academic critics take pains to distance themselves from classic essentialism, characterizing their stance as being "against constructivism" (Reddy 1997) or a form of "anti-antiessentialism" (Gilroy 1993); nonetheless, they represent a significant rethinking of the complex nature of essentialism and the shortcomings of constructivist theory.

Despite its general disrepute within the academy, an essentialist view of culture underwrites many contemporary ethnic movements the world over. As the former subjects of colonial and neocolonial governments seek to recover and assert their ethnic distinctiveness, they quite naturally turn to those elements that are perceived as being most authentic, the apparent essences of their culture. Anthropologists steeped in antiessentialist theory often take an ironically paternalistic and subtly contemptuous view of this sort of essentialism. Their irony is multifaceted. Most appear to support the philosophy of indigenous self-determination while proffering constructivist critiques that undermine their subjects' notions of cultural authenticity (Watanabe 1995, Fischer and Brown 1996). At the same time, their

1. Parts of this paper were presented at the 1997 meetings of the American Anthropological Association in Washington, D.C., and to a graduate seminar in Maya ethnography at Vanderbilt University in the spring of 1998; I thank the participants in both these events for their many helpful comments. Judith Maxwell, McKenna Brown, and Pakal B'alam have for many years instructed me in Kaqchikel, and their help was instrumental in collecting linguistic constructions containing *k'u'x* and *anima*. An early draft of this paper was substantially revised around the incisive and extensive comments of John Watanabe; later drafts benefited greatly from readings by Quetzil Castañeda, Richard Fox, Peter Hervik, Laurie Medina, John Monaghan, and three anonymous reviewers (the unsung heroes of the process of scholarly publication), all of whom have strengthened my faith in the vitality of academic dialogue. All errors remain my own.

2. Critical variants of this line of thought can be found in Richard Handler's (1988) work on the Canadian Québécois, Jocelyn Linnekin's (1983, 1991) discussions of Polynesian cultural invention, and Partha Chatterjee's (1993) study of Indian postcolonial nationalism.

irony and word plays often leave their audiences unsure of exactly where they stand politically and thus provide a safeguard against attacks on their work.

Such safeguards are increasingly important for some anthropologists, as the subjects of anthropological investigation are ever more likely to be the consumers of anthropological writings. Nothing quite tests the limits of one's commitment to deessentializing multivocality as a native's critique of one's work (see Warren 1992 for an account of a Maya essentialist critique of her efforts to deconstruct categories of ethnicity in Guatemala). These rebuttals should not force us to the shelter of academic jargon and cynical irony but rather should encourage a new type of engagement of anthropologists with "the field" in which we understand "ourselves" to be them as well as us (Fabian 1991:264; Hervik 1994; Hastrup 1995). Martin Diskin (1995:175) predicts that

> greater awareness of the field might well become the task of anthropologists because it will soon be raised by those we study as they develop the capacity to read and criticize our work. Their criticism will often express the accusation that anthropologists' allegiances and interests lie elsewhere than with those being studied. And texts will be produced that flatly contradict anthropological judgement and writing based on the impossibility of outsiders' understanding native culture.

As John Watanabe (1995:41) notes, this new type of engagement with the field should have as its goal the creation of "dialogues through texts, not just within them." This article attempts just such a dialogue by critically examining essentialist and constructivist theory in light of Maya models of culture and identity.[3]

The rethinking of constructivism and essentialism offered here is based on the concept of cultural logic. Cultural logic is defined as generative principles expressed through cognitive schemas that promote intersubjective continuity and are conditioned by social, political, and economic contingencies. Both change and continuity are integral to the concept of cultural logic, and I present evidence that they are mutually constitutive in lived experience. The generative yet constrained nature of cultural logic allows for theoretical inclusion, without irony, of both "constructivist" and "essentialist" tendencies in cultural change and continuity. Evidence for the existence of a cultural logic is found in Maya cognitive models of the heart and soul. I begin by presenting the historical context of debates over identity in Guatemala and their present relevance to Maya peoples. I then outline the theoretical framework of cultural logic, seeking a common ground between constructivist and essentialist positions. Presenting linguistic and ethnographic data from fieldwork in the Kaqchikel Maya town of Tecpán, Guatemala, and making reference to work published on other Maya groups, I show that Maya heart-soul conceptions view individuals as intimately linked to larger cosmic processes. The condition of psychological and cultural normality reflects a metaphysical balance of vitalistic forces and the centering or grounding of an individual's heart-soul in a cosmic order. This conception allows for individual idiosyncrasy and cultural change while at the same time serving a normative function in the perception and realization of cultured agency. Finally, I show how the Maya cognitive model of metaphysical balance expressed through conceptions of the heart and soul expresses the concept of cultural logic.

## Identity Politics and the Relevance of Theory

On July 23, 1997, a historic public debate took place at Guatemala City's upscale Gallery of Contemporary Plastic Arts. The topic "Ethnicity and Identity," drew a standing-room-only crowd. Made up mostly of ladinos (non-Indians), the audience was a sea of subdued cocktail dresses and business suits interspersed with pockets of the brightly colored indigenous dress worn by a number of Maya in attendance. The debaters, Estuardo Zapeta and Mario Roberto Morales, had for several months carried out an exchange over Indian and ladino identity in the editorial pages of the progressive daily *Siglo XXI*. Zapeta is part of a generation of young Maya scholars and activists actively involved in Guatemala's pan-Maya ethnic movement (Fischer 1996*a*). Like most pan-Mayanists, he has multiple vocations. He is at once a scholar (having received an M.A. in anthropology from SUNY-Albany and currently working on his Ph.D. there as well), a bureaucrat (holding a managerial position at the Guatemalan Ministry of Education), and an activist (associated with several organizations involved in the pan-Maya movement). Morales, a ladino, is also a U.S.-educated scholar (doing graduate work in literary theory and criticism at the University of Pittsburgh) and an activist, although his activism involves promoting ladino pride, lest non-Maya culture be swept away in the rising tide of Maya cultural activism. Their debate was historically significant as the first post–civil war, perhaps the first ever, ladino-sponsored attempt at dialogue with a Maya leader on the issues of identity that underlay many of the country's social problems.[4] There was no

3. In part this essay was stimulated by a critical review of my work on Maya ethnonationalism by a Maya scholar in the Guatemalan press (Sam Colop 1997; cf. Zapeta 1997, Morales 1997). In that review Enrique Sam Colop accused me and a number of other North American scholars of essentializing Maya culture, with all of the pejorative connotations that entails. As I hope to make clear, my position is one of anti-antiessentialism rather than a reification of romantic models of a Maya culture that has remained essentially the same over time and space.

4. The extent to which Zapeta is a leader of the Maya people is arguable. His neoliberal economic views (he argues, for example, that the Maya university called for in Guatemala's 1996 peace accords should be private, operating on free-market principles) are unpopular with many of the leaders of the pan-Maya movement. It is certain that his economic philosophy played a part in his being invited to debate Morales. Nonetheless, he runs an experimental bilingual education program that shows great promise and maintains formal and informal ties to a number of pan-Mayanist organi-

moment of epiphany, no outburst of ladino-Indian communitas, and yet the event marked an important move in the process of postwar reconciliation (doubly significant in that no army officials or former revolutionaries were present).

The intellectual and political stakes of the debate were high for both Zapeta and Morales. Both men overtly acknowledge the practical political significance of social theory for their lives and the lives of their countrymen, and this practical context profoundly influences the application and content of their theoretical constructions. As John Watanabe points out in his analysis of the utility of postmodern theory to Maya scholars, "the paradigms they seek to reject are actual—oppression, racism, inequality—not virtual—theories, genres, representations; the empowerment they seek is for themselves and their people, not misrepresented others; the rhetoric they seek aspires to authenticity and authority, not evocation or equivocation" (1995: 40). Social science has long been employed to justify Guatemalan state social engineering programs, often with dire consequences for Maya peoples. With the rise of pan-Maya cultural activism over the past ten years, Maya scholars and activists such as Zapeta have mounted an effective humanistic critique of the misguided scientism underlying Guatemalan state hegemony. This Maya critique and the countercritiques it has provoked elude easy categorization as modernist (justification of state hegemonic expansion through Westernization) versus postmodernist (subaltern critique of dominant ideologies) or essentialist (Mayaness viewed as a primordial quality intimately tied to certain symbolic clusters) versus constructivist (Maya culture and ethnic identity as active forms of resistance to non-Indian sociopolitical structures) (Fischer 1993). We might expect ladino academics and politicians to take, as indeed many do, the modernist, essentialist stance that development and progress can be achieved by eliminating the essential bases of Maya culture (e.g., language, clothing) and assimilating the Indians into ladino society. Likewise, we might expect Maya scholars to adopt, as many do, a postmodern (de)constructivist position, questioning the bases of hegemonic containment strategies that exclude a Maya voice. Yet, as the debate between Zapeta and Morales makes clear, such categorizations belie the complexity of identity theories in practice.

The debate revolved around the respective merits of essentialist versus constructivist approaches to culture and ethnicity, a topic provoked by recent work in which Maya scholars strategically co-opt certain aspects of the essentialist tradition. Specifically, Maya scholars (and to a lesser extent, based on exposure, the Maya masses as well) are attracted to what might be termed the "archaeo-romanticism" evident in studies of Maya cultural continuity (Thompson 1970, Vogt 1976, Tedlock 1982, Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993); national pan-Maya leaders use such accounts to buttress their position that Indians have certain natural political rights within the Guatemalan state granted them by the essential continuity of their cultural tradition (see Cojtí Cuxil 1991, 1997). In reaction, ladino writers such as Morales have adopted a strong constructivist position, arguing that Maya culture is no more "natural" than ladino culture and is therefore entitled to no special protection (Morales 1997, Flores Alvarado 1993). It is Morales's contention that ethnic identity and the culture that it is based on are both products of self-interested construction; Kay Warren (1998:176) notes that his works "employ images of globalized popular culture, hybridity, mimesis, culturally fabricated otherness, and *mestizaje* to argue against the existence of separate cultural groups in Guatemala," thus insidiously cloaking ladino hegemony in the politically correct terminology of fashionable social scientific thought. Certainly the recognition of agency in cultural construction is well justified, but for Morales this agency takes a very specific self-interested form. Ethnic politics are pursued in the free-market arena of culture in which individuals seek to build up cultural capital by innovating symbols and forms in the pursuit of their material self-interest. Thus, for Morales, the ethnic politics of the pan-Maya movement is reducible to the opportunism of a small group of well-educated and politically savvy Maya activists (see also Bastos and Camus 1993). Ironically, Morales invokes a stance of cultural relativism to support a universalizing proposition: Maya culture is no better than ladino culture and thus should be judged by the same (Western) criteria. (Significantly, Morales falls back on a modified essentialism when extolling the virtues of ladino history.) Such a strong constructivist view is problematic for most Maya scholars, even one as economically liberal as Zapeta. Whatever their motivations (and they are certainly more complex than mere economic calculation), Maya activists base many of their claims against the ladino-controlled Guatemalan state on an ethnic legitimacy rooted in essentialist notions of culture. At the same time they deftly wield the power of constructivist deessentialization to deconstruct negative stereotypes of Maya culture and languages and to justify the right of their voice to be heard in these times of multivocality.[5] Zapeta's performance

zations, and his triweekly newspaper editorials are widely read and commented on. Thus, while allowing that he does not speak for all Maya or even all factions of the pan-Maya movement, he may still be considered a Maya leader.

5. Blurring the boundaries between constructivism and essentialism even further, the constructivism of Maya activists self-consciously seeks to remain true to an essentially conceived past. This is clearly seen in the pan-Maya movement's tactical usage of hieroglyphic symbols (Sturm 1996, Schele and Grube 1996), traditional forms of dress (Hendrickson 1995, 1996; Otzoy 1996), and maps (Fischer 1996*b*). The effectiveness of these symbols in conveying the pan-Mayanist position is contingent on the indexing symbolic value with which they have historically been imbued. As van den Berghe (1981:27) notes, "unless ethnicity is rooted in generations of shared historical experience, it cannot be created *ex nihilo*." In this regard, Les Field (1994) presents a nuanced overview of the tension between what he terms the "resistance school" and the "cultural survival position" in the ethnographic tradition of Mesoamerica.

during the debate was not as forceful as Morales's, although his attempt to synthesize constructivist and essentialist positions opens more theoretically fruitful ground.

While benefiting from the constructivist-inspired valuation of subaltern agency, Maya scholars and peasants alike continue to assert the legitimacy of an essentialist paradigm, arguing that there is a metaphysical quality to Mayaness that transcends the minutiae of opportunistic construction to unite individuals and communities across both time and space. I began my fieldwork (carried out over 24 months in the Kaqchikel region of Guatemala and among leaders of the pan-Maya movement) prepared to document the constructed nature of Maya identity and how this construction was influenced by contemporary political and economic conditions (Fischer 1996*b*). I thought that my Maya interlocutors' assertions of the essential nature of their identity were naive, misplaced, or ill-informed. Certainly, a number of Maya models of culture are not rigorous social science, such as the belief that proficiency in a Maya language is genetically inherited or that corn tortillas are the only effective nourishment for the Maya body. Such claims can be easily dismissed, but looking back at my field notes and reexamining my own preconceptions has led me to question the tenets of a strong constructivism that views Maya identity as nothing more than the product of counterhegemonic resistance (Martínez Peláez 1971, Hawkins 1984, Flores Alvarado 1993) or the romantic musings of anthropologists (Castañeda 1996).

Conversations with both pan-Maya leaders and Kaqchikel Maya living in Tecpán repeatedly pointed me toward the essential continuity underlying cultural forms. Domingo,[6] a 45-year-old Kaqchikel religious specialist (*aj q'ij* or "day-keeper"), eloquently explained the essence of continuity to me one July day in 1994 during an interview at his home in Tecpán. Although he maintains the count of the sacred 260-day calendar and acts as a spiritual intermediary for individuals during ceremonies, Domingo does not conform to stereotypes of Maya traditionalists. He owns two trucks and makes his living hauling produce for farmers (an income supplemented by donations he receives for religious intervention); his business is expanding, and our interview took place in the formal den of his new two-story whitewashed cinder-block home just off Tecpán's central plaza. Don Domingo explained the importance of ritual and sacrificial giving in the maintenance of the covenant between humans and a divine world force. This covenant, widespread in Mesoamerican ideologies and prominent in origin myths, mandates that humans make sacrifices to propitiate the god(s) in order to ensure agricultural and reproductive fertility (cf. Monaghan 1995, n.d.). Sacrifices must be made for the covenant to continue, and the covenant must continue in order to perpetuate the grand cycle of cosmic and terrestrial existence. As Don Domingo says, "You don't play with God." In addition to his role in observing ceremonies on sacred days of the 260-day calendar as part of continuing the covenant with God, Domingo also diagnoses and treats illnesses of metaphysical origin. In doing so he "looks in the souls of patients and cleans them out," bringing them into harmony with the forces of the cosmos and thus making them contented and "normal." In discussing the resurgence in Maya culture after the violence of the early 1980s, Domingo explains how this is part of a larger cosmological cycle:

> Let's consider all that has happened with the people here in [19]81 and [19]80. How many thousands of people died? Thousands, not hundreds, died. They were buried just anywhere, as if they were animals. The blood of these people went to the earth and was consummated before God, right? This blood is their spirit, right? Thus our people have now won—and we remember how it was before. We already paid and gave alms. I bought my land, and I am going to buy another house. . . . it is much better now.

Listening to these words I remember looking down to make sure my tape recorder was on, capturing one of those all too rare instances in ethnographic fieldwork in which an interlocutor eloquently sums up a salient cultural concept that hitherto has remained implicit. Don Domingo's remarks reference a Mesoamerican cosmological paradigm of the cyclic continuation of a long-standing covenant between individuals and the vitalistic forces of the cosmos. The structuring properties of this "foundational idea" (in the words of Gossen 1986, building on Bricker 1981 and Hunt 1977) result in its essential continuity over time and space and its potential to *react* to the contingencies imposed by macrostructural dynamics as well as *enact* novel forms of interpretation and action based on the reconciliation of mythistory[7] and available socio-material resources through referential practice. For Don Domingo, the paradigm of cyclic regeneration provides not only a framework for situating the almost unthinkable atrocities of the violence but also a justification and mandate for future action (cf. Warren 1993). In justifying present or future action, cosmological paradigms are particularly open to idiosyncratic interpretations—interpretations that may themselves, because of shared structural conditions and/or communicative power, become normative in the sense of self-fulfilling prophecies.

Examining the cognitive and material circumstances surrounding Sherpa Buddhist monastery foundations, Sherry Ortner (1989:199) has similarly shown how "abstract cultural schemas became part of people's personal intentions, or, at the very least, [how] people worked out for themselves in practice the same solutions that the heroes found in the schemas." Building on the theoretical studies of Ortner (1984, 1989), Fox

6. I have used pseudonyms for individuals described in my ethnographic data.

7. This is Dennis Tedlock's (1993) apt phrase for the proactive cosmological historiography found in the Maya tradition.

(1985, 1989), Kapferer (1988), Friedman (1994), and others working in the tenuous middle ground between culture studies and materialism, I proceed below by showing the utility of the concept of cultural logic for understanding the elusive dynamic of cognitive and cultural change and continuity. I then return to the Maya cognitive model of a sacred covenantal balance, presenting ethnographic data to show how such models are encoded in a Maya cultural logic that acts both as a motivational force and as an interpretive template for lived experience.

## Cultural Logic

Cultural logic differs from formal Western logic, which is but a subset of the former, in not being inherently based on an Aristotelian ideal. Different cultures have different cultural logics, and these do not uniformly conform to the syllogistic "law" of noncontradiction; indeed, formal logic is a very contextually restricted form of thinking in our own culture. Nor can all non-Western logics be lumped together as a prelogical mentality or savage mind (Lévy-Bruhl 1926, Lévi-Strauss 1966). "Logic" is an especially appropriate term for describing cultural processes because of its generative yet constrained connotations. The foundational relations of cultural logic are historically received through the processes of socialization and ongoing social interaction, and yet they are redefined through these very processes; dynamics of cultural change, both external and internal to the individual and the collectivity, must be reflexively reconciled with cognitive and material constraints on innovation, as well as vice versa. Cultural logic is realized (and thus, for the anthropologist at least, can only be meaningfully analyzed) through practice. And this practice has a marked constructive quality, with new symbolic forms and meanings emerging from the dynamic interaction of individual intention (itself culturally conditioned but not predetermined), cultural norms (variably enforced through reflexive social interaction), and material contingencies (encompassing not only local ecologies but also structural positions in global systems of political economy). Taken at the microsituational level, the variation produced through these innumerable historically specific interactions may seem overwhelming, leading some scholars to argue against the concept of a unifying culture (e.g., Abu-Lughod 1991). I believe that culture is still a useful concept and that it is best conceived of in terms of its logical properties. Intentional agents in social interaction are not mere drones pursuing their formally defined economic self-interests in ways that can be mathematically modeled. Their self-interests and the ways in which they see fit to pursue them are variably conceived (even if oppositionally) in relation to received cultural forms and norms. It is useful here to recall Bourdieu's (1977) discussion of the containing nature of the doxa, defined as "the aggregate of the 'choices' whose subject is everyone and no one because the questions they answer cannot be explicitly asked" (p. 168)—which is to say the realm of what is taken for granted continually delimited through social interaction. And, as Bourdieu goes on to explain, the nature of social interaction itself (expressed through both orthodox and heterodox positions) reinforces the undiscussed foundations of the delimited field of cognitive and cultural possibilities.

Cultural logic establishes the boundaries of the doxa and thus delimits cultural realms. This is not to say that the doxa cannot be expanded through interaction with other differentially conceived fields of doxa (the goal of anthropology as cultural critique) or that, in being bounded, the realm of the thinkable exists in cultural isolation (an implicit premise of the containment strategy of cultural essentialism). Cultural logic changes, but it does so in a manner internally consistent with that logic itself. This is not to reify some romantic notion of cultural isolation and difference; cultural logics are unique but not wholly autochthonous. The world system is deeply implicated in contemporary Maya formulations of identity in terms of both political-economic structural openings and sociocultural diffusion. In this age of late capitalism, fields of meaning and identity space (such as those denoted by the core-periphery distinction) are less and less confined by time and space distances (Jameson 1991, Friedman 1994, Kearney 1996, Fox 1997). As the boundaries of the doxa expand there is certainly a blurring of boundaries in regard to specific elements; the Cartoon Network, for example, plays similar roles in local constructions of youth culture in places as far apart as Kansas City and Tecpán. Shifting our focus away from individual cultural elements (and thus away from issues of their authenticity) to the dynamic relationships between them (the cultural logic in which they are situationally implicated), however, makes meaningful boundaries reappear. These boundaries of cultural logics delimit fields of social discourse (and intercourse) a bit messier than but not unrelated to the fields of ethical discourse proposed by Habermas (1990). These fields often have clear territorial correlates, especially in areas, such as rural Guatemala, that lie on the far margins of hyperspace. As Watanabe (1992) points out in his discussion of place and culture in the Mam town of Santiago Chimaltenango, the very act of sharing a physical space leads to the formation of a shared sense of community and sensibility concerning appropriate behavior. Richard Wilson (1993) sees commonality of place and shared historical experience as anchoring the rapidly changing culture of Maya communities in a perceived sense of tradition. Hervik (1992, 1994) situates this process in the face-to-face discursive experiences inherent in living together as a community. These observations also hold true in the case of Tecpán: reflexive lived experience in particular social contexts produces a powerful sense of community-based identity, a field of cultural discourse from which outsiders are excluded. This discursive field is united and delimited not only by overt markers (language and dress, for example) but also by

the shared sensibilities of which Watanabe writes, the fluid consensus about what constitutes acceptable behavior. This cultural sensibility, in turn, rests on a shared generative cultural logic. While acknowledging community idiosyncrasies, comparing cultural forms found in Tecpán with those reported in ethnographic descriptions of other Maya communities suggests the existence of a Maya cultural logic spanning community boundaries that simultaneously conditions individual agency and reflects changing consensual ethics that have emerged from practical activity in local and global contexts.

Maya cultural logic provides only the broad shared foundation for comprehending and producing thought and behavior; it is productive and generative while at the same time ensuring continuity, and although it is idiosyncratically internalized, its specific social instantiations may be deemed rational or irrational by others on the basis of consensual norms, indicating its shared, normative quality. This cultural logic underlies and is expressed through cognitive models. Shore (1996:47) distinguishes two types of cognitive models, idiosyncratic personal mental models and internalized conventional mental models.[8] The distinction is useful, questioning as it does the implied interindividual homogeneity of much cognitive anthropology (e.g., D'Andrade 1995) as well as the purely idiosyncratic focus of much cognitive psychology (e.g., Gentner and Stevens 1983). Yet, there is a danger is drawing this distinction too clearly. Idiosyncratic mental models are built out of both received knowledge and ongoing interaction with the social and material world. Granted, idiosyncrasies are important, and the specific conjunctures of events acting on individuals throughout their lives uniquely affect how they view and act in the world. Yet, although the conjuncture of events acting on an individual is unique, the elements themselves are by and large social, understood in relation to social conventions even if they are not themselves conventional. Likewise, conventional models are by their nature internalized and thus integrated into an idiosyncratically unique mental metamodel. The distinction between personal and conventional models becomes even more blurred if we look to what Shore terms the "foundational schemas" underlying externalized mental models. Foundational schemas are more abstract and less contextually specific than mental models, and thus they act "to organize a wide diversity of particular models" and "underwrite the possibility of meaning construction in a variety of contexts" (Shore 1996:53). Shore is justified in looking beyond the particulars of externalized mental models to their foundational schemas, but his use of the term "schema" (and the stasis it implies) belies the generative nature of the processes he describes. Foundational schemas are plastic, and this plasticity is based on the practical application of a culturally and idiosyncratically unique logic. To understand the processes of Maya identity maintenance and formation we must look beyond surface representations to uncover the cultural logic (the generative patterns of relations) realized in and transformed through observable practice. We should thus focus not simply on the novelty of new forms but on how these forms are cognitively integrated, in a culturally consistent (i.e., logical) manner, into cognitive schemas. This logic is not static, for it is predicated on practice and common experience, and yet through its generative nature it is more resistant to change than the surface elements it organizes. This logic provides the basis for interpreting foreign introductions and for maintaining a distinctly Maya worldview (a worldview based at least as much on continuity as on resistance to an Other) in an ever-changing world.

Bourdieu's (1977) model of the habitus and Giddens's (1984) description of the modalities of structuration reveal the workings of cultural logic, if only incompletely. Both Bourdieu and Giddens attempt to incorporate agency into their sociological models, but neither goes on to elucidate the cognitive bases of agency and intentionality. Bourdieu sidesteps the problem by reducing agency to self-interested economic calculation and unwitting (even unwilling) reproduction of received structures; Giddens's reflexivity never fully overcomes the implied tautology that agents enact structure while structure conditions agents' actions (cf. Sewell 1992).

Refining this line of thought and addressing a number of the issues I raise here, Ortner (1989) has shown that Sherpa cultural models that are grounded, metaphorically and materially, in the recurrent founding of monastic communities both reproduce existing schemas through practice and are tools of self-interest in the hands of individuals. She writes that the foundings "are both events and symbols" and that "as symbols, they convey meaning—they can be read expressively as well as instrumentally" (p. 59). Ortner rightly stresses that individuals have variable relationships with cultural elements and therefore unique life-history trajectories, and she concludes with a discussion of closure in the sense of a temporally specific convergence of individual intentions and larger structural processes. Yet, her argument is weak in its attempt to operationalize the link between idiosyncratic cognition and the dynamics of shared culture, and we are left with little sense of the precise mechanics of how individually articulated intentions not only reproduce but *change* the system itself.

A useful corrective is to be found in the work of Richard Fox (1985) and Bruce Kapferer (1988), who take as their starting point dramatic instances of culture change precipitated by new terms of engagement with global political-economic structures. Starting with a macro event and working back to explain its instantiation gives both Fox and Kapferer heightened sensitivity to the process of institutionalizing variant cultural forms. As does Ortner's work, Fox's (1985) study of Pun-

8. It should be noted that in terms of both theory and terminology Shore is building on an illustrious tradition in cognitive linguistics and anthropology, particularly the work of Lakoff and Johnson (1980), Lakoff (1987), Johnson (1987), and Strauss and Quinn (1997).

jab anticolonial resistance provides ample evidence of individuals' appropriating and manipulating cultural symbols as well as material objects for situationally contingent ends. Fox goes on, however, to point out that "as people build their current culture out of pieces of the old and live out their material conditions in new ways, so their social world takes on new configurations" (p. 197). Thus he acknowledges that cultures (and their logics)—not just individuals—manifest the properties of change through referential practice, but his focus on dominance and resistance leads him to stress the instrumentality of such change: "contemporary individuals and groups take pieces, not the pattern, of the past and form them into new social arrangements" (p. 197; see also Friedman 1994:136). Yet, as Fox himself shows in his ethnographic analysis, patterns (albeit extrapolated post hoc from lived experience) can and do persist through time as an intersubjectively perceived cultural continuity. That these patterns change is undeniable, but it is my contention that an underlying cultural logic informs reactive and proactive interpretation in a manner that ensures cognitive continuity through the very processes of change. Change is an integral part of cultural logic, but such change must be reconciled with preexisting cognitive schemas in a manner that allows for an intersubjective sense of cultural continuity, even—perhaps especially—in the face of dramatic externally induced modification. In this regard, Kapferer (1988) rightly stresses the simultaneity and inseparability of sociological and psychological factors. Comparing nationalist beliefs in Sri Lanka and Australia, he observes that "these ideologies contain logical elements relevant to the way human beings within their historical worlds are existentially constituted" (p. 19). In this view, instantiations of idiosyncratic variation, the ultimate source of cultural change, are reflexively linked to underlying structural paradigms: "no tradition is constructed or invented and discontinuous with history . . . [they] are chosen because of what they distill ontologically; that is, they make sense and condense a logic of ideas which may also be integrated to the people who make the selection although hidden from their reflective consciousness" (p. 211). Below I extend the observations of Ortner, Fox, and Kapferer to argue that agency is the instantiation of just such an inner cultural logic and that to understand its complex relationship with normative structures we must examine its cognitive bases. I proceed by describing in greater detail the Maya cognitive model of metaphysical balance mentioned above, showing how the cultural logic of this model is expressed through Kaqchikel conceptions of the heart and soul (*k'u'x*).

## Metaphysical Balance in Maya Cosmology

Tecpán, like many other Maya communities, is religiously diverse. There are a number of day-keepers such as Domingo living and working in this predominately Kaqchikel Maya town of 7,000 residents. In addition, Tecpán is home to a large Catholic church, dozens of evangelical Protestant congregations (and one evangelical Catholic congregation), a Mormon tabernacle, a Mennonite colony, a Seventh Day Adventist group, and the Central American Agnostic Movement. This balkanization leads to some tension within the community as sects seek to expand and to impose their moral standards on the community as a whole. Evangelicals in particular are notable for their opposition to public ceremonies that involve drinking and pagan rituals. For the most part, however, Tecpanecos do not let religious animosities get in the way of everyday life. Catholics and Protestants alike frequent the market stall of the fervent evangelical woman who sells the best sweet breads in town; voters in local elections are not easily swayed by the religious association of candidates; and Maya Protestants, Catholics, and traditionalists all participate in local forms of cultural activism. Indeed, ethnicity (Indian or ladino), not religion, is the most salient category of identity and plays the more prominent role in shaping individual agency (see Warren 1978 for an account of religious and ethnic tensions in a neighboring Kaqchikel community). Ladinos are viewed by Indians as prone to cheating Indians in financial transactions (although honest ladino shopkeepers are recognized and patronized) and to engaging in graft when in public office (although, again, dishonest Indian politicians are acknowledged and shunned for falling prey to the lure of ill-gotten gains). Such views lead to a preference among Indians for dealing with other Indians, where feasible, in their economic and political transactions.

Kaqchikel Tecpanecos frequently explained to me that the state of religious coexistence in the town is due to the fact that there is really only one god, although this god is differently conceived by religious groups and individuals. Such a transcendental perspective plays down the differences in the forms of religious expression to emphasize a fundamental commonality. Individuals are judged by their behavior (which is reflective of the state of their soul) more than by the church they attend. It is not surprising, then, that traditionalist daykeepers such as Domingo use the terms *ahaw* ("lord" or "god"), *ruk'u'x kaj, ruk'u'x ulew* ("the heart/soul/essence of sky and earth"), and *dios* (Spanish "god") interchangeably in their prayers and ceremonies. Each addresses the same divinity, and the diversity of terms plays nicely into the Maya rhetorical style of using couplets and repetitions of synonyms in formal discourse. That Catholic saints and other figures from the Judeo-Christian tradition are invoked alongside deities and mythical figures from the Maya tradition further points to the encompassing hybridity of Maya religion. The monotheistic-polytheistic distinction breaks down in its application to traditionalist Maya beliefs. As daykeepers repeatedly informed me, there is but one "god" in Maya religion, best conceived of as a cosmic, vitalistic force rather than the corporeal entity that "god" denotes in the Western tradition. This force has various aspects and is manifest in various forms that may appear as distinct "gods" (cf. Montejo 1991). Despite hav-

ing different names, different symbolic associations, and different contexts of activity, these "gods" are but aspects of a single force that animates the cosmos.

Seeing unity in diversity is characteristic of Maya cultural logic in a number of domains. Such unity is conceptually associated with balance and harmony both within and between the physical and metaphysical worlds. Indeed, continued human existence is predicated on the maintenance of cyclic cosmic balance, a balance that both affects and reflects earthly conditions. Humans act to maintain cosmic harmony through ritualized reciprocity, part of the covenant between humans and cosmic vitalistic forces (see Monaghan 1995). The primordial events that gave life to mankind and set the cosmos in motion were played out both on earth and in the celestial sphere, and the force animating these events is linked to the eternal cycles of time as measured by the movement of the sun, moon, and stars. Conceived of in its perfect unitary state, the cosmic order is one of perfect harmony and balance between natural and metaphysical forces. It is the duty of (Maya) humans to approximate cosmic harmony on earth. Collectively this is realized through adherence to rituals scripted to approximate cosmic equilibrium. Individually, the Kaqchikel Maya also strive for equilibrium of cosmic forces acting through the self. Edmonson (1993:70) writes:

> Like god, the human being exists in his or her self, his or her uniqueness (*tu ba, tu hunal*). The self (*ba*) or thingness (*baal*) of god and the human being lies in their relation to each other (*tu baal ba*), and this reciprocity is the inmost part (*ol*) of each. In various contexts this is identified with the heart, breath, mouth, eye or face, head, belly or womb, blood or semen, flesh and bone, but it is the center (*ol*) that is the seat of feeling, of thought, and of the soul (*pixan*).

Ideally an equilibrium is maintained between these forces that mirrors that of the cosmic realm.

Kaqchikels view the self (and thus identity) as intimately connected to cosmic forces and phenomena, primarily through what anthropologists conventionally gloss as "souls," "spirits," or "animistic forces" (cf. Monaghan n.d.:60). These forces link the individual to the cosmic forces that animate the world, thus blurring the very boundaries that the modern (Western) conception of "self" seeks to delineate. Such a view of self was often problematic for Spanish missionizing. As Klor de Alva writes in his review of Nahuatized Christianity, "the boundary between the individual self (the sole object of a Christian-type salvation), other selves, and what Westerners would consider nonanimate objects was completely permeable. Human beings physically and supernaturally formed part of a universal continuum linking their fortunes directly to the cosmic order" (1993:185). This link to the cosmic order was complex and multifaceted, and the role of the human individual and collectivity was to maintain (by mirroring) cosmic harmony and equilibrium on earth.

Monaghan (n.d.) cautions against discrete categorizations of Mesoamerican soul concepts; following Boremanse (1993), he prefers to see a singular divine force (*pixan* in Lacandon and other Maya languages) that "takes on different aspects, depending on the context" (p. 60). Edmonson (1993) similarly emphasizes the essential unity of the Maya soul and divine force as seen in the soul's "inner motives," considered not necessarily transparent from the "outer clues" it gives. Such a concept of the unity of souls or soul-aspects follows logically from the Maya philosophical presupposition of fundamental cosmic connectedness—just as the individual is one with the cosmic order, so too are cosmic forces ultimately connected. The Maya penchant for seeing unity in apparent (to us) diversity is characteristic of their cultural logic, a logic diffuse enough to be transposable into various cultural domains while adhering to internal generative rules that render its instantiations intelligible to (even if not sanctioned by) others.

Ethnographies from across Mesoamerica have pointed to the significance of balance in native cosmologies (López Austin 1988, Boremanse 1993, Monaghan 1995). Lévi-Strauss (1995) would see this as part of the dynamic dualism characteristic of native "mythologic" throughout the hemisphere. Balance has occupied a central role in Maya cosmology since at least Classic times (Hill and Fischer n.d.). Through the covenantal relationship between humans and the divine cosmic force, balance is maintained in cyclic cosmic rejuvenation, agricultural rejuvenation, and procreation (cf. Carlsen and Prechtel 1997). This balance has both spatial and temporal correlates in solar movements and the agricultural cycle (Hunt 1977, Watanabe 1983).

Balance is conceptually related to centeredness. The center is definitionally midway, implying a balance of quantities (and these may be time, space, material goods, or anything else) in oppositional relation to the point of reference. This need not be conceived as a state of two-dimensional balance; indeed, a three-dimensional conception seems better to approximate it. Balance, in the Kaqchikel conception, also requires grounding, an idea that again has pre-Columbian roots, for it was from the center of the primordial hearth stones that the tree of life, a maize plant emerged. The primordial maize tree was at the center of the cosmos, implying a propitiously balanced state, and yet, as is corn today, it was planted, grounded in the most literal sense.

Maya religious specialists have long been students of mathematics and numerology. Sacred calendars keep track of the passage of time and are used in native historiography and predictions. Calendrical equations mathematically represent the forces of the cosmos and their cyclic yet progressive nature: the perfect nature of cosmic harmony is mirrored in the precise balance of mathematical equations. Indeed, the empirical essence of balance is a mathematical equation that works out; it is as simple as $1 + 1 = 2$. For example, the *tzolkin*

(*chol q'ij* in Kaqchikel Maya) is the most widely used Maya calendrical system today. It measures a 260-day period; the *tzolkin*'s 20 named days (each associated with a certain conjuncture of cosmic forces) are complemented by numerical coefficients running from 1 to 13. Cosmic harmony is measured (and in part maintained) by counting the progression of *tzolkin* cycles, and the balance of physical and metaphysical forces is mathematically demonstrable in the calendar's cycle (20 × 13 = 260). The number 13 figures in a number of Maya equations; the primordial world tree was planted on the back of a turtle with 13 platelets on its shell, associating 13 with the primordial confluence of cosmic forces that produced the current creation. Words for "20" in Maya languages (*winäq* in Kaqchikel) are cognate with words for "human being" (*winäq* in Kaqchikel). Finally, 260 days approximates the human gestation period, linking the human life cycle (including both cultural and biological regeneration) to the cyclic harmony of cosmic time and the confluence of cosmic forces acting upon individuals to result in their destiny. Thus this equation may be symbolically read as "Cosmic forces (13) acting on (×) individuals (20) regenerate human existence (260)."

The day upon which one is born significantly affects one's fate, linking the self to the confluence of cosmic forces associated with that day. While destiny is to some extent ascribed, it is also mutable, just like the cosmic cycles; events recur structurally without being identical in their contingent implications. The creation of the world itself resulted from cyclic progression, what Tedlock (1982) calls "accumulation"; three previous creations were destroyed because the beings created refused to perpetuate the covenants of spiritual and material reciprocity demanded by the cosmic force.

Such cyclic progression aptly captures the dynamics of Maya cultural logic, in which consensual norms are perpetuated in changing contexts. In part, Maya cultural logic is based on the covenantal relationship between humans and cosmic forces and the dynamic cyclicity of history. Gossen (1986:5) observes that mediation between cosmic and earthly realms is "key [to] intellectual, political, and religious activity, for with successful mediation come power, wisdom, and even personal health and community survival." Life on earth seeks to approximate cosmic harmony (or is threatened with destruction through disjuncture with cosmic forces) both collectively and individually. Collective cosmic harmony is approximated and reinforced through adherence to rituals (Edmonson 1993). Individually, a balance must be maintained between aspects of the cosmic animating force acting on the self. In Maya and other Mesoamerican worldviews, cosmic forces act on the individual through a number of loci, including the mind, the liver, and the heart. For the Kaqchikel Maya the concept of *k'u'x* is central to an understanding of the relationship between individuals and the cosmos and illuminates the workings of a Maya cultural logic.

## The Heart and Soul of Maya Culture

Anna Wierzbicka (1997) has recently made a strong case for understanding cultures through their key words. Comparing certain seemingly cognate terms frequently employed in hegemonic discourse, she shows, for example, that the different ways in which the cognitive categories of "liberty" and "freedom" are construed in Latin, English, Russian, and Polish significantly affect the ways in which speakers of these languages view and act in the world. What Wierzbicka offers is an especially palatable version of the linguistic-relativity hypothesis. Other recent rethinkings of the work of Sapir and Whorf have focused on the more troublesome issue of the relation between grammatical structure and worldview (e.g., Lucy 1992*a*, *b*; Gumperz and Levinson 1996). The results of Wierzbicka's wide-ranging research seem to convey a great deal more information about the cultures under study than these other works (which is not to say that her results are more theoretically significant) precisely because she is working on much safer epistemological ground. Virtually all ethnographers and linguists recognize the value of key words in translating other cultural realities; we implicitly acknowledge as much in our liberal peppering of ethnography with words in the language of the people under study. Edmund Leach, among others, anticipated Wierzbicka's argument in his 1954 *Political Systems of Highland Burma*, which presented an understanding of Shan and Kachin cultures based on a thick description of the terms *gumsa* and *gumlao* and the meaningful relations they signified. Leach found no useful English translation for *gumsa* and *gumlao*, for they indexed unique cultural ideas, and they have since become part of the anthropological canon. Likewise, very few ethnographies written about the Maya lack a glossary to define the many indigenous terms the author has found necessary to include in the English text.[9]

Following Wierzbicka, I believe that key words are important in understanding cultures, which is to say that semantic variation plays an important role in the maintenance and transmission of culture. Kaqchikel has many words with no adequate translation in Spanish or English. For example, *xrajowaj ruk'u'x* refers to becoming ill from eating something that because of its metaphysical properties and the time at which it was eaten (during a liminal stage of the day, particularly dawn and dusk) weakens the person's heart/soul (*k'u'x*).[10] Any translation of *xrajowaj ruk'u'x* into English or Spanish is cumbersome, and it is through the

9. A notable exception would be Tedlock's (1993) strategy of poetically translating unique cultural concepts into English. Nonetheless, he too marks these words as culturally significant by translating them with unusual English constructions.

10. Fredrik Svenaeus has called to my attention the Swedish word *goe*, which refers to the process of burping gasses following the eating of the delicacy of *surstromming*, a type of fermented fish; there is no concise translation of *goe* in English precisely because it references a culturally specific Swedish/Nordic concept.

use of such culturally relative terms that salient aspects of Maya worldview are reproduced in subtle yet fundamental ways. As Nora England (1996:180) points out in discussing the social theory underlying Maya language conservation efforts, "while Spanish is of course an adequate code for daily expression, it certainly is not the *same* code as a Mayan language and can hardly substitute for it without loss."

*K'u'x* is a key word in Kaqchikel Maya. Examining its usage reveals the ways in which a Maya cultural logic based on conceptions of metaphysical balance is realized in lived experience. Although I will treat simple translations of the word as problematic, it is useful to note from the outset that *k'u'x* is most often rendered in English or Spanish as "heart" (*corazón*), "soul" (*alma*), "center" (*centro*), or "essence" (*esencia*), and these translations give us a feel for the range of semantic variation the term encompasses. *K'u'x* is a key word in Kaqchikel because it indexes a culturally specific concept that significantly affects the ways in which individuals view and act in the world. It is significant because it implicates a larger system of symbolic relations, a field of cultural logic. Through reference to cognate terms and cognitive schemas in other Maya languages, I will argue that certain fundamental aspects of this cultural logic are widespread across Maya communities and linguistic boundaries.

The concept of *k'u'x* is intimately related to the concept of *anima*,[11] and both metaphysically link individuals to vitalistic cosmic forces through the *ruk'u'x ranima* (the essence of one's being). *Anima* is most likely a loanword adopted from the Spanish *ánima* (spirit), and it seems to have replaced the Kaqchikel term *natub* found in early dictionaries (Hill and Fischer n.d.). *Anima* denotes a vitalistic force unique to humans. "It is what makes us human," as one woman explains; "it gives us the will and power to live." There is disagreement among Tecpanecos on exactly when one is endowed with *anima*; some say at conception and others say at birth. All agree that the *anima* is weak in the earliest days of life. During the first nine days after birth the infant has to be kept warm and is wrapped in heavy red cloth (the color red having the metaphysical quality of heat). If it survives the first nine days of life, its *anima* is considered sufficiently strong and it is formally welcomed into the family in a ceremony designed to ground and center its *k'u'x*. During the ninth-day ceremony the infant's umbilical cord (coming from the navel, the center of its body just as the navel of the earth is the sacred axis mundi) is buried inside the family *tuj*, or sweatbath.[12] In offering a sacrifice of part of the infant's body to the earth (and thus to the vitalistic force known as *ruk'u'x kaj, ruk'u'x ulew,* the heart/soul/essence of sky and earth), the family perpetuates the covenantal relationship between humans and cosmic forces that ensures fecundity and agricultural abundance.[13]

*Anima* is often translated as "spirit" or "soul," although its significance varies greatly from the Western concepts. The *anima* is physically located in the heart; *k'u'x* is often translated as "heart," but when asked to make a formal distinction between the two words, Kaqchikel-speakers say that *anima* is the heart and *k'u'x* is the chest. These two terms come together in the phrase *ruk'u'x ranima* ("the *k'u'x* of one's *anima*"), a deep-seated metaphysical quality that both motivates and reflects expressions of individual identity. Conceptions of *anima* carry a sense of a mutable destiny. The basic nature of the *anima* is laid down at birth on the basis of the cosmic confluence of forces associated with the day of one's birth in the sacred 260-day calendar, and yet one's *anima* is susceptible to the changing equilibrium of external (to the self) cosmic forces that act upon the self throughout one's life. One's *anima* is especially vulnerable when one is frightened (*susto*), described as *xb'e ranima* ("the *anima* leaving"). Stories of *susto* are common, such as that of the child whose *anima* left when a stray dog attacked her in the street. The *anima* of children, sick people, and the elderly is especially vulnerable to such events. When one's *anima* leaves, so does one's desire to live, and the condition can result in death. Death can be avoided through intervention either by the work of a religious specialist such as an *aj q'ij* or by bathing in a river, the water of which can bring back the *anima* of the afflicted in a ceremony known as *oyoj ruk'u'x* ("a calling back of the *k'u'x*").

*Anima* is closely associated with states of normality/abnormality, at least from an external vantage point. A normal person is described as *nik'ikot ranima* ("having a contented or beautiful *anima*") and an errant individual as *itzel ranima* ("having an ugly *anima*") or *yalan kow ranima* ("having a very hard *anima*" [used to describe especially self-centered individuals]). The *anima* survives death and lives on as a disembodied soul in the heavens and/or on earth.

Whereas the *anima* is uniquely human, all things—humans, plants, animals, lakes, mountains, the earth—have *k'u'x*. This is not to say that all *k'u'x* is the same. The *k'u'x* of a mountain is quite different from that of a human, and among humans and objects *k'u'x* varies

1. Both *anima* and *k'u'x* are normally possessed (e.g., *ranima* 'his/her/its *anima*').

2. Traditionally the *tuj* is built out of adobe with a low conical roof; they are often described as "little volcanoes," an appropriate metaphor given their shape and the profusion of smoke that billows forth as the fire gets started. Volcanoes and mountains are considered sacred places in Kaqchikel cosmology and are endowed with powerful cosmic forces. Caves and indentations in mountains and volcanoes are often chosen as places of ritual, for they allow supplicants to get physically closer to the *k'u'x* of the earth. Entering a *tuj*, one must crawl through the doorway on hands and knees, much as if entering a small cave. Further, certain rituals, especially those related to pregnancy and childbirth, take place within the *tuj*. Thus, the *tuj* acts as a personal and convenient symbolic representation of a sacred cave and the cosmic forces it contains.

13. During the ninth-day postnatal ceremony the newborn is bathed by an elder sibling in the *tuj*, after which the latter is given a bowl of soup containing the meat of an entire chicken to eat in its entirety. This part of the ceremony symbolically mitigates potential sibling rivalry, showing the elder sibling that his or her future subsistence (based on the continual regeneration of the agricultural cycle) will not be threatened by the complementary act of corporeal reproduction.

interindividually. Meanings associated with *k'u'x* are varied. It is most often translated as "heart" or "center." In this context it has the connotation of a stabilizing force: *ruk'u'x che'* is the hard inner wood of a tree, *ruk'u'x ri ken* is the central rod used in backstrap weaving, and *ruk'u'x awij* is the spine. In its metaphysical sense *k'u'x* likewise has a centering function. Maintaining the metaphysical balance of cosmic forces requires that one's *k'u'x* be grounded or centered in those forces. In this sense *k'u'x* may be translated as "soul," as it is perceived as the point of contact between individuals and the cosmic force animating the universe.

*K'u'x* also overlaps with Western concepts of "conscience." Kaqchikel cosmology envisions a close connection between one's *k'u'x* and one's self, and it is often invoked in categorizations of normality and abnormality. To have an ugly *k'u'x* (*itzel ruk'u'x*) is to be out of harmony with the cosmos, a state with potentially dangerous consequences for the individual and the collective. To have a big *k'u'x* (*nim ruk'u'x*) is to be honest, trustworthy, and reliable; to have a small *k'u'x* is to be the opposite. A person possessing a hard *k'u'x* is insensitive to the concerns of others and thoroughly self-interested; at the same time, having too soft or malleable a heart is a sign of moral and physical weakness. To have one's *k'u'x* go (to another person) is to fall in love—a potentially blissful state but one that can also threaten the equilibrium of the heart. Normality is described as having a contented (i.e., grounded and centered) *k'u'x* (*nik'ikot ruk'u'x*), denoting a deep-seated social and psychological stability.

Traditional Kaqchikel prayers normally begin by addressing the spiritual force *ruk'u'x kaj, ruk'u'x ulew,* and a better translation of *k'u'x* than "heart" in this context is "essence." The *k'u'x* of the sky and earth is the essence of the cosmic force that animates nature. The heart-center is, for the Kaqchikels and other Maya, a spatialized representation of the ephemeral essence of an object or force. For the ancient and modern Maya, the axis mundi or cosmic navel is a powerful place, where there is a confluence of primordial animating forces (see Vogt's 1976 discussion of the axis mundi in the Tzotzil Maya town of Zinacantan and Eliade's 1954 cross-cultural comparison of similar beliefs). Prayers addressed to *ruk'u'x kaj, ruk'u'x ulew* are calling on the same cosmic forces that continue to animate and often predestine life on earth and are an explicit acknowledgment of the need for the world to maintain equilibrium among cosmic forces (i.e., to be centered).

The state of one's *k'u'x* is closely related to the ubiquitous Mesoamerican distinction between the physical and metaphysical qualities of hot and cold. Caves, where one descends toward the *k'u'x* of a mountain, are especially hot places because of their symbolic proximity to the powers unleashed by cosmic convergence at the axis mundi. The axis mundi is often represented by hearth stones, which themselves have been converted from cold to hot by the primordial fire of creation. Hot conditions are powerful, and their power can be harnessed toward either benevolent or malevolent ends. A young man in Tecpán, for example, is said to have a hot *k'u'x* because he is impulsive and headstrong; while he is described as being very productive in his work and community obligations, he is seen as somewhat unstable (uncentered) and thus prone to rash, unpredictable actions and to starting projects that never get completed.

The *k'u'x* not only of humans but also of places is relationally evaluated. Kaqchikel Tecpanecos recognize that the mountain of Pulchich, located in a neighboring municipality overlooking Lake Atitlán, has a grander, more powerful *k'u'x* than the mountain Ratzamut, located just outside of Tecpán's city center. It is a difficult journey from Tecpán to Pulchich over a steep mountain range. On crossing the last summit, the blue waters of Lake Atitlán announce pilgrims' imminent arrival. The area is surrounded by precipitous cliffs and soaring rock faces, and just below Pulchich's summit is a cave where rituals are performed. The importance of this cave is ancient; its first recorded mention is in the 16th-century *Annals of the Kaqchikels.* Inside the cave are mounds of multicolored wax, the remnants of the countless candles that have been burned here, and the ceiling and walls are covered by a thick coating of black soot. Pulchich, because of its majestic geological surroundings and deep historical significance, is a powerful place. Entering the cave allows one to move closer, physically and metaphysically, to the mountain's center, its *k'u'x.* As the *k'u'x* of Pulchich is firmly grounded in the harmonious balance of vitalistic cosmic forces (being literally closer to the *k'u'x* of the earth, *ruk'u'x ulew*), rituals conducted there are better able to attune individuals to this harmony and thus to perpetuate and/or restore physical and emotional health, economic prosperity, and abundant harvests.

As sacrificial rituals at Pulchich attest, *k'u'x* is closely tied to the sacred covenant between Mesoamerican peoples and cosmic forces. In this sense *k'u'x* is associated with balance and reciprocity, both material and social. A centered *k'u'x,* for example, leads individuals to participate in normative reciprocal labor exchanges and the ritualized exchange of sweet breads during Holy Week. To refuse to participate in such socially cohesive obligations reflects an unbalanced *k'u'x* and results in social censure. The reciprocal benefit of such relations and the consequences of ostracism lead most individuals to perpetuate these normative patterns. Cooperation is highly valued, and it is significant that a local agricultural cooperative named its hardware store *Ruk'u'x Samaj* (The *K'u'x* of Work).

The concept of *k'u'x* is further tied to the covenantal relationship with cosmic forces through its meaning as duplication or abundance. Kaqchikel farmers often refer to the *ruk'u'x nutikon* ("the *k'u'x* of my planting"), and in this context *k'u'x* signifies the regenerative nature of agricultural production and the cosmic harmony that predicates it. Likewise, *ruk'u'x rumerya* is a special coin that one keeps in one's pocket so that money never stops coming in. This meaning of duplication nicely links concepts of *k'u'x* to the (re)generative nature of

cultural logic, a logic that allows for mutability of cultural forms while providing a basis for continuity.

## *K'u'x* and Normality

Having outlined the semantic domain of *k'u'x*, I turn now to how the cultural logic of *k'u'x* is played out in practical activity—in the behavior (*b'anob'al*) of individuals and its classification as culturally normal or abnormal.

The condition of normality is usually unmarked in Kaqchikel Maya. A normal person is just a person, *winäq*. In contexts that require the condition of normality to be marked, the phrase *nik'ikot ruk'u'x* ("has a contented *k'u'x*") is most often heard. Watanabe (1992) demonstrates the close relationship between the Chimbal conceptualization of the condition of normality and the perceived state of the soul. For Chimaltecos the soul is built around the "sense and sensibility" that common circumstance and socialization engender. Much the same holds true for the Kaqchikel Maya of Tecpán.

There is, of course, a range to what is considered normal both culturally and individually—a point that brings us to the heart of recent debate in anthropological theory concerning the relationship between individual idiosyncrasy and what we call culture. For our purposes, we may define normality as the exhibition of culturally unmarked behavior, that is, observable action (or inaction) that is explainable post hoc (if not predictable) through salient, contextually variable cognitive models. Individual variation plays into both sides of the equation of normality. Actors who produce the observed behavior certainly influence the way they are perceived by others, and consciously so to the extent that they knowingly play off salient cultural models. A Tecpaneco who refuses to speak Kaqchikel even to his age-mates and elders, feigning forgetfulness of his maternal tongue after having shifted entirely to Spanish, the language of formal political power and prestige, is seen by others in town as abnormal: while not evil, he is considered a troubled person whose identity crisis leaves him metaphysically uncentered. He has symbolically rejected the Tecpaneco Maya communitas by rejecting its primary vehicle, a unique language unintelligible to the town's non-Indians, and he has cast his lot with an Enlightenment-inspired philosophy of individual self-improvement and advancement (ironically, by adopting the hegemonic principles advanced within Guatemala's elite non-Indian class). The man in question is quite aware that his actions lead to censure among Maya Tecpanecos,[14] and so the perception of him as abnormal owes much to his own self-conscious rejection of expected behavior.

But no condition (or action, or thing) itself produces an objective cultural significance; that significance is ascribed to it by other cultural actors (and, in cases such as these that have fortuitously caught an anthropologist's eye, ascribed once again in the writing of ethnographic texts). Thus it is that the observers who interpret behavior also take an individually variable role in the classification of actions and individuals along the continuum of normality and abnormality and, indeed, in the construction of the cognitive and cultural models upon which that continuum is based. As one might expect, among Tecpanecos there is not always consensus on what behaviors constitute abnormality or, further, on whether an instance of abnormal behavior is more than an aberration. To illustrate, let us take the example of Pedro, a schoolteacher and part-time farmer whose wife tragically died in a 1993 bus accident. Grief over the loss of his wife, compounded by a general unhappiness with his job, propelled Pedro into a deep yearlong depression, a condition exacerbated by periodic bouts of excessive drinking. He lost his job, refused to fulfill obligations of reciprocal aid to his neighbors, and was alleged by some to be involved in financial misdeeds to support his newly reckless lifestyle. Among his family, friends, and neighbors there was much discussion about his state and what it indicated. His family and a small circle of friends argued that although his behavior was onerous, it was understandable given the circumstances; the man's *k'u'x* was uncentered, resulting in a loss of *anima*—a dangerous state with potentially permanent effects if allowed to progress. Here we see *k'u'x* closely associated not only with normality but with identity as well. Indeed, Pedro's crisis of *k'u'x* was largely an identity crisis, resulting from his abrupt and complete alienation from the person with whom he had long most closely identified. His wife had, early in their acquaintance, "taken his heart" (*xb'e ruk'u'x chi rij xtan*), and the couple had gone beyond the grudging fulfillment of expected duties that seems to hold many marriages together to integrate their lives and their livelihoods. Their souls had conformed to one another (*xkuqur ruk'u'x*), and the loss of this close and constant point of reference had left his *k'u'x* uncentered and his identity uncertain.

It was the considered opinion of his immediate family and close friends that this crisis of identity could only be resolved by grounding the man once again in a strong sense of common social identity. An important point of self-reference had been lost, and a healthy readjustment required that it be replaced by the stalwart and dynamically normative (being as much deduced from the norms of practical behavior as determinant of those norms) anchors of community and kin. This was realized practically by making special efforts to exercise "normal" relations with the troubled man, including him whenever possible in the myriad daily tasks that foster a sense of communal integration. Perhaps the most important of these daily efforts was sharing a family meal around the kitchen hearth. The location of this perhaps seemingly mundane event itself symbolizes the centering effect of the action, for the kitchen hearth is

14. Heightening the irony, his rejection of his heritage is also viewed skeptically by the town's affluent non-Indians, and this places him, from the viewpoint of an observer, is an interminable liminal state vis-à-vis identity.

known as the mother of the fire (*rute' q'aq'*), and the traditional three hearth stones surrounding the fire represent the axis mundi.[15] Symbolically, then, the hearth is associated with the balance of cosmic forces that is implied in the conception of center. Anthropologists have long noted that the sharing and distribution of food in nonmarket contexts often follows different rules from the sharing and distribution of other goods. There is something special about sharing food; at one level, for the Kaqchikels of Tecpán, it is the daily practical and symbolic continuation and affirmation of cosmic, agricultural, and life cycles: physical sustenance received from the bounty of the agricultural cycle, which is governed by the confluence of cyclic cosmic forces. A greater sense of mutual empathy is created in sharing food around the hearth than in any other daily activity of the life cycle; the filling of the stomach seems to stimulate mutual goodwill expressed in open stories about one's daily activities and thoughts. As I have argued elsewhere, this empathy creates a strong sense of mutual identification, and the hearth group serves as a primary nexus of identity (Fischer 1996*b*). To jolt us out of any unmerited romanticization I should note that the hearth in question where our troubled protagonist shared his meals with his immediate family was not built around three hearth stones. Very few in Tecpán today are—a side effect of the modernization of house construction (in which a cinder-block stove is de rigueur) that followed the 1976 earthquake. Elders lament this change of design, seeing it as detrimental to the maintenance of family ties. Nonetheless, even in houses with modern stoves, the symbolic value of the hearth is retained. This symbolic value is reinforced through practical activity as the kitchen hearth remains a center of household activity and common meals continue to be important events in interpersonal integration. It was through practical activity such as sharing meals that Pedro's family and friends exercised kinship ties and affective relations to provide him with a stable references for identity so that his *k'u'x* (and his self) could once again be centered, returning him to normality.

A number of more distant friends and neighbors believed that Pedro had become chronically unbalanced and that his behavior was indicative of a fundamentally flawed *k'u'x*. This analysis led them to distance themselves from him lest he drag them along on his downward spiral. Past behavior was reinterpreted in terms of this new characterological interpretation, and evidence was found to support the diagnosis of a chronically unbalanced, ugly *k'u'x*. Here we see the clear but not always unwavering distinction made between an abhorrent abnormal behavior and chronic abnormality and the ways in which such distinctions can be self-reinforcing if not self-fulfilling. Distancing an already alienated individual from important social relations heightens that individual's alienation and thus can promote the very antisocial behavior characteristic of the diagnosis. Conversely, a group therapy approach to social integration of an uncentered *k'u'x*, akin to early childhood socialization, can recenter the *k'u'x* in terms of social identity, and this has largely been the outcome in Pedro's case. He has dedicated himself anew to his teaching career, participates actively in family and community life, and has given up heavy drinking. At times he is struck by waves of melancholy ("Sometimes I sigh," he says[16]) that he now self-consciously recognizes as a dangerous uncenteredness and combats by seeking out situations of conviviality to counter his feeling of alienation and isolation.

Despite the importance of differing constructions of normality and abnormality in the dynamics of Tecpaneco society (variation that might be employed to argue against the concept of shared culture), it is telling that more often than not there is consensus as to what constitutes abnormality. Drinking too much, crossing an ill-defined threshold of excessive domestic violence, cheating friends and relatives in financial dealings, and many other such behaviors are almost uniformly condemned as abnormal, and this abnormality is explained through reference to the state of one's *k'u'x*. As is the reflexive nature of such cognitive models, *k'u'x* simultaneously models observed behavior and conditions individual agency. The application of the cultural logic underlying the *k'u'x* model is not uniform; indeed, the generative quality of cultural logic allows for infinite variation. There is no uniform agreement on what specific contextualized behaviors reflect an unsettled *k'u'x*; as we have seen in the case study above, there are often competing logically rigorous cultural interpretations of specific behaviors. For the most part, however, these competing interpretations are mutually intelligible, for they are based on common logical principles. Whether or not it was believed that the man who had lost his wife possessed a fundamentally unbalanced *k'u'x*, all explained his state of ab/normality in terms of *k'u'x* and the situationally unique conjuncture of social and cosmic forces acting on it. Further, the man in question, in recovering from his emotional depression, consciously sought to live up to the social standards indicative of a stable *k'u'x*. Less dramatic realizations of individual agency are likewise informed by the fluid and idiosyncratically perceived social standards of *k'u'x*, although often not so self-consciously. In acting on cognitive models of *k'u'x* through concrete activity and in applying the *k'u'x* paradigm to observed behavior and relations, these models are constantly modified in light of circumstantial contingencies. And yet continuity is maintained through the logical transposition of salient cultural schemas. Maya men no longer pierce the foreskins of their penises to offer blood to the god(s), and yet the covenant between humans and cosmic forces is perpetuated through ritual sacrifice to the *k'u'x*

15. I am grateful to William Harrison for explaining this and countless other Maya stories derived from iconographic studies.

16. The metaphor of sighing used here is significant, as breath (*uxla'*) was seen as closely related to the soul in colonial Kaqchikel ethnopsychology (Hill and Fischer n.d.)

of earth and sky and through individuals' striving to maintain metaphysical centeredness, grounding their *k'u'x* in the balance of the cosmos.

## *K'u'x* and the Cultural Logic of Cultural Change

The cognitive model indexed by the usage of *k'u'x* and *anima* makes clear the workings of the concept of cultural logic. It is a model that allows for the idiosyncrasies that have been the focus of constructivist theory while at the same time reaffirming an essential continuity and authenticity in the Maya cultural tradition. As we have seen, the state of one's *k'u'x* is idiosyncratically and contextually variable, shaped by the contingencies of lived experience. At the same time, cognitive models of *k'u'x* are socially maintained through consensual interpretations of behavior and categorizations of normality.

It is significant that the Kaqchikels have a word for the essence of identity, *ruk'u'x ranima* ("the heart/soul/essence of one's being"). The *ruk'u'x ranima* is the foundation for individual agency and intentionality while at the same time being a product of social interaction. Although Kaqchikels are born with *k'u'x*, in childhood the *ruk'u'x ranima* is not yet fully formed. Events affect the individual's *ruk'u'x ranima* and thus in part mold its formation, shaping the future outlook of individuals on the basis of affective sentiments. There is an enduring quality to *ruk'u'x ranima* as well; it is much less variable than the outward manifestations of the *anima* and less affected by the ups and downs of daily life. One close friend in Tecpán told me of the trauma caused by her father's drinking when she was a girl. She has vivid memories of his getting drunk and unruly while watching soccer games, and ever since she has had a powerful disdain for soccer. In her words, her father's behavior pushed into her *ruk'u'x ranima*, changing it in a negative way.

Predicated on practice as it is, *ruk'u'x ranima* may change over one's lifetime. Often noted in this connection are military veterans, and the intense brainwashing and indoctrination of military recruits in Guatemala has been well documented. Conscripts are taken far away from their natal communities and trained in Spanish to highlight the break with community; those selected for service in the elite Kaibil corps are reportedly given a puppy at the beginning of their training to care and provide for until graduation, at which time they must cut the dog's throat and drink its blood in a rite of passage. Not surprisingly, men often return from military service changed in some fundamental way, suffering from what we might term posttraumatic stress syndrome. Veterans frequently suffer severe crises of identity as they find themselves again enmeshed in local systems of ethnic politics while carrying the stigma of association with the military and its violent campaigns. They often have little patience for the machinations of established tradition and are more comfortable with rigid command chains than with the consensus model of negotiation and governance long characteristic of Maya communities. One man I know well had been a kind, gentle soul before he was shanghaied by the military, but upon his return he drank heavily, abused his wife and children, and alienated his family and friends through his antisocial behavior; it is said that the army changed his *ruk'u'x ranima*.

Constructivist analyses of culture and identity have long focused on such idiosyncratic change, showing how individuals adapt to changing contingencies through innovative cultural interpretation and adaptation. Certainly, man the symbol maker exhibits the qualities of a Lévi-Straussian bricoleur; individuals are innovative and constructive given the material and ideological resources at hand. Accepting this observation, we must turn our attention to a consideration of how available resources are not only rearranged and symbolically redefined but themselves changed through ongoing reflexive practice. Cultural logic does not merely facilitate the interpretation of novel situations; its very organizing principles are themselves changed through cumulative micro and macro situational conjunctures of idiosyncratic intentions and collective actions. I have stressed the symbolic conservatism built into cultural logic as well as its idiosyncratic internalization in the context of ongoing social interaction. Let me turn now to an example of how idiosyncratic interpretations and actions may, given conducive and overlapping structural contexts, result in the emergence of new normative patterns. Most dramatic in this regard, perhaps, is the wave of large-scale violence that swept through highland Guatemala in the late 1970s and early 1980s. The violence not only created new social groups such as returned veterans and internal refugees but also fundamentally altered the contours of the material and political space open to Maya individuals and groups. To a certain extent preexisting cultural templates were transposed onto the new realities, exemplified by Don Domingo's interpretation of the violence as reported above (see also Wilson 1995, Carmack 1988); in other domains, cultural and cognitive templates proved less resilient. The consensus model of group interaction, for example, became suspect as a communist device and was abandoned or curtailed by local Maya groups throughout the highlands. Effective consensus building requires a degree of moral transparency, and with the infiltration of military and guerrilla *orejas* (spies, literally "ears") in Tecpán and other Maya towns the ability to divine the intentions of others was greatly reduced. This new darkness of the *ruk'u'x ranima*, which could result in torture and death for the targets of bad intentions, was not easily discernible through traditional criteria, and, further, intersubjective interpretations of the state of an individual's heart/soul were themselves dangerous (one can imagine the interrogation beginning, "So, they say they you are worried that Señor X may be collaborating with the forces of state security . . . why is that? What would you have to fear, compatriot?").

Despite its resilience, cultural logic is not like a rubber band that stretches to accommodate present contingencies and then snaps back to its original form. The violence has fundamentally changed the way Maya peoples view the world, expanding the realm of the doxa by bringing that which was formerly unthinkable into the realm of possibility. As the Jewish Holocaust has shown, there is no return from this condition, although its proximate effects may diminish with passing generations.

At the same time, I am not arguing that the course of Maya cultural change is unilaterally dictated by the convergence of external forces. The pan-Maya movement provides us with a more encouraging example of self-directed change in Maya cultural logic (albeit in the context of external political-economic contingencies). The underlying goal of pan-Maya cultural activism is nothing less than the creation of a culturally salient and accepted category of pan-Maya identity to encompass and perhaps ultimately replace the long-standing community-based allegiances characteristic of Maya groups (Fischer and Brown 1996). Pan-Mayanists often characterize their work as raising the consciousness of the masses, implying that they are simply creating cognitive and social space to allow a latent cultural characteristic to come to the fore. To what extent there was a concept of pan-Maya unity in pre-Columbian times is unknown, although competition between expansive city-states in the Classic and Post-Classic periods suggests that community-based allegiances have a long history in the area. Even were an authentic and autochthonous Maya pattern from the past knowable and known, however, it could not be transposed in toto onto present circumstances. Pan-Mayanists are not blind to this fact; they freely acknowledge that they have to construct cultural alternatives that are both true to their conceptions of their past and viable in the context of contemporary Guatemalan society. Promoting a pan-Maya identity involves fundamentally restructuring the way in which millions of individuals view the world and their position therein. Maya activists have begun their task through linguistic innovations. For example, they encourage the use of the term Maya' or Mayab' in place of toponyms and language-group names as the primary signifier of identity for Indians; they also advocate the adoption of personal names derived from the sacred 260-day calendar or from pre-Columbian texts. The introduction of such neologisms is supported by pan-Mayanist outreach programs including lectures and workshops in rural communities and written materials that employ historical and epigraphic evidence to stress the common origins and grand heritage of all Maya peoples. Surprisingly, given the entrenched cultural paradigm that equates community with identity, pan-Mayanists have had notable success in gaining acceptance for their restructuration of intersubjectively conceived ethnic relations. Identifying oneself as Maya rather than as a person from town X or a speaker of language Y no longer raises eyebrows in Tecpán, and the town's ladino registrar has recently relented to allow children to be legally given Maya names. More significant, increasing numbers of Maya people are un-self-consciously using this new vocabulary and the change in cultural logic that it implies to situate themselves in their social and material worlds. Yet, far from marking a sharp break with the past, such new paradigms of cultural logic are effective precisely because they adapt to changing circumstances by building on received constructions. This is not the purely instrumental constructivism of cloaking new types of oppression in the time-honored guise of history, to borrow a phrase from Marx's masterful analysis of how French peasants were duped by the Napoleonic rhetoric of Louis Bonaparte. Rather, it is the conscious and unconscious dialectic reconciliation of received cultural paradigms and changing real-world circumstances that both reproduces and alters an underlying cultural logic. The cumulative result of such cognitive modeling is the apparent irony of "authentic" cultural continuity's being actively constructed by intentional, self-interested individuals in contexts not entirely of their own making. But we must not lose sight of the fact that this is not an ironic endeavor for the subjects of our analysis, nor do their self-interests correspond to some universal concept of utility. If culture is like a game, then it is as much Scrabble as Battleship, with actors building words and meanings not by tearing down the existing structure but by adding to it and thus permanently changing it.

Watanabe (1992) is similarly concerned with the dynamics of cultural change and continuity. Focusing on the interrelated concepts of *naab'l* and *aanma,* he relates a cultural logic of soul to the ways in which the Maya of Santiago Chimaltenango gossip, envy, and maintain local forms of knowledge. He poetically glosses *naab'l* as both "sense" and "sensibility": "if *naab'l* means 'sense,' as in general sense perceptions or awareness, it also means 'having sense' as in being humanly sensible to oneself and to others" (p. 82). *Naab'l* performs an important normative function in Chimalteco culture, and its various meanings "thus define general human social capacities and characteristics in reference to the conventional normality of particular communities" (p. 84). *Naab'l* is intimately related to the soul, or *aanma* (cf. the Kaqchikel *anima*). The concept of soul is largely self-referential, but "this does not mean that Chimaltecos can do whatever they please and call it 'soulful,' because . . . the propriety of having soul must be recognized and affirmed by others, not simply self-asserted" (pp. 90–91). Watanabe's data provide important comparative support for my assertion that among Kaqchikel-speakers the concept of *k'u'x* is part of a relatively stable cultural logic with a transcendental point of reference, realized through practical activity, that centers identity. An emotional episode or period may indicate an uncentered heart, but that does not translate into an ugly soul. As Watanabe points out elsewhere, "a linguistically derived model of Maya space and time need not depend on any particular historical constellation of cultural traits but can represent a more fundamental cognitive order which underlies

these traits" (1983:711); at the same time, such an underlying cognitive order is itself subject to the same historical forces of change that affect observable cultural traits.

Carlsen and Prechtel (1997) find an ever-changing cultural logic at work in the Tz'utujil cognitive model of *jaloj-k'exoj*. *Jal* refers to life-cycle change, metaphorically associated with the maturation of maize as seen in its changing husk. *K'ex* refers to cyclic generational change and is associated with the rejuvenation of seeds in maize agriculture. As with *k'u'x*, the *jaloj-k'exoj* cognitive model is based on the sacred covenant between humans and vitalistic cosmic forces that perpetuates the cycle of earthly existence. But such cognitive models do not blindly reify received wisdom, predicated as they are on lived experience. It is through habitual practical activity, such as the reciprocal social relations implicated in models of *naab'l*, *k'u'x*, and *jaloj-k'exoj*, that the cultural logic underlying these models is reinforced and transformed. As Carlsen and Prechtel write, *jaloj-k'exoj* refers to a process of "change within change: a single system of transformation and renewal" (p. 51). As with the Kaqchikel model of *k'u'x* and the Mam model of *naab'l*, the cultural logic underlying the *jaloj-k'exoj* paradigm "guide[s] the transformations of the local Maya cultural configuration" (p. 49). Further, *jaloj-k'exoj*, like *k'u'x*, is spatially associated with the axis mundi. Carlsen and Prechtel hypothesize that *jaloj-k'exoj* derives from a "conceptualization of observed processes and patterns in the *natural* environment" (p. 49, emphasis mine). Eva Hunt finds a similar natural basis for Zinacantan cosmology, which is governed by a "root paradigm of ecology, agrarian schedules, and invariant astronomical events" (1977:249; see also Gossen 1974, Bricker 1981, Watanabe 1983). Such metaphorical and metonymic modeling of nature may well describe the etymology of these conceptions, but doubtless, as with *k'u'x*, their ongoing expression and logical transformation are based on social and cultural as well as natural contingencies.

## Conclusion

Similar cultural logics related to the soul have been reported from other areas of the Maya region (Nash 1970, Vogt 1976, Boremanse 1993, Wilson 1995) and other parts of Mesoamerica (López Austin 1988; Sandstrom 1991; Monaghan 1995, n.d.). In all of these cases, the logic revealed appears to be based on conceptions of metaphysical balance and a sacred covenantal relationship between individuals and cosmic forces. That such conceptions are found in widely divergent contexts across both time and space in Mesoamerica belies the argument that cultural forms are developed and deployed solely in relation to circumstantial contingencies. Cultural elements and the logic that binds them can and do act as tools of resistance, and yet their power derives from their unifying quality, a quality based at least as much on continuity as on resistance to an Other.

Maya culture is dynamically constructed. At the same time, innovation is constrained by aspects of an internalized cultural logic—a logic that is itself subject to change but that changes much more slowly than surface markers of identity. The concept of cultural logic does not relegate Maya culture to the realm of the traditional. Nor does it portray Maya culture as an infinitely malleable construction based on economically logical, self-interested agendas. Rather, it allows us to view Maya culture as a historically continuous construction that adapts to changing cirumstances while remaining true to a perceived essence of Mayaness.

# Comments

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The heart of this essay on Maya *k'u'x* is neither Maya "heart" nor the transcendent (inter-)subjective identity that can generate a continuity of Maya identity-with-difference (Maya "soul") but the politics and ethics of anthropology and, specifically, of doing cultural anthropology among Maya and "about" Maya culture.

Fischer says that his compulsion to write *this* essay arises from his need to address the problem of his ethical responsibility as an ethnographer working in a politically volatile context. At the same time, he points to theorizing culture as the legitimizing or significance-granting value of this essay, but his theorizing neither leads to nor is constituted by a desire to create an objective, neutral, and value-free science. Rather, this is the postulation of a science that is consciously constituted in and through relations of power and politics. Nor is it science in either of Rosaldo's (1984:168–95) ideal-types of anthropological (or scientific) interventions; it is clearly not (*a*) an analysis that seeks to dissimulate its political intervention as scientific, objective, the disclosure of a truth pregnant with policy ramifications, or (*b*) an ethnography epistemologically constituted as a cultural critique of politics and society from its location in and through science.

Motivated by the critique of a Maya anthropologist—one of those "natives talking back" who steal and rewrite the colonizer's books (cf. Paredes 1958, Limón 1994, Rosaldo 1989, Retamar 1989)—Fischer seeks an alternative ground from which to do anthropology. He moves in the direction of a science that recognizes—and makes explicit—its politics and thus recognizes that it must justify itself through an ethical positioning in relation to the power implications and ramifications of its knowledge production. The extent to which this

essay negotiates this terrain is what, I feel, makes it valuable. It opens up the possibility of pluralizing the field of ethical engagement and breaking up Manichean interpretations of both politics and science.

There is, however, a fundamental contradiction here, Fischer explicitly recognizes that politics, government, and power are linked to and complicit with scientific institutions, practices, and knowledges. This recognition might imply that there are heterogeneous and multiple interconnections between power and knowledge, yet in other discussions (e.g., on the governmentality of Guatemalan social science) there is a reduction of positions to binary possibilities. This is presupposed by his framing of a monolithic and unitary "constructivism" which collapses widely divergent theoretical positions—deconstruction, poststructuralism, interpretivism, postcolonialism, "writing culture," cultural critique, and Marxisms—into one type, without any recognition of the critical epistemological, political, and ethical differences between them—and this in an essay that argues for opening up dialogues on the ethical problematic of anthropological knowledges, analyses, and practices. Whether or not this relates to mischaracterizations of certain works, it does allow him to express the misguided idea that all constructivisms are equivalent with regard to "essentialism" and that this entity is the same in the realm of analysis-theorization and in that of politico-cultural claims of essentialist identities. Thus binary positions within science and within politics, which are then homologously identified, are presupposed as solid, unavoidable Manichean options that are reconsolidated by the essay's conclusion.

This point is evident from the style of Fischer's presentation of the Zapeta-Morales debate, which finds persuasive force in its "surprising" revelation that theoretical-intellectual positions cannot be deduced a priori from their authors' ethnic-national identities. Both the ladino and the Maya intellectual complicate and confound Manichean binaries with their "hybridized" or "bricolaged" arguments. Here, then, is an opening up of ethical commitments in relation to the political implications of anthropological knowledge and its production. It stands in contradiction, however, with the characterization, following Watanabe, of "constructivist" analyses as authorial hubris that avoids the "real" issues and conflicts. This framing, as noted above, reentrenches a polarization between "good" science/politics and "bad" science/politics in which the ethical value is constituted by the opposition of "us" (implicitly Westerners-anthropologists) and "them" (cultural Others, nonetheless Other even if anthropologically trained). The Maya, then, are on the "good" side, and to be ethical we must side with them. But how precisely are we to do so? This is an unanswerable question unless one can determine who the Maya are, who are Maya, and what identity relation constitutes Maya as Maya. It is these questions, posed in terms of Maya heart and soul, that Fischer is asking in positing, on the one hand, a binary field in which "(de)constructionist" approaches are "ironically" not on the Maya side of the playing field while "essentialism" and "anti-antiessentialism" are, and, on the other hand, that this Manichean field of drama is too simple (e.g., see n. 5).

It is in addressing these questions of identity as simultaneously political and social scientific that Fischer finds the legitimizing significance for his retheorization of the culture concept in terms of logic as epistemologically and ethically viable. While I respect his clear statement of intention that his analysis of "cultural logic" as the "intersubjective continuity" of Maya identity may serve a politico-pragmatic purpose for a specific pan-Maya agenda, I find problematic his theoretical reliance upon and ethico-political defense of the concept of "continuity" (see his concluding paragraphs and nn. 3 and 5). It seems to me that it is precisely the reentrenching reiteration of the polarized debate on continuity in Maya studies—reactionary Maya "resistance" to external forces versus "essential" cultural "survival"—that forecloses the possibilities of dialogue that would lead to a pluralizing of the field of ethical, political, and scientific positions. Maya studies and the field of anthropology in general cannot afford to celebrate cultural plurality across the globe while seeking to enforce theoretical homogeneity and conformity within the discipline. But this is what occurs when the various constructivist theories are conflated for argument's sake (resulting in misguided critiques) or when unfamiliar writing styles are labeled for dismissal on a priori grounds as too exotic, too fashionable, too disconnected with "real" issues, or simply too "postmodern" (used as a pejorative).

Pluralizing the field—or to use Fischer's term, opening up dialogues—is possible and feasible only if we stop silencing the multiplicity of positions already present. Given the presence and re-presentation of this debate in this journal, so far from yet so close to Guatemala, should remind us that the issues at hand are inherently transnational, international, and transcultural. The inherent transnationalism of anthropology and of the Maya might make us aware that binary models of anthropological ethics and the politics of knowledge production are naïve and woefully inadequate. Without rigorously addressing the issue of transnationalism, we open the door for Manichean politics to consume the plurality of ethical positions and exclude theoretical multiplicity. At stake in such a foreclosure of dialogue and thought is the possibility of re-creating, if not also radically modifying, the relations between anthropological subjects who study Maya objects of study.

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Fischer's essay is well argued and informative; it makes sense to the non-expert. Opposed positions in the politi-

cal debate regarding Maya identity give the story its dramatic plot; the dénouement comes from "cultural logic." However, historical accuracy (or perhaps the simple fact that I have been around long enough to recognize old acquaintances among the ingredients of new theories) makes me question both the plot and its solution. I sympathize with the attempt to cool the debate by transporting it from its political forum in Guatemala to an arena in which, we are told, the two opponents are essentialism and constructivism. True, these two labels are currently employed to mark positions, and if someone who sees himself as an essentialist decides to fight another whom he calls a constructivist (or the other way around) there is little one can do about it. But I don't know of any essentialists calling themselves essentialist, while I have the impression that constructivists may be less reluctant to accept the labeling. This is a first indication of a lack of symmetry, one that points to a deeper problem with opposing the two terms: Essentialism is—essentially—an ontological position; it asserts a reality, in this case Maya identity. Constructivism (at least in the understanding of someone who has been put in that corner) marks an epistemological position. It regards the "conditions of possibility" of, in this case, knowing what Maya identity might be. Put somewhat differently, "essentialism" is one of the things "constructivists" try to understand.

Now to the proposed solution, one that is to transcend the two positions by showing that Maya essence (substantial propositions, "key words," of Maya views of the world) is "realized" through construction following the rules of a cultural logic (affecting practices that change, idiosyncratic positions that have to be negotiated within a community, and so forth): This, I must admit, looks to me like a return to a kind of faith in the explanatory power of "logic." Among other things, it was loss of this faith that made constructivists take their position. Need I recall the arguments? Against statements like "cultural logic establishes the boundaries of the doxa," one must still point out that logic cannot define a domain; a map is not the territory. Unless culture is being reduced to structure, in which case form counts and content ("essence") may be dismissed, cultural logic cannot be equated with (or even stand for, represent) culture. More important (as I argued some time ago in an essay included in a collection cited by Fischer [Fabian 1991], "Taxonomy and Ideology"), analyses of culture that are confined to elaborating the logic of (systems of) key words obscure the deployment of "logic" in actual speech events, that is, their rhetorical, poetic, political, hence historically situated significance. Fortunately, Fischer is by all indications a good ethnographer and shows much awareness of this. But he cannot have his cake (adopting a theory of cultural logic) and eat it too (documenting how Maya argue with concepts from their cultural and linguistic repertoire).

In sum, and coming back to dramatic plots, we anthropologists are no riding messengers. In the tragic conflicts we face among those we study, our discipline does not afford us a position. That position is something we must build in the course of our ethnographic work, document and defend in our writing, and, if circumstances demand this, translate into political action—which is how, as a putative member of the constructivist tribe, I would describe constructivism if asked.

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I welcome this article as a new attempt among several others to deal with the question of cultural continuity in contemporary conflict situations. It provides an argument of the kind proffered by me and certain other anthropologists, not least Kapferer, who provides an elaborate framework—ontology, cosmology, ideology—for understanding the historical conjuncture within which so much confusion has arisen regarding the nature of cultural, i.e., specific, practices. The interpretations that have been debated are those of cultural continuity and cultural invention. The latter assume that current situations like the one depicted here for the Maya are disjunctive—entirely the product of cultural resistance. The continuist approach claims that there is a great deal of cultural replication involved, and the strongest argument is perhaps that of Sahlins regarding mythopraxis. The approach suggested here is based on the notion of culture not as code or as objectified code or program but as mode of experiential organization. It is discussed, however, in terms of cognitive modes, sets of interpretively linked categories or perhaps schemas. The approach I have suggested, which is closer to Kapferer's, is not so much cognitive as experiential or ontological. It concerns the way in which the immediately experienced properties of social worlds are structured. This is not culture in the usual sense but a powerful mode of cultural production. In its simplest terms it refers to the way in which Christian symbols and objects may be assimilated into a specific practice of religiosity. Certain practices of statehood and government in Central Africa and Papua New Guinea demonstrate similar forms of articulation in which extraneous Western forms are reorganized into local strategies and logics of social reproduction. This is not the same as syncretism or hybridity, as the terms are often used, since it stresses the nature of the articulation—one which is dominated by local forms of experience and strategy. This kind of discussion has a history in the work of the early Mannheim, from whom much of Bourdieu's habitus discussion is derived. In his work the notion of experience space is central, and within this category develop what he refers to as subjunctive forms of communication, those which are immediate and significant but not explicit. He opposes these to the communicative forms, which are explicit and more context-free rather than embedded in structures of implicit understanding.

Fischer is aiming at the same kind of understanding of social reality, and I believe that the fact that such interests have emerged in apparently different quarters indicates an important shift away from the culture as object, text, product that has been dominant for so long in American anthropology. The notion of a cognitive cultural logic seems to refer to a kind of substrate of related interpretations which are also invested emotionally and practically. This might be countered by saying that it is no different from the older notion of core or key symbols, of which *k'u'x* as a kind of animate force applicable across many domains might be an example, but there is an important difference in the way the concepts have been used. The notion of key symbol has been used in a communicative (Mannheim 1983) rather than a subjunctive sense; that is, the associations involved in the use of such symbols (e.g., the mudyi tree or the flag) are semantic associations, assemblages of links, whereas the kinds of complexes described here are constituted not of explicit categories but of strongly invested recursive or systemically interacting ones. The incorporation of God into an ancestral position is one in which God takes on a set of properties of action that supply the subject with qualities that are necessary for survival and are felt in powerful existential terms. These are not cognitive logics in Bourdieu's sense but practical logics, logics that connect a series of activities in a larger set that tends toward logical closure. The power of such logics is expressed in the way in which they structure different domains of social life; that is, they are not restricted to a specific single set of objects and practices.

It is important, I think, to approach the issue of cultural movements in the kinds of terms set out here, because it is very much closer to the way people live their lives and engage in movement activities. The inventionist or constructivist approach to this problem is based on a situation construed as intellectual and distanced and must ultimately be in conflict with the way people live.

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Fischer's essay sets out to resolve a crucial problem—the more so because it arises from dialogue with the Maya intellectuals who are the subjects of his analysis. As I understand the generative experience, Fischer and his coauthor, R. McKenna Brown, published *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala* in 1996, and both Maya and ladino newspaper columnists immediately read and commented on it, especially on its coauthored introductory essay. Enrique Sam Colop, an influential K'iche Maya intellectual and columnist for the *Prensa Libre,* wrote a scathing critique titled "Un par de gringos despistados" (Two Gringos Lost in the Woods), objecting that Fischer and Brown overstated the role of gringo anthropologists in the emergence of contemporary Maya cultural activism and discredited the Maya movement with the epithet "essentialist." Mario Roberto Morales, a ladino columnist known for provocative "deconstruction" of Maya identity and rights, praised the essay for these same reasons. In their next visit to Guatemala a few months later, Fischer and Brown met with leading Maya intellectuals to air the issue and recover a spirit of solidary dialogue.

This experience, despite the amicable resolution, is understandably a source of great disquiet for Fischer, who has positioned himself as an ally of the Maya movement and who shares most Maya's disgust for the intellectual politics of Morales. How could culture theory have so utterly failed him? This could be expected to happen in the 1950s, before "situated knowledges," when most anthropology still implicitly endorsed the premises of modernization theory, but not in the 1990s, when alignment with the subaltern (especially the indigenous subaltern) is a nearly unquestioned point of departure. I heartily agree with Fischer: something is wrong with constructivist theories of identity that lend themselves so easily to the delegitimation of subaltern peoples. Further, if these peoples regularly engage in collective responses to subordination with recourse to what anthropologists call "essentialism," we probably should think twice about imbuing the term with such opprobrium.

While Fischer perceptively and eloquently frames the problem, his solution does not carry us very far. He advances a critique of constructivist approaches to identity politics and seeks a newly formulated common ground between essentialism and constructivism. In language vaguely reminiscent of ethnoscience, he settles on a notion of key cognitive patterns—called cultural logic—which provide the deep structure underlying both thought and practice. Although he registers possibilities of contention and change, these are the least developed and least convincing parts of the model. We get the distinct sense that this cultural logic has anchored the Maya for the historical long haul, embodying, as he puts it, an "essential continuity underlying cultural forms." Even the contemporary Maya movement, introduced to illustrate change, ends up simply transposing these principles to higher levels of political aggregation. Moreover, Fischer's data from Tecpán makes it sound as if all Maya embodied this cultural logic in a more or less equal and a priori way—relegating change and variation either to the realm of individual histories and idiosyncrasies or to distant, vaguely specified political-economic processes. His search for deep principles short-circuits the critical examination of how those principles are established, reproduced, and contested. The root problem is that Fischer has provided us with a model of "cultural logic" in which culture is prior to and largely insulated from the exercise of power and the processes of subject formation, and this

brings us back to the question of politics. The constructivist theories of identity that Fischer had invoked to dub the Maya "essentialist" were developed principally in the context of continental and U.S. critiques of modernity, with little or no engagement with the daily practice and struggles of people like the Maya. Fischer's model seems to correct that problem by creating a contingent alignment between his theoretical message (the existence of a deeply rooted and continuous Maya cultural logic) and the political positioning of Maya intellectuals whom he respects. However, by suppressing ambiguity in the name of theoretical closure, it stakes out an equally rigid politics that could later come back to haunt him. For example, there is an incipient but strong gendered critique of Maya cosmology, advanced by Maya women, which Fischer's model could well be used to deauthorize. The "unity in diversity" principle can cut in many different ways.

The alternative? I am inclined toward Stuart Hall's (1996) resting place, in which the "suture" between subject formation and individual agency is both impossible to theorize (without recourse to arbitrary closure) and absolutely necessary to assert because that is how people make political interventions in the world. This coincides with Diana Fuss's (1989) argument that essentialism of one sort or another is present in all political acts, all processes of cultural construction. The question is not, then, "Are they essentialist?" but rather "What does their discourse (we need not even call it "essentialist") do?" Does it promote a frozen-in-time view of Maya culture? A grounding for Maya rights and struggles? A basis for promoting the superiority of Western (or ladino) culture? A notion of Maya culture that legitimates gender inequality? A theory that orients the same response to each of these "essentialisms" obscures more than it clarifies; to call some (i.e., the good ones) "strategic" defers the issue without resolving anything. In any case, I suspect that the constructivism-essentialism polarity may soon have run its course, just as the structure-agency debate did before it. Once any such polarity has been framed and resolved as a classic modernist dialectic, it is time to move on—not because the solution "sticks" but because the self-referentiality of the framing has been revealed. Interestingly enough, one could draw this precise conclusion from the Mayā intellectual response to Fischer's earlier essay. They have no time for the debate, because they refuse the premises on which it is predicated. Instead of returning to academia to give that critique a "high-tech" expression in the idiom of Western culture theory, Fischer might have taken it as a mandate to refuse closure, forsake the elusive "common ground," and change the subject. As things stand, he runs the risk of reinforcing a subtle hierarchy of knowledge production whereby U.S.-based anthropologists provide the sophisticated theoretical counterpart to the political interventions of our indigenous allies. For that very reason, he has created a cultural model that—if adopted—would be likely to place his students in the same awkward predicament in which constructivist culture theory placed him.

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Fischer grapples courageously with a difficult problem in current anthropology, the conflict between epistemology and politics. The invention-of-tradition approach of the past 20 years has put anthropologists in the awkward position of debunking the essentialist claims of groups whose political aims they nonetheless support. Fischer tries to rescue a notion of authentic Maya culture, but, though I agree with his conclusions, I find his argumentation unconvincing.

First, I agree that a useful theory of culture must be able to account for both continuity and change. People do not live their lives randomly; they build upon given cultural patterns. At the same time, those patterns make innovation possible while historical, real-world contingencies make it necessary. This, however, is hardly news—think, for example, of Sapir's essays from the 1930s on culture and personality, which argue that "no matter how rigorously necessary . . . the analyzed pattern may seem to be, it is always possible . . . for the lone individual to effect a transformation of form or meaning which is capable of communication to other individuals" (1949:573). Notwithstanding the venerability of this argument, Fischer's work to redeploy it is welcome, for, as he says, postmodern theoretical fashions have too frequently overlooked it (cf. Brightman 1995). Fischer also does us a service in situating his theoretical argument in the context of ongoing debates in Guatemala. He reminds us that—contrary to right-wing diatribes in the United States against the amoral constructivism of the "tenured radicals" (Kimball 1990)—there is no one-to-one mapping of epistemological and political positions. Empowered elites deploy both essentialist and constructivist arguments, depending on their aims, as do their opponents (cf. Gable and Handler 1996:576).

I am less convinced, however, by Fischer's attempt to theorize "the essential continuity underlying [Maya] cultural forms" on the basis of Maya cognitive models of the heart and soul. In particular, I dispute his claim that the Maya model "expresses" his own "concept of cultural logic." Let me be clear: I do not dispute that there is both cultural continuity and cultural change in the world of the people Fischer discusses. But it seems to me that he has inconsistently translated Maya conceptions of persons in relation to the cosmos, rewriting them in terms of our current obsession with "identity" and "normality." "Identity" (oneness) is a term that speaks to our notions of bounded, unique individuals, unit-actors not in relationship to the cosmos but independent of it—the fetishized Western individual (Han-

dler 1994, Rouse 1995). As Fischer notes, Kaqchikel notions of self blur "the boundaries that the modern (Western) conception . . . seeks to delineate." Thus it is all the more surprising that by the end of Fischer's sensitive discussion of "unbalanced" individuals he is talking about "identity." Similarly, "normality" is a term central to modern Western conceptions of the self and of society as a collection of similar or "normal" individuals. As Goffman noted long before we were reading Foucault, the concept "may have its source in the medical approach to humanity or in the tendency of large-scale bureaucratic organizations . . . to treat all members . . . as equal. Whatever its origins, it seems to provide the basic imagery through which laymen currently conceive of themselves" (1963:7 n.10).

Theorizing cultural continuity and discontinuity in identity terms—in terms of cultures imagined as discrete (albeit collective) units, each with its own identity—leads to impossible conundrums, because it is difficult in Western logic to imagine a thing (in this case, "authentic Maya culture") as retaining its essential identity yet changing continuously. The solution, as I once argued in the pages of this journal (Handler 1984), is to eschew reification, that is, to stop thinking of culture as a thing. Yet Fischer's rendering of Kaqchikel concepts ultimately translates them into a discussion of identity and abnormality (when does a thing, an identity, cease to be the thing it used to be?) and then claims them as an analogue for a reworked theory of culture!

Midway through his argument, Fischer claims that a semantic analysis of cultural terms (such as his analysis of "the heart and soul of Maya culture") is "on much safer epistemological ground" than a grammatical analysis. He does not tell us what his criteria of epistemological safety are, but it seems to me that he would have done better to heed Whorf's (1956) analysis of the grammatical categories underpinning "Standard Average European" objectification than to confine himself to the domain of semantic analysis.

Finally, Fischer's claim that the Maya model is an analogue of his own is irrelevant. If what is at issue is the logical coherence and analytic utility of a model, it is irrelevant whether an emic model matches or contradicts an etic one. It seems to me that Fischer is trying to legitimate his scholarly authority by linking it to Maya authenticity—an old anthropological ploy, to be sure, but one that we should abandon.

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The apparent opposition between constructivist, hyperrelativist (often highly individualistic) perspectives and approaches that stress close attention to cultural logics and value is often misconceived and of doubtful or limited analytical worth. As Fischer demonstrates, so-called constructivists, especially many "postmodernists," frequently mask assumptions of an individual self-interest, pragmatic sort perhaps appropriate to dominant cultural values of the global marketplace. That is, a foundationalist and universalist perspective, almost of the Orwellian "smelly orthodoxy" kind and antagonistic to the spirit of much anthropology, seems to be gaining some ascendancy, despite claims to the contrary, and ultimately makes a mockery of the Nietzschean and deconstructionist antidialectics to which many anthropologists of a postmodern kind declare allegiance. Fischer correctly shows that some charges against a culture-centered anthropology, such as those of essentialism and homogeneity, are more caricatures than anything else, disguising overlaps in approach. This article is a welcome attempt to overcome false contrasts and contradictions in contemporary theoretical discussion and get back to the ethnographic problematics of lived realities, which have the ever-challenging capacity to resist the constructions that anthropologists and scholars of all kinds may wish to impose upon them.

In my view, the concept of culture is not worthy of the sort of hostility that is routinely heaped upon it. Culture is merely ingrained in what all human beings do and is always taking diverse and innovative directions. It is known largely through its practices and otherwise is available only to the crudest of abstract definitions. It is when attempts are made to define culture abstractly in terms of content—when practice is subordinated to the idea and populations are marked by such an idea—that difficulties creep in. This is tragically apparent in the abstract mythologizations of culture and history of contemporary nationalism and ethnic struggle that seem to be implicated in the human destructions of the present day. However, it must be insisted that it is not so much definitions and ideas of culture that are at "fault" as the fields and structures of force and power that fly such cultural banners. As Fischer indicates, anthropologists give far too much to their culture concept when they decontextualize it.

Nonetheless, culture—the diverse and constantly emergent ways in which human beings are oriented through their values to each other and to their worlds—is a key dimension of the forces of power. Power always assumes cultural dimensions, and various modern nationalisms both exploit and manifest this. Nationalism takes form in an already cultural and changing world. Nationalists cynically appropriate and reinvent cultural ideas to their purpose, but these ideas do not necessarily come from out of the blue—a fact that can help to explain their sometimes alarmingly passionate force and the direction that some of the appalling violence may take.

Fischer argues that cultural ideas, cognitive schemas, have remarkable resilience, and he demonstrates linguistic and other processes for this. In my view, some cultural orientations are resilient by virtue of their embeddedness in mythic and ritual practices. These prac-

tices continue (though changing) through time because of their always modern value. That is, they do not model or represent external realities (the simulacra behind the real) but are realities enclosed within themselves, giving the practices within them ontogenetic potency or yielding to them ontological power ultimately enabling participants to reengage with the contemporary realities around them. It is the very fact that such cultural practices are nonrepresentational (virtual rather than real [see Kapferer 1997]) yet reoriginating that is integral to their endurance. They are structures that have no necessary meaning and are always open to the meanings of the world in which they are practiced. Many healing rites, I think, are of this kind, and it is such aspects, as well as their focus on victimization and suffering, that draw nationalists to them and make them such a powerful force in nationalist dynamics. In their nationalist engagement, the orientation of practices (practices which usually thoroughly engage the person) is given a larger political, often representational meaning that it did not have before, with possibly disastrous world-changing consequences.

Fischer's analysis expands and gives much substance to perspectives such as these. I am a little more cautious about his cognitive-schema direction. In my opinion it is overreflexive and not sufficiently practice-centered, but it is nonetheless convincing in this analysis. His effort to break out of the circularity and liturgical repetitiveness of much contemporary anthropological rhetoric is to be applauded.

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Fischer is on solid ground in asserting the existence of basic Maya cultural features that distinguish Mayans from ladinos. It is reasonable to assume that this difference was present at the time of the Spanish conquest, but the basic issue is not its origin but its persistence—the perpetuation of cultural diversity within the presumably homogenizing conditions of a national society. I propose to distinguish between such cultural *diversity* and class *differentiation*, and my working assumption is that issues of diversity only become contentious when they are linked to such differentiation.

As I see it, the fundamental issue underlying the culture theory and politics that Fischer addresses is class differentiation in Guatemalan society. Such an assertion might appear off the mark, given that Fischer deals not with class but with ethnicity. But whereas ethnicity belongs to the realm of identity—be it essential or constructed—class is better defined as a position in a field in which value is unevenly produced, consumed, and exchanged. Expressions of identity (ethnicity, "race," gender, nationality, etc.) are always constructed; class is positional and relational within a field of value. In exchanges of value there are typically net winners and losers such that A may lose net value to B, B may in turn lose net value to C, and so on, in complex reticula through which value percolates up through subaltern communities and then out of them. Because value is ontologically real, that is, essential, class is an essential feature of personhood. Inevitably, unequal exchange relationships based on and constituting class differences have mapped onto them cultural differences—a diversity of identities such as, in this case, Maya and ladino ethnicities. Thus it is never a question of whether identity or class is the primary categorical dimension of a person or group but one of how the identities that are historically given or consciously constructed map onto class positions and the uneven exchange relationships that define them in a field of value. Indeed, the relationship between ethnicity and class is not either/or but both-and.

The abstract nature of value (and power) and the complexity of its net flows within a community and between communities are such that clear boundaries between blocks of winners and losers of value, that is, between classes, rarely become apparent. Although class differentiation is the most fundamental and essential issue, it does not lend itself well to a sense of collectivity, as compared with the various identities that tend to obey the logic of either/or distinctions. A distinctive Maya culture originally due to divergent cultural evolution prior to the Spanish conquest is now, I would argue, perpetuated by and a requisite for the general class differentiation between Mayans and ladinos—a large overlapping of Mayan and ladino class positions notwithstanding. As such it poses a dilemma, because it also has the potential of being the basis for organizing to combat the inequities of the class realities.

When all is said and done, the kinds of Maya-ladino identities that are at issue are differences in cultural forms, and like all cultural forms they are constructed. To argue that they are otherwise is to have recourse to biological, that is, "racial," differences as indeed some of the essentialists do. But clearly Fischer in his anti-antiessentialism is not making a racial argument. Instead I see him as successfully steering a middle course that synthesizes and rises above gross essentialism and a simple-minded constructivism that would deny any deep, enduring, and legitimizing features of Mayaness.

Clearly, there are different kinds of essentialism. One is the intentional "strategic essentialism" in which a tradition such as Pan-Mayanism is consciously elaborated for the practical purpose of creating Mayan political solidarity. A second is the Maya cultural logic that Fischer speaks of. It differs from the first in that it is an enduring complex from a deep historic past that predates the contemporary moment in which it is consciously mobilized for its group emblematic potential by virtue of its contrast with the ladino identities that tend to occupy higher class positions within the national field of value. Thus, to sum up, whereas Fischer opts for an anti-antiessentialist position, I would—be-

cause value is an essential quality—opt for a combination of class essentialism and anti-anticonstructivism. But we both seek the same goal of transcending the either/or structure of the cultural essentialist-constructivist debate.

# Reply

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In that my essay provoked such thoughtful comments I deem it successful even if the commentators are of more mixed opinion.

My argument was neither intended as a rejection of what I (arguably too broadly) labeled "constructivism" nor motivated by a romantic yearning to recapture the certitude of an earlier ("essentialist") ethnography. Rather, I have expressed certain misgivings about the epistemological positioning of "strong constructivism." Fabian points out that while essentialism is fundamentally ontological, constructivism is an epistemology, with essentialism being one of the things constructivists try to explain. Thus, my position should perhaps be better stated (à la Herzfeld 1997 and Kearney's comments) as a critique of the shortcomings of constructivist epistemology as an adequate explanation of essentialism. The point—by no means a novel one, as Fabian and Handler point out—is simply that commonality and continuity (as perceived, remembered, and acted upon by those we study) have been too often dismissed in antiessentialist position statements so sharply focused on change (situational, pragmatic, endlessly variable and interpretable) that they fail to explain continuity as other than imagined. This is an argument that Maya scholars make in critiques of academic imperialism (see Warren 1992, 1998). Their subaltern critique of subaltern studies has influenced my own view, and yet it was not my intention in writing this article to buttress a particular Maya political position but to speak to the expanding consensus that, in my more optimistic moments, I see emerging in the practice of anthropology within the Western academy.

Several commentators chastise me for essentializing—excluding (intentionally or blindly) portrayals of the rich diversity of practice in pursuit of manageable analytic categories. Castañeda focuses on the "mischaracterization of certain works" that allows me to pursue a "misguided idea" about constructivism as portrayed in opposition to essentialism, and Hale questions the implicit homogeneity in my descriptions of Tecpán. Similarly, Fabian and Handler have serious misgivings about the perceived closure built into the model of cultural logic presented. Any reification of a dichotomous opposition between essentialism and constructivism and any sense of premature closure (in the specific situation of Tecpán or the broad processes of identity formation) are unintended readings of my argument. Indeed, it is my position that the gap between constructivism and essentialism is not so great as is often portrayed. For instance, even in critiquing strong constructivism I agree with Fabian that the anthropologist's position "is something we must build in the course of our ethnographic work, document and defend in our writing, and, if circumstances demand this, translate into political action" and thus find myself to be a constructivist. Further, in focusing on the inherently processual nature of cultural logic, I hoped to avoid the pitfall that Handler points out here, as elsewhere, of "thinking of culture as a thing." Cultural logic is an inherently open-ended process that adapts to real-world material, political, social, and cultural contingencies; as an analytic concept its predictive capacity (a mark of true theoretical closure) is imprecise at best, and like most social science it is most appropriate to post hoc explanation.

Tellingly, several commentators focus on one issue that I intentionally played down, namely, my own political positioning in the events and processes described. Castañeda views this—what I tried to sweep under the rug—as the most valuable contribution of the essay. More pessimistically, Hale sees my model as running "the risk of reinforcing a subtle hierarchy of knowledge production whereby U.S.-based anthropologists provide the sophisticated theoretical counterpart to the political interventions of our indigenous allies," and Handler describes my attempt as "trying to legitimate . . . scholarly authority by linking it to Maya authenticity." As Hale notes, any theoretical position carries multiple potentialities, some of which the author may deem positive and others negative, even repugnant. I agree and appreciate Hale's sensitivity to political implications (a subject which always carries potentially deadly connotations in the Guatemalan context). At the same time, we should not allow a hypersensitivity to *potential* political implications to restrain intellectually honest debate and inquiry. David Stoll reports that he faced formidable opposition to the publication of his recent book on Rigoberta Menchú (1998); this opposition was largely political (based on potential damage to Maya rights and the peace process in Guatemala) and not a scholarly critique. My own position is that such arguments should be freely circulated and discussed and that their faults will come to light through the sort of critical inquiry exemplified here. As Michael Herzfeld writes, "distinctions between fact and judgement may not be universally clear and may themselves be culturally determined, but . . . inserting our own claims to factual precision into that perspective strengthens rather than weakens them because it broadens the empirical basis of assessment" (1998:69). I suspect that the reactions of Maya scholars to this article will be much the same as those above: some will find value in it while others will have reservations, seeing it as potentially detrimental to their precarious political position or an-

other not-so-subtle act of academic imperialism. Many will have neither the time to read it nor the interest in doing so (although as I write it is always in my mind that they may). Still, we cannot control what becomes of our formulations after we have publicly expressed them, which is not to say that we should stop trying—or that we should stop producing them. In the process of ethnographic writing diversity gets homogenized. It seems that the real issue is how far and in what political contexts such distillation is allowable.

For some commentators my model significantly overlaps with their own perspectives. I was reading Friedman (1994), Kapferer (1988), and Kearney (1996) around the time I wrote this article, and justifiably they see much similarity in my own formulation. Nonetheless, Friedman chooses to emphasize "experientiality" over my cognitive perspective, and Kearney overlays a model of class, which he defines "as a position in a field in which value is unevenly produced, consumed, and exchanged." All three portray identity as the product of constructivist forces deployed by intentional agents in the context of culturally and historically particular fields of values, and Friedman and Kearney highlight the political-economic valences of such fields. Material experientiality, however, can be fruitfully linked to the cognitive realm. I understand experience as a cognitive ordering of perception which must be reconciled (though not necessarily parsimoniously) with preconceptions. Culture—all thought—can be reduced (pace Geertz) to neurological functions, and while precise mapping will likely always remain elusive, neurology provides a useful metaphor for understanding how our cognitive processes operate and thus how culture is created (Strauss and Quinn 1997). Fabian notes that "a map is not the territory," and yet our best approximations of cognitive maps come as close to the ideational "territory" of culture as we are likely to get. And for this reason I must disagree with Handler's statement that my claim that the Maya model is an analogue of my own is irrelevant; ethnographic description and resultant analyses should, as Friedman makes clear, be as close as possible to the way people actually live their lives. A cognitive model should therefore approximate cognition.

I find valuable much of the writing that has been produced in the constructivist vein: I appreciate the liberating quality of antiessentialist critique, the refreshingly honest intellectualism not above a bit of self-mockery, and the new literary sensibilities of ethnography (clever references and word plays, textual sleuthing to uncover Manichean plots, Joycean juxtapositions that explicitly reject any move toward closure). The work of Lutz (1988), Ortner (1989), Abu-Lughod (1986, 1993) and others represents a theoretical shift toward seeing other cultural actors as human beings (intentional if not always "rationally" self-interested) and not just cultural or structural automatons. But a focus on diversity need not lead us to reject the culture concept as merely a tool of essentialism. Kapferer and, elsewhere, Brumann (1999) point out the widespread, although largely implicit and differently represented, similarities in the concepts of "culture" invoked by contemporary anthropologists from across the theoretical spectrum. Perhaps, then, we should acknowledge and examine these similarities, not to impose a hegemonic position but to complement our heightened awareness of the differences that separate our positions. In many ways, Gossen (1999) provides a model for balancing the competing ethnographic burdens of representing the distinctions of individuality while simultaneously examining the nature of interindividual, intergenerational, and even intercultural similarities.

As all of the commentators have noted, there is much fertile middle ground outlined here. I concur with Hale's predication "that the constructivism-essentialism polarity may soon have run its course," and I hope that what follows is a productive engagement of theoretical positions of the sort represented here.

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