

# Maya Ethnogenesis

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## RESUMEN

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Eran los mayas de Yucatán verdaderamente mayas? Con respeto a las identidades a las cuales pretendían y las que otros les daban, los mayas no eran mayas. Este artículo examina fuentes coloniales que demuestran que los habitantes indígenas de la península no se llamaban a si mismos “maya” ni utilizaban ningún otro término étnico para identificarse como parte de un grupo étnico común. Este artículo explora el género de identidad maya durante los siglos coloniales, utilizando principalmente fuentes en lengua maya yucateca. El artículo analiza tres circunstancias que afectaron ésta “etnogenesis maya”—los conceptos de raza impuestos por los españoles durante la colonia, la Guerra de Castas en el siglo XIX, y la etnopolítica del siglo XX, enfatizando el efecto gradual, sutil o indirecto de cada uno de éstos contextos.

**PALABRAS CLAVES:** Identidad, Cultura, Etnogénesis, Mayas, Yucatán. **KEYWORDS:** Identity, Culture, Ethnogenesis, Mayas, Yucatan.

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### Inventing Mayas

WERE THE MAYAS OF COLONIAL YUCATAN actually Mayas? In terms of both the identities they claimed and those assigned to them, they were not. Colonial-era evidence shows that the native inhabitants of the peninsula, whom modern scholars identify as “Maya,” did not consistently call themselves that or any other name that indicated they saw themselves as members of a common ethnic group. Nor did Spaniards or Africans in colonial Yucatan refer to the Mayas as “Mayas.”

Nevertheless, the term “Maya” was in use in Yucatan in colonial times and most likely in the post-classic period too (if it is rooted, as I argue below, in the toponym “Mayapan”). Today it is the conventional term used in all languages to refer to a broad swathe of peoples in the so-called “Maya area” of southern Mesoamerica. The term has acquired considerable baggage, much of it contested, though arguably insufficiently so. In Edward Fischer’s words, “Maya scholars and peasants alike con-

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tinue to assert the legitimacy of an essentialist cultural paradigm, arguing that there is a metaphysical quality to Maya-ness that transcends the minutia of opportunistic construction” (2001: 243). Fischer is willing neither to embrace nor dismiss views of “Maya identity as nothing more than the product of counterhegemonic resistance or the romantic musings of anthropologists” (2001: 243); his compromise is “to view Maya culture as an historically continuous construction that adapts to changing circumstances while remaining true to a perceived essence of Maya-ness” (2001: 246; also see 15–19). Quetzil Castañeda’s position is somewhat less compromising; for him, “categories of Maya, Maya culture, and Maya civilization are not at all empty of meaning or reality, but . . . are fundamentally contested terms that have no essential entity outside of the complex histories of sociopolitical struggles” (1996: 13).

The presupposition of this article is that the issues surrounding “Maya” as a “contested term” are relevant to the colonial period, and vice versa; the article’s purpose is to approach this debate from the perspective of the colonial period, and to contribute to it by demonstrating how colonial-period evidence disproves the commonly made assumption that in previous centuries Mayas shared a sense of common ethnic identity. In the introduction to *The Invention of Ethnicity*, Werner Sollors refers to Ernest Gellner’s argument that “nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness; it *invents* nations where they do not exist” (1989: xi); my position is that modern Maya ethnogenesis had to invent Maya ethnic identity because there was no Maya ethnic self-consciousness in pre-modern times to which Mayas could awake.

Because of its modern ubiquity, I begin with the term “Maya,” examining its meaning to Mayas of the Conquest and colonial periods in Yucatan, using Yucatec Maya-language sources to categorize its usage. I then briefly further explore the nature of Maya identity during these centuries, likewise using archival evidence primarily in Yucatec Maya, to search for possible alternative terms or bases of ethnic identity. Finding no clear ethnic component to self-ascribed colonial Maya identities, but at the same time uncovering hints of ethnic awareness in the written record, I resort to breaking down the broad category of “ethnic identity” into two sub-categories, overt ethnicity and implied ethnicity (both explained further below). Finally, I look very briefly at three circumstances that impacted “Maya ethnogenesis”—colonial Spanish ethnoracial concepts; the Caste War; and twentieth-century ethnopolitics—emphasizing the muted, gradual, or indirect nature of their impact.

### “Maya” in the Colonial Period

If the historical roots of Maya ethnic identity are an illusion, what of the colonial-era use of the term “Maya”? It does not appear at all in Spanish-language written

TABLE 1  
*Uses of the term “Maya” in colonial Maya-language sources*

PHRASE	REFERENCE TYPE	DATE	SOURCE: GENRE, TOWN (REGION) (INCIDENCE)
maya than	cultural: “the Maya language”	colonial	quasi-notarial & notarial sources (numerous)*
maya cuzamil	toponym (Cozumel)	colonial	Book of Chilam Balam, Chumayel (Xiu) (thrice)
mayapan	toponym (Mayapan)	colonial	quasi-notarial & notarial sources (numerous)
uchben maya xoc	cultural/material: “the ancient Maya count”	colonial	Book of Chilam Balam, Tizimin (east) (once)
maya pom	cultural/material: “Maya copal incense”	1669	<i>cabildo</i> petition, Calkiní (Calkiní) (once)
maya ciie	cultural/material: “Maya wine”	colonial	Book of Chilam Balam, Chumayel (Xiu) (once)
maya zuhuye	cultural/material: “Maya Virgin”	colonial	Book of Chilam Balam, Chumayel (Xiu) (once)
maya ah ytzae	to others: “those Itza Mayas”	colonial	Book of Chilam Balam, Chumayel (Xiu) (once)
maya ah kinob	to others: “Maya priests”	colonial	Book of Chilam Balam, Chumayel (Xiu) (once)
maya uinicob(i)	to others: “(the) Maya men/people”	colonial	Book of Chilam Balam, Chumayel (Xiu) (eight times); Titles of the Pech, Chicxulub and Yaxkukul (Pech) (twice)
maya uinicob	to others: to commoners by nobles	colonial (1769)	Titles of the Pech, Chicxulub and Yaxkukul (Pech) (once)
maya uinicob	to others: of another Yucatec region	colonial (1769)	Titles of the Pech, Chicxulub and Yaxkukul (Pech) (once)
maya uinicob	to others: to Yucatec Mayas by Chontal Mayas	1567/1612	Title of Alcalan-Tixchel (Chontal region) (once)
coon maya uinice	self-reference: “we Maya men/people”	1662	individual petition, Yaxakumche (Xiu) (once)
coon maya uinice	self-reference	1669	<i>cabildo</i> petition, Baca (Pech) (once)**
con maya uinice	self-reference	colonial	Book of Chilam Balam, Chumayel (Xiu) (once)
coon ah maya uinice	self-reference (as nobles of the Canul <i>chibal</i> )	colonial (1595/1821)	Title of Calkiní (Calkiní) (once)

Sources: Edmonson (1982: 169); AGI (*Escribanía* 317b, 9: folio 9); Roys (1933: 28); TLH (*The Title of Calkiní*: folio 36); Roys (1933: 57); Roys (1933: 47, 58, 59); Roys (1933: 61); Roys (1933: 58); Roys (1933: 53, 55, 56, 31, 27, 24, 56); TLH and TULAL (*Title of Chicxulub*: folios 6, 8, 15) and (*Title of Yaxkukul*: folios 3v, 4r, 8v); AGI (*México* 138, the *Title of Alcalan-Tixchel*: folio 76r); TLH (*Xiu Chronicle*: #35); AGI (*Escribanía* 317a, 2: folio 147); Roys (1933: 20). For many of these examples, also see Restall (1997: 13–15; 1998: 35, 44, 74, 101, 116, 121, 124, 127, 134, 177, 233).

\*A notarial example is in AGN (*Bienes Nacionales* 5, 35: folio 5); a quasi-notarial one is in Roys (1933: 40).

\*\*This is an example; the phrase appears several other times in near-identical petitions from other north-west *cahob* in 1668–69 (AGI, *Escribanía* 317a, 2: various folios).

sources, as Spaniards preferred the generic *indio*. The term does appear in Maya-language sources, but with little consistency or frequency. Table 1 lists examples of this usage, with types of usage categorized and listed according to frequency of attestation.

The primary category is one I have labeled “cultural,” containing references to the Yucatec language, as the term was mostly used as an adjective to describe it (*maya tʰan*, “Maya speech or language”); Landa’s only reference to the term’s etymology is to “the language of the land being known as Maya” (*la lengua de la tierra llaman maya*; Landa 1959: 13; Restall and Chuchiak, n.d.). The persistence of this connotation as primary to the term among the Maya themselves is illustrated succinctly in the dictionary of present-day Yucatec by Victoria Bricker and her native collaborators; the sole entry under “Maya” is “*maya?-t’àn*, Maya language” (*maya tʰan* in colonial orthography; Bricker et al 1998: 181).<sup>1</sup>

The context of Landa’s comment is the second category of usage, labeled “toponym” in Table 1; the Franciscan asserts that the place-name “Mayapan” was derived from the term “Maya.” However, no other toponym in Yucatan contains the element “Maya”; when, in a single quasi-notarial source, the term is attached to the name for Cozumel island, the context is a sacred association to Mayapan (Edmonson 1986: 47, 58, 59). Indeed, I suspect that the reverse of Landa’s suggestion is true, that “Maya” derived from “Mayapan.” This hypothesis is consistent with: first, the term’s association with, and primary usage in, the northwest, where Mayapan is located; second, the entry in the 16th Century dictionary from Motul, also in the northwest, that glosses *maya* as *nombre proprio desta tierra* (Ciudad Real n.d., 1: folio 287v; Arzápalo Marín 1995, 1: 489); third, the term’s vague link to the Itzas, who, like Mayapan, were seen as part of the semi-sacred, semi-mythic historical past of the peninsula; and fourth, the following passage from the Chilam Balam of Chumayel (translation mine, but see Roys 1933: 50, 140; Edmonson 1986: 59):

*oxlahun ahau u katunil u  
he:cob cah mayapan: maya  
uinic u kabaob: uaxac ahau  
paxci u cabobi: ca uecchahi  
ti peten tulacal: uac katuni  
paxciob ca haui u maya  
kabaob: bulub ahau u kaba  
u katunil hauci u maya  
kabaob maya uinicob:  
christiano u kabaob*

13 *Ahau* was the *katun* when they founded the *cah* of Mayapan; they were [thus] called Maya men. In 8 *Ahau* their lands were destroyed and they were scattered throughout the peninsula. Six *katun* after they were destroyed they ceased to be called Maya; 11 *Ahau* was the name of the *katun* when the Maya men ceased to be called Maya [and] were called Christians.

These annals entries offer both an explanation of the diffusion of the term “Maya”—a product of the Diaspora created by the fall and abandonment of Mayapan—and a clear association of the term with the pre-Conquest pagan past. This hypothesis on the origins of the term was also circulating in 16th Century Yucatan; a dozen years after Landa claimed that the derivation was the reverse, an old conquistador of the province, the *encomendero* for the *cah* (Maya community) of Dzan, wrote in the *Relaciones Geográficas* that “this province speaks but one language, called Maya, its name derived from Mayapan” (RHGY, 1: 156).<sup>2</sup>

Of course, accepting that “Maya” comes from “Mayapan” begs the question as to the toponym’s etymology. If “Mayapan” did indeed precede “Maya,” then Landa’s explanation of the toponym *el pendón de la Maya*, (the banner of the Maya) would only have meaning after the site became a major city (Landa 1959: 13; Restall and Chuchiak n.d.). However, there are many possible alternative roots. May and Pan are both Maya patronyms, for example; *pan* also means “dig, sink (a well), plant (a tree)” and *ah pan* thus “he who digs,” with *May Ah Pan*, “(the land of) May, the well digger.” As *yapan* means “broken up,” the origin could be a reference to the stony ground, with *ma yapan*, “not broken up, unbroken (terrain).”

The tertiary category of usages of “Maya,” labeled “cultural/material” in Table 1, consists of references to material objects native to the peninsula (such as *maya pom*, “Maya copal incense”) or to local cultural practices (such as *uchben maya xoc*, “the ancient Maya count”). The significance of these types of references is that not only are they rare, but they all have sacred connotations and are consistent with the toponymic use of the term as rooted in semi-sacred myth and history. Although the *Motul* dictionary lists a material item that seems to lack such associations—*maya ulum*... “gallina...de yucatan”; and “gallina de la tierra”: *ulum: mayaulum*—in the references Mayas make to turkeys and chickens in their testaments I have never once seen *lum* qualified by *maya*; on the contrary, Mayas tend to qualify the imported fowl, the chicken, as *caxtillan u lum*, “Castilian turkey,” abbreviated by the seventeenth century to *cax* (Ciudad Real n.d., 1: folio 287v; 2: folio 119v; Arzápalo Marín 1995, 1: 489; Restall 1997a: 125–26, 181, 365, 370).<sup>3</sup> The purpose of a dictionary like the *Motul* was for Franciscans to make themselves comprehensible to Mayas, and Mayas would certainly have understood *maya u lum*. But Mayas themselves would have used *lum* for “turkey” and the qualified or invented term for “chicken;” this would have been more logical from their perspective and consistent with the more esoteric associations of *maya*.

Equally rare, and comprising the fourth category in Table 1, are instances where “Maya” refers to people. As references are so few, patterns can only be tentatively identified. But the examples suggest that the term was mostly applied by Mayas to Maya “others” or outsiders, specifically Yucatec natives of another region or class. One usage in this context was by nobles in reference to commoners, with the term

seemingly somewhat derogatory. Thus when applied to Mayas of another region, the term sometimes implied that such people were of lesser status, although at other times the reference seems neutral. Native perspectives on the Spanish Conquest are the context for one such set of derogatory references, with “Maya” being designated to the natives of communities who were slower to accommodate the invaders.

The Pech nobles, for example, authors of one Conquest account, assert that they and their Spanish allies suffered much “because of the Maya people (*maya uinicob*) who were not willing to deliver themselves to God (*Dios*)” (that is, surrender themselves to the new colonial regime); these *maya uinicob* are ambiguously either local commoners or natives to the east of the Pech region, or perhaps both (*Title of Chicxulub*, folio 15, from my translation in Restall 1998a: 124). A similar perspective is found in the *Relaciones Geográficas* from Valladolid, a Spanish account based partly on oral native sources, which claims that the natives of Chikinchel (in the peninsula’s northeast) called the Cupul and Cochuah (of the east and southeast) “*Ah Mayas*, insulting them as crude and base people of vile understanding and inclination (*soez y baja, de viles entendimientos e inclinaciones*)” (RHGY, 2: 37).

This pattern incorporates the use of the term as a self-reference (the fifth and final category in Table 1), in that the context in some of those cases is that of petitions, whose language was by tradition self-deprecating. This tradition was Mesoamerican in scope, being most clearly visible in petitions in Nahuatl and Yucatec Maya. One of its central tropes was the presentation by nobles of themselves as children and commoners. In some Yucatec examples, this self-depiction is paralleled by a description of themselves as *maya uinicob* (Maya people or men). One group of such attestations is found in a series of petitions authored by *cahob* across the whole colony in 1668–69, in response to *residencia* activities by Spanish officials—an investigation, in other words, into a governor’s term of office. In this case, the administration under review was that of don Rodrigo Flores de Aldana, whose use of forced purchase operations had made him especially unpopular among Mayas and some colonist groups too. However, to view these attestations as simple indicators of ethnic self-identity would be to remove them misleadingly from their context. That context was, first, the self-deprecating component of Maya petitionary discourse, and second, the similarity of these petitions across the series, suggesting the use of a template that may have been partly Spanish-authored (with “*maya uinicob*” thus a translation of a phrase such as “indios”) but was certainly aimed at a Spanish audience. Thus by calling themselves “Mayas,” the petitioners were ritually humiliating themselves within two parallel social structures: a wholly native one in which “Maya” had negative class and region connotations, and the other a colonial ethnoracial one in which “Maya” was understood to have meaning to *Spaniards* as a marker of ethnic subordination.<sup>4</sup>

The region-class-“Maya” nexus has an additional dimension to it, one that fur-

ther undermines the term as a monolithic ethnic designator. This dimension is the mythical tradition of foreign origin maintained by a number of Maya noble families—all families in the group of prominent ruling *chibalob* that I have elsewhere dubbed the “dynastic dozen” (being the Caamal, Canul, Canche, Chan, Che, Chel, Cochuah, Cocom, Cupul, Iuit, Pech, and Xiu) (Restall 2001). Scholars have tended to take this tradition at face value, as simple historical evidence of the non-Yucatec (usually central Mexican) origins of the peninsula’s native elite. However, there is no clear evidence beyond the tradition itself of any such invasion or migration. Furthermore, the metahistorical construction of the tradition by Maya dynasties conforms to the patterns of traditions of mythical elite foreign origins elsewhere in the world (as studied, for example, by Mary Helms; see Helms 1993; 1994; 1998; also see Henige 1982: 90–96). I have argued, therefore, that this tradition was *not* rooted in an historic migration of ruling families into Yucatan, but rather in pre-colonial efforts to bolster legitimacy of status and rule through sacred, mythic associations with often-fictional distant places of origin (for the full development of this argument, see Restall 2001). These efforts were given renewed necessity and vitality by the Spanish Conquest, resulting in the frequent references to such mythic origins in sixteenth-century sources (for example, in the *Title of Acalan-Tixchel*, folio 69v, *The Title of Calkiní*, p. 36, the *Book of Chilam Balam of Maní*, p. 134, and RHGY, 1: 319; see Restall 1998a: 58, 101, 140, 149). By claiming to be both native and foreign, Maya dynasties effectively problematized and undermined any incipient sense of Maya ethnic identity that may have otherwise developed in late post-classic and colonial times. In permitting and often fostering the survival of a Maya elite, Spaniards thereby colluded in the perpetuation of an identity differentiation that ran against their impulse to see natives as an undifferentiated mass—and served to soften the impact of that impulse on Maya ethnogenesis.

All the attested self-references of Mayas as “Maya” come from the regions of the west, seemingly confirming Munro Edmonson’s suggestion (based on his reading of the Chilam Balam manuscript from Chumayel) that the Mayas were deemed to be the inhabitants of the peninsula’s west and the Itzas those of the east. However, the vast majority of extant colonial Maya sources come from the peninsula’s west, skewing the evidence. Furthermore, Edmonson’s translation of *maya ah ytzae* as “O Maya / And Itza” (1986: 100) is more likely “those Itza Mayas” (or “Oh Maya Itza,” as Ralph Roys has it; 1993: 167). Elsewhere in the Chumayel manuscript the Yucatec language is called *u than maya ah ytzaob*, “the language of the Itza Mayas,” again suggesting that Maya and Itza were not always mutually exclusive categories (Roys 1933: 40; Edmonson 1986: 222).

The regional association, therefore, of Mayas with the west and Itzas with the east is suggested but not very well supported by this evidence. In some ways, the category of “Itza” is comparable to that of “Maya”; both are ambiguous, used variously

and usually to describe some other group of natives within the peninsula, with uncertain historical roots but a fairly clear connection to an important ancient city (Chichén Itzá and Mayapan, respectively). But there is also a crucial difference between the two terms: Itza was, and still is, a Yucatec Maya patronym; “Maya” is not and there is no sign that it ever was. Although this could be taken to suggest that “Itza” connotes family, and “Maya” ethnicity, in fact the difference between the two is more complex. Whereas “Maya” has various connotations, most of them not referring to people, “Itza” is a category that primarily refers to people, both in the family sense (in the form of a patronym) and in an ethnic sense (in the form of the Itza Mayas of the Peten region of northern Guatemala, whose name may have derived from the patronym of the kingdom’s founders).<sup>5</sup>

Before summarizing the evidence offered by Maya-language sources, it is worth turning briefly to the evidence of colonial-era dictionaries. This complex, bilingual, bicultural genre cannot of course be used as a simple window onto colonial Yucatec; dictionaries merely suggest how Maya was spoken in a particular time and region in the peninsula, as perceived and recorded by their Franciscan authors. Nevertheless, a search for *maya* entries in colonial dictionaries is revealing, especially in the context of the evidence from Maya notarial sources discussed above.

As Table 2 shows, there is a clear *maya* entry in one of the two principal Maya-Spanish dictionaries of the colonial period (the 16th Century *Motul*), but it is not listed as a Maya term in the late-colonial grammar by Beltrán. The term supposedly appears once in the Maya-Spanish section of the *San Francisco* dictionary—to qualify *bat*, meaning “axe”—but the original manuscript of this dictionary was a 19th Century copy that is now lost and so its 17th Century origins remain speculative (Barrera Vásquez 1980: 25a-27a, 513). Only in the Spanish-Maya sections of colonial dictionaries does the term appear with any regularity, suggesting that while the term certainly existed in colonial Maya, it was not one commonly used by Mayas. The types of applications of the term in Spanish-Maya vocabularies compares closely to the examples that I grouped under “cultural” and “material” (as opposed to “human”) in Table 1, implying that to Spaniards too the term was an adjective conveying autochthony in a general sense, rather than one specific to human beings. Indeed, surprisingly “Maya” does not appear in reference to people in the Spanish-Maya volume of the sixteenth-century *Motul* manuscript, even though it does in the Maya-Spanish volume. Such an entry first appears in Spanish-Maya lists half way through the colonial period, in the *Vienna* vocabulary of the late 17th Century, and perhaps also in the *San Francisco* dictionary, which may date from the 17th Century too. But *maya* does not appear in reference to people either in Beltrán’s grammar of 1746 (in which the language is “el Idioma Maya,” “la Maya,” and “el Idioma Yucateco,” but its native speakers are “Indios” and “Naturales”) or the *Ticul* compilation of 1836, suggesting it remained uncommon as an ethnic designator through

TABLE 2  
*Colonial dictionary attestations of the term maya*

CEN- TURY	DICTIONARY	IN REF. TO THE LANGUAGE	IN REF. TO CULTURAL/ MATERIAL OBJECTS	IN REF. TO PEOPLE
16th	Motul (Maya-Spanish)	✓	✓	✓
17th?	San Francisco (Maya-Spanish)		✓	
18th	Beltrán (Maya-Spanish)			
16th	Motul (Spanish-Maya)	✓	✓	
17th?	San Francisco (Spanish-Maya)	✓	✓	✓
17th	Vienna (Spanish-Maya)		✓	✓
18th	Beltrán (Spanish-Maya)	✓		
19th	Ticul (Spanish-Maya)	✓		

Sources: Ciudad Real (n.d.); Beltrán (1746); Mengin (1972: folio 131v) (the edition is a facsimile reproduction that uses the folio numberings of the original manuscript); Solís Alcalá (1949).

Notes: The *maya* entry in Ciudad Real (n.d.) is on f. 287r of vol. 1, which corresponds to Arzápalo Marín (1995, 1: 489). The relevant entries in the Spanish-Maya volume of the *Motul*, the original manuscript of which remains unpublished, are “gallina de la tierra: ulum: mayaulum” (vol. 2, f. 119v) and “lengua de esta tierra o prouincia de yucatan: mayathan” (vol. 2, f. 141r); the phrase “esta lengua: de maya” appears on f. 134r. Folio 233 of vol. 2 of the *Motul* (the unpublished Spanish-Maya volume) is missing from the original manuscript; two of the uses of *maya* found in the Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel (see Table 1 above) would have been on this folio under “vino maya” and “virgen maya” if they were included by Ciudad Real (the Maya terms used in the Chumayel are *not* in the *Motul*’s Maya-Spanish volume).

The frontispiece to Beltrán (1746) states that the work was written in Mérida in 1742; I consulted the copy in the JCBL (B746/B453a), which contains marginalia hand-written by Beltrán himself. Beltrán’s book is not a dictionary, but a grammar containing numerous brief vocabulary lists; thus to be sure I did not miss anything, I also checked the tabulation of Beltrán’s lists in Pío Pérez (1898); *maya* is conspicuously absent on p. 51. It appears in the Spanish-Maya portion of the *coordinación* (which is Pío Pérez’s edition of the *Ticul*) in reference to language on p. 220, but I could find no other attestations. The entry in my table under “Beltrán (Spanish-Maya)” is based on his book’s title and text, in which the native speakers are “Indios,” never “Mayas.”

Solís Alcalá (1949) drew mostly upon the *Motul* and Pío Pérez’s vocabularies, and Barrera Vásquez (1980: 513), which was my sole source on the *San Francisco* (for the others, I also consulted the originals). According to the *Cordemex*, the only entry in the Maya-Spanish *San Francisco* that includes the term *maya* is “*maya’ bat*: hacha de las de esta tierra con su cabo a lo antiguo.”

A note on dates: The *Motul* dates from c. 1577, the *San Francisco* possibly from the seventeenth century and the *Vienna* the late seventeenth century, the *Beltrán* was first published in 1746 (I have used Pío Pérez’s edition of 1898), and the *Ticul* compiled in 1836.

the end of the colonial period (Ciudad Real n.d.; Arzápalo Marín 1995; Beltrán 1746; Pío Pérez 1898; Mengin 1972: folio 131v; Barrera Vásquez 1980: 513).<sup>6</sup>

What can be concluded, therefore, from the evidence discussed so far and presented in Tables 1 and 2? First, “Maya” is not a common term in colonial Maya

sources. Second, it was primarily used to refer to the Yucatec language or to native material items, the latter primarily ones with sacred and/or historical associations. Third, when it was applied to people, it was never done so in a way that explicitly indicated a peninsula-wide or macroregional ethnic identity, suggesting instead smaller groups defined by region or class, with the term very possibly deriving from the toponym “Mayapan.” Dictionary entries of the term as a macroregional ethnic one are irregular, with no colonial dictionary including it in both a Maya-Spanish and Spanish-Maya vocabulary; its more common dictionary meanings are in reference to the Yucatec language and to local material items. Fourth, such implications of “Maya” group identity are inconsistent and contradictory. Fifth, there are signs that the term may have been viewed by Mayas as derogatory and/or as an archaic historical or literary term.

### A Maya By Any Other Name?

If Mayas therefore did not see themselves as “Mayas,” what were the foundations of native self-identity? In addition to expected micro-identities such as gender, age, class, and occupation, there were two fundamental units of social organization which served as the basis of group and individual identity for colonial Mayas—the municipal community (which the Mayas called the *cah*), and the patronym-group (which they called the *chibal*). Mayas organized their lives and activities around these two units and consistently identified themselves and other Mayas according to *cah* and *chibal* affiliations.

The *cah* was a geographical entity, consisting of its residential core (what we would call a village or town) and its agricultural territory (the combination of the cultivated and forested lands held by *cah* members). But it was also a political and social entity, being the focus of Maya political activity (regional politics was a Spanish monopoly during colonial times), and the locus of social networks. At the primary level of the extended family, identity and social activity was generated at the meeting point of *cah* and *chibal*—built, in other words, around the members of a particular *chibal* in a particular *cah*. As *chibalob* were exogamous (in accordance with a deep-rooted Maya taboo that was broken only occasionally by dynastic-dozen couples), their members tended to form multi-*chibal* alliances that were inevitably class-based and related to political factionalism in the *cah*. As almost every aspect of a Maya individual’s life was determined by *cah* and *chibal* affiliations, it is not surprising that these units formed the native identity nexus, and provided the references for identification; thus someone might be *Ah Pech* or *Ah Pechob*, “of the Pech [*chibal*],” and *Ah Motul*, “of Motul [*cah*]” (Restall 1997a: 15–50; 1998b: 355–81).

One might argue that *cah* and *chibal* formed the basis of a kind of ethnic identity, or a multiplicity of micro-ethnic identities, a notion reminiscent of an older historiographical tradition that saw the pre-Conquest Mayas as divided into various “tribes.”<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, if all Mayas shared the same *type* of identity, as well as sharing the experience of colonial subjection, then arguably they shared a kind of aggregate ethnic identity.<sup>8</sup> This argument is not altogether without merit, but it is hard to reconcile with the three fundamental aspects of Maya identities: the persistence of class differences within each *cah*, as discussed above; the open nature of the *cah* (in that it was exogamous, permitted settlers from other *cahob*, and was part of the complex pattern of Maya mobility, the *cah* was not a closed community); and the diasporic nature of the *chibal* (that is, members of each *chibal* were found in a variety of *cahob*, almost never in just one, and often not even in a single region). Thus to categorize *cah* and *chibal* as types of ethnic identity would seem to stretch the term too far.

Nevertheless, as tempting as it may be, the issue cannot simply be left tied up in the tidy parcels of *cah* and *chibal*. Colonial circumstances made Maya identity increasingly more complex than that. After all, however rarely or irregularly the Mayas used the term “Maya,” it was never used to describe a person or object from outside the peninsula (see Table 3). Furthermore, *cahnalob*, or *cah* members, were

TABLE 3  
*Maya terms of self-description containing ethnic implications*

TERM, WITH VARIANTS	MEANING	CONTEXT OF USAGE
ah <i>cahnal</i> , <i>cahnal</i> , (ah) <i>cahal</i> / <i>cahalnal</i> , h <i>cahala</i> [late]	<i>cah</i> member, resident	all genres, non rhetorical, often juxtaposed to <i>vecino</i> (“Spaniard”)
ah <i>otochnal</i>	householder, native	same as ah <i>cahnal</i>
<i>macehual</i> , <i>masehual</i>	commoner	rhetorical usage implying “Maya”
<i>mehen</i>	(man’s) children	same as <i>macehual</i>
<i>almehen</i>	noble	only to describe Maya nobility
<i>uinic</i>	man, person	sometimes means (Maya) person
<i>kuluinic</i> , u <i>nucil uinic</i> , <i>noh uinic</i>	a principal, or elder	Maya person only
<i>maya uinic</i>	Maya man/person	rare; quasi-notarial sources only
<i>maya than</i>	Yucatec Maya	the language
ah [cah name]	person of [cah]	Maya person only
ah [patronym]	person of [chibal]	Maya person only

Sources: Adapted from Restall (1997: 17), based on colonial Maya-language notarial and quasi-notarial sources.

never non-Mayas, nor could *chibalob*, or members of a particular *chibal* be non-Mayas either. Another Maya term, *macehual*, which primarily meant “commoner,” came to take on ethnic implications in the colonial period because Spaniards and Africans could not be *macehualob*. As Table 4 shows, by the mid-eighteenth century *macehual* appears in a Maya-Spanish dictionary glossed as *indio*, having been omitted entirely from earlier dictionaries. Corresponding to terms that were applied only to Mayas were terms applied only to non-Mayas, such as *dzul* (written *zul* in colonial orthography), “foreigner,” and the Spanish word *vecino*, “resident,” which was mostly used by Spaniards, and occasionally by Mayas too, to refer to non-Mayas (Restall 1997a: 15–16; 1997b: 239–67; Karttunen and Lockhart 1987; Lockhart 1992: 86–89, 365–68).

However, it would be a mistake to assume that “macehual” was effectively a colonial cognate for “Maya” as used today (as Hervik seems to suggest; 1999: 39, 42). The absence of “macehual” from colonial Spanish-Maya vocabularies and the consistent defining of “dzul” in colonial dictionaries as “foreigner,” rather than “Spaniard,” suggests that “macehual” and “dzul” did not become terms of ethnic identity comparable to the meaning we assign to “Maya” and “Spaniard.” In Table 3 I have denoted the “context of usage” of “macehual” in Maya-language sources as being a rhetorical one “implying ‘Maya,’” because Maya nobles typically styled themselves commoners in petitions to Spaniards, as a political ploy and in accordance with Mesoamerican techniques of deferential discourse, in a way that was similar to their usage of “Maya” as an identity marker. Spaniards read such terms as ethnoracial because they defined the colonial social structure ethnoracially; Maya elites continued to see “macehual” as a class term, because the social structure from their perspective was primarily a local one of Maya nobles and commoners, and only secondarily a colonial one featuring non-Mayas too. The fact that Spanish officials read “maya” and “macehual” as “indio” was probably not lost on the Maya elite; indeed, this contributed to the efficacy of their rhetoric and its adaptation to the colonial setting. But that does not mean that native elites thereby adopted Spanish perspectives and internalized the Spanish perception of them as Indians.

Nevertheless, the appearance of “macehual” in colonial sources cannot simply be dismissed any more than “maya” can. Mayas did not see themselves as “Maya” or any other term or label that contained all natives in the peninsula, but the evidence of Tables 3 and 4 suggests that Mayas did develop during colonial times an awareness of difference that more or less corresponded to Spanish ethnoracial distinctions. More specifically, this awareness can be better understood if we draw a distinction between two forms of ethnic awareness: *overt* ethnicity, whereby members of an ethnic group clearly identify themselves as such; and *implied* ethnicity, whereby terms of self-identification imply membership in a loosely-defined ethnic group within the context of broader social and ethnoracial structures. Colonial evi-

TABLE 4  
*Colonial dictionary attestations of the terms macehual and dzul*

CENTURY	DICTIONARY	MACEHUAL	DZUL
16th	Motul (Maya-Spanish)	—	extranjero
17th?	San Francisco (Maya-Spanish)	—	—
18th	Beltrán (Maya-Spanish)	indio	[forastero]
16th	Motul (Spanish-Maya)	—	advenedizo
17th?	San Francisco (Spanish-Maya)	—	—
17th	Vienna (Spanish-Maya)	—	—
18th	Beltrán (Spanish-Maya)	—	forastero
19th	Ticul (Spanish-Maya)	—	—

Sources: Ciudad Real (n.d., 1: folio 133r), which corresponds to Arzápalo Marín (1995, 1: 222); Beltrán (1746); Pío Pérez (1898: 51, 101); Barrera Vásquez (1980: 503); Mengin (1972).

Notes: I could not find *macehual* in the Spanish-Maya volume of the *Motul* manuscript in any entries referring to people, but it does appear in the compound form “vulgar lengua: *maçeualthan*” (vol. 2, f. 235v). The *Cordemex* (Barrera Vásquez 1980: 503) lists “*masewal ki*: vino de la tierra” as a Beltrán attestation, but I could not find it in Beltrán or the Pío Pérez edition cited in the *Cordemex*. The *Cordemex* also cites the Spanish-Maya portion of the *San Francisco* in support of the *macehual* entry, but gives no specific attestation, leaving it unclear as to what form, if any, such an entry takes. I found “forastero. *zul*” in a Spanish-Maya list in Beltrán (p. 182) but could not find in Beltrán the reverse entry included by Pío Pérez (hence its inclusion in my table in brackets). I have modernized the spellings of *extranjero*, *forastero*, and *advenedizo*, which all mean “foreigner” (with the last having a connotation of “interloper”).

dence indicates that the colonial experience gave rise to and fostered a sense of *implied* ethnicity among the Mayas who lived within the Spanish province, but that *overt* ethnic awareness among Mayas did not exist in either the late post-classic or colonial periods.

One dimension of this terminological bifurcation is the role played by ethnic boundaries: Maya terms of implied ethnicity are mostly inward looking and concerned with social life in the cah; overt ethnic markers tend to be outward-looking and reflect a keen awareness of ethnic borders.<sup>9</sup> Jon Schackt proposes that “ethnogenesis should mean the drawing of new boundaries or, perhaps, some notable redrawing of old ones” (2001: 4). The boundaries that defined community and identity among Yucatec Mayas were not notably redrawn during the colonial period, nor were new boundaries created; such boundaries continued to demarcate one cah, or group of cahob, from another, without expanding outward to include the natives of all cahob.

By adding to the above analysis of Maya-language sources a reading of Spanish-language notarial sources from the colonial archives, it is possible to be more spe-

cific still in locating the colonial conditions under which implied, but not overt, ethnic awareness developed. Such sources stem mostly from conflict of some kind, being criminal cases, Inquisition files, land disputes, and investigations into alleged political and other abuses within or against the cahob (to be found in various sections of the AGI, AGN, and AGEY). A survey of such sources reveals three pertinent types of condition. The first is the colonial legal system itself. Its often-skillful manipulation by cah leaders suggests that one important reason for this bifurcated development was the Maya realization that colonial identities and their various facets could be used as weapons in law courts or as tools to work away at the structures of colonial administration. Under these circumstances, ethnic identity remained implied most of the time, becoming or seeming overt in rare moments of legal strategy.

The second colonial condition was the growing difference between urban and rural Maya communities. In rural cahob, identity remained rooted in community and family affiliations, as discussed above. Colonialism reinforced this localization of identity, through its suppression of regional native politics; or, to borrow terms used recently by Natividad Gutiérrez in a more general context, “nondominant ethnic cultures . . . beyond the level of the village, lack the means to engender cohesion and to construct and reproduce homogenized meanings” (1999: 50). But in the city of Merida and the colonial towns—the *villas* of Bacalar, Campeche, and Valladolid, and the *pueblos* that became semi-urbanized towards the end of the colonial period, such as Izamal—Maya identity developed urban variations on the implied/overt model. The multiracial setting and the concomitant process of miscegenation made Maya ethnic identity increasingly overt in late colonial decades; in the compact world of differences that was the colonial Yucatec city or town, some Mayas became something close to “Maya.” At the same time there developed a form of implied native identity among *mestizos* or *castas* of mixed-Maya descent—the colonial genesis of the Maya-mestizo identity to be found in present-day Yucatan and frequently the subject of scholarly discussion (Hostettler and Restall 2001; this issue of *JLAA*).

Urban developments, therefore, incorporate the third condition under which implied ethnic awareness developed rather than overt ethnic self-identity. This was, simply put, the effect of time. My hypothesis regarding the chronological development of the use of the term “Maya,” and its implications for Maya ethnogenesis or ethnic identity, is the following.

In the late postclassic period, the term applied to all or some of the inhabitants of Mayapan; after that city’s collapse in the 1440s the term applied to the Diaspora of families who migrated to various locations in the peninsula, but its application seems to have been vague and probably increasingly obscure as such families did not maintain identities that were clearly distinct from other local families. At the time of the Spanish invasion, its primary use was probably in reference to the Yucatec lan-

guage, in the form *mayathan*. By the late 16th Century the term was being applied both to the Yucatec language and to local material items, but not to people, and even then it seems to have been more commonly used by Spaniards than Mayas. At the same time, there remained no other term in Yucatec Maya equivalent to our understanding of “Maya” as an ethnic designator; Maya identity remained more localized than that, lacking a clear ethnic component.

As the colonial period wore on, a sense of implied ethnic identity evolved in response to colonial conditions and the influence of Spanish efforts to build a colonial society based on ethnoracial principles. In the late 17th Century the written record reveals evidence of “Maya” being used in reference to people, but attestations are rare and dictionary entries are only in the Spanish-Maya listings. More common in the late-colonial period is the term *macehual*, but its transition from an exclusively class term to an exclusively ethnoracial one was gradual and not complete by the end of colonial rule. By the early 19th Century, with the possible exception of urban variants mentioned above, there is little sign of this implied ethnic identity having become overt.

### **Towards a Conclusion: Ethnogenesis as a Tug-o’-War**

If the colonial Maya evidence supports the notion of a highly muted sense of ethnic identity among Yucatec Mayas by the early 19th Century, why have they been assigned such an identity with such regularity over the past five centuries? I have already alluded to one of these—colonial Spanish influence—but I would like to restate it more fully and in the context of a chronology of three historical developments that have pulled Mayas towards a “Maya” identity even as they themselves have continued to resist that tug.

Spanish influence is of course rooted in the mid-sixteenth century, when repeated Spanish invasions finally resulted in the permanent establishment of a small colony in the peninsula. Directed by a presumptuous geography and a cavalier ethnocentrism, Spaniards imposed upon hundreds of native groups in the New World a blanket racial identity, that of *indio*, which indigenous peoples neither shared nor ever came to embrace.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, Spaniards imagined that the “Indians” of particular regions, such as Yucatan, had a regional sense of identity that gave them particular characteristics in common.

Such characteristics were based less on proto-ethnographic observation—investigations such as Diego de Landa’s into native culture were the exception rather than the rule<sup>11</sup>—and more on explaining phenomena related to the Spanish experience. For example, the protracted nature of the Conquest—twenty years to establish a permanent hold on a mere corner of the peninsula (Clendinnen 1987; Restall

1998a)—was put down to Maya bellicosity and duplicity, a paradigm that remained an undercurrent to Spanish discourse on Mayas throughout colonial rule and one that would resurface with vehemence during the Caste War. Clendinnen quotes the conquistador Francisco de Montejo who wrote to the king in 1534 that Yucatan’s “inhabitants are the most abandoned and treacherous in all the lands discovered to this time, being a people who never yet killed a Christian except by foul means. . . . In them I have failed to find truth touching anything” (1987: 29). Montejo’s words echoed three centuries later, in 1848, when, according to Chuchiak, the Spanish Yucatecan Justo Sierra O’Reilly denounced the Mayas as “brutal, scheming, warlike savages, whose goal is nothing less than the destruction of civilization” (1997: 25).<sup>12</sup>

Spaniards thus assigned the Yucatec Mayas what was in effect an ethnic identity, bounded by regionalism—in this case a colonial province that more or less comprised the peninsula of Yucatan—and by perceived characteristics such as those cited above or those recorded by Landa.<sup>13</sup> Within the larger schema of the colonial Spanish *sistema de castas* or ethnoracial “caste” system, constructed ethnic groups such as the Yucatec Mayas comprised the racial category of “Indians.” The importance of the latter—with “Indian” characteristics being more significant than regional ethnic ones—was reflected in Spanish terms of reference; native groups were usually “the Indians of this province” or “the Indians of that land,” with more specific references being geographical (Landa sometimes refers to *los yucatanenses*; 1959: 47, for example) or externally determined (there are so-called Chontal groups around the margins of the regions that were Nahuatl-speaking in the 16th Century because *chontalli* is a Nahuatl term for “foreigner”).

“Indians,” as a subordinated but semi-civilized source of labor, slotted into the ranking of the ethnoracial system between Spaniards, who as “people of reason” were destined to rule, and Africans, whose “inherent inferiority” suited them to slavery. Because these “natural laws” were part of an evolving European ideology of colonial justification, they had to be realized through a complex mixture of force, coercion, and co-optation. Furthermore, for the same reason, the system was never fully realized, leaving scholars of colonial Spanish America to struggle with the complex contradictions between colonial Spanish assertions and historical evidence on the nature of societies in these colonies. Some historians have argued that the Spanish-“Indian”-African ranking based on phenotype was, when it came to the functioning of social organizations, a Spanish-African-“Indian” system (Lockhart and Schwartz 1983: 130). Others have argued that the growth in the mixed-race population, the people to whom the term *castas* properly refers, created a social structure in which class played a more significant role than race (most notably Cope (1994), but also see Boyer (1995) and Stern (1996), as well as additional citations on the race-class debate in Kellogg (2000)). The point to be emphasized here is that there was, from the start and increasingly so, a disjuncture between social and cul-

tural realities on the one hand and colonial Spanish constructions and perceptions of ethnoracial identities on the other. One part of this phenomenon was the invention of an ethnic group of Yucatec “Indians,” later becoming Yucatec “Mayas,” within the larger race of New World “Indians.”

The second historical development that acted as an external force pulling Mayas towards an ethnogenesis was the conflict that began in Yucatan in the 1840s as a civil war and was during the course of 1847 recategorized and labeled as a “caste” or race war by the peninsula’s Hispanic leaders. In a long historical and historiographical tradition, running from Justo Sierra O’Reilly (see his 1848 quote above) to Lazaro Cárdenas, Nelson Reed, and Don Dumond, the war actually became a race war, with vengeful Mayas almost regaining the lands taken from them by invading Spaniards and their descendents (Reed 1964; Dumond 1997; also Bricker 1981).<sup>14</sup> The counter-view, articulated most notably by Terry Rugeley, is that divisions of region and class played more important a role than ethnic or racial antagonisms (Rugeley 1996; Cline 1947; Patch 1991). Questions of Maya ethnic identity are obviously at the heart of this debate, in the light of which my argument above on colonial Maya identity has two possible applications. One is that the colonial-era development of multiple implied-ethnic terms laid a foundation for a Maya ethnogenesis during the Caste War. The other is that the bifurcation of implied and overt ethnic awareness persisted through the mid-19th Century, with the war failing to foster an ethnogenesis. My position is the latter; indeed, I would go so far as to suggest that Caste-War evidence demonstrates that a Maya ethnogenesis did not take place in Yucatan before 1850.

As the 19th Century is primary neither to this article nor my expertise, I prevail upon the reader to accept a mere sample piece of evidence to support this assertion. In the “Proclamation of Juan de la Cruz” of 1850, the *cruzob* author refers to his followers either in paternal terms, as “my children” (*in sihsahbilob*, literally “my progeny,” and *in sihsah uincilob*, “my engendered people”), or in the same terms of the implied—not overt—ethnic awareness of the colonial period (*Cristiano Cahex*, “you Christian *cah* members,” and *maseual*, “commoner [by implication, native],” or *in sihsah maseualilob*, “my commoner progeny”). Ethnic divisions are strongly implied—at one point Cruz lists four implied-ethnic groups, those of *dzul*, (“foreigner,” by implication, Hispanic), *box* (“black”), *maseual* (“commoner,” by implication, native), and *mulato*—but the terms “indio,” “indígena,” or “Maya” never appear and the bifurcated sociopolitical world of the letter seems to be between Cruz’s community “children” and their “enemies” (*enemigoob*) (letter in Bricker 1981: 187–207; glosses mine. The same language was used in Cruz’s 1851 letter to Governor Barbachano; *op. cit.*: 208–18).

This example and its analysis has been chosen in part for reasons of methodological consistency with the philological analysis of colonial Maya terms above. It

has also been chosen as a bridge to the article by Wolfgang Gabbert that follows in this issue of JLA. That article, viewed in the terms of this one, argues that ethnic identity did not create the two sides in the war, because ethnic divisions did not characterize the make-up of its combatants or victims. The intense period of war (from 1847 to about 1853) was followed by a half century in which Yucatec Mayas were as divided as they had ever been, with numerous native groups (cruzob, different pacifico groups, and so on) existing at various points along a spectrum between full incorporation into the Mexican state of Yucatan and complete autonomy. Whatever impact the intense mid-century conflict may have had on generating a macehual ethnic identity, the subsequent decades broke down macro-regional macehual identity as so-called pacifico groups began to call themselves mestizos and the so-called *bravos* or cruzob rebels proclaimed themselves *macehualob* in distinction to the “pacified” Mayas (Hervik 1999: 42–46; Dumond 1997; Castro 2001; Gabbert 2004: Part II). This political situation was partly a result of the state’s inability to establish direct rule over the whole peninsula, but it also represented continuity in terms of the localized nature of Maya identities and reflected the fact that the discourse of the rebels was not built upon the kind of ethnopolitical ideas that have underpinned the late-20th Century ethnogenesis in Guatemala.

This brings me to the third historical development that helps explain why Mayas have been so consistently assigned an ethnic identity; this is the process that coalesced in the 1960s and has been dubbed “ethnopolitics” by political scientist Joseph Rothschild. The ethnopolitical process mobilizes ethnicity for the political purpose of “altering or reinforcing . . . systems of structured inequality” between groups, and in doing so “stresses, ideologizes, reifies, modifies, and sometimes virtually re-creates the putatively distinctive and unique cultural heritages of the ethnic groups that it mobilizes” (Rothschild 1981: 2–3). In other words, ethnopolitics fosters ethnogenesis. In the context of this late-20th Century ethnopolitics, and specifically with respect to the Mayas, a modern Maya ethnic identity has been forged by Mayas and their non-Maya allies, complete with constructed historical roots, for the purposes of mobilizing the mostly-Maya underprivileged.

Guatemala offers a more vivid example of this process than Yucatan, partly because “Maya” appears to have been imported into the region from Yucatan by 19th-Century archaeologists (Schackt 2001: 7–8), and partly because of the late-20th Century civil war in Guatemala; modern ethnopolitics marks one important difference between that civil war and Yucatan’s earlier Caste War, the ethnopolitics of which resulted not in a pan-Maya movement but in a splintering of rebel Mayas into the distinct groups mentioned above (Carmack 1988; Smith 1990; Wilson 1995; Watanabe 1995; 1997; Warren 1998; Wellmeier 1998; Montejo 1999; also see Friedman 1992). The fact that “Maya” identity is a late-20th Century development in Guatemala is underscored by Sol Tax’s assertion that in the 1930s the “municipio”

delineated “the basic ethnic divisions and cultural groups into which the country is divided” (1937: 425).<sup>15</sup> However, the process is also visible in Yucatan, where, in the decades following the Revolution of the 1910s elsewhere in Mexico, non-Maya Yucatecans sought to exploit a reconstructed Maya heritage for symbols of regional identity (Castañeda 1996: 108–9). Yet in both regions, political circumstances gave rise to a Maya ethnogenesis gradually and unevenly. As Jon Schackt has observed, with respect to both Guatemala and Yucatan, “until recent years most so-called Mayan Indians have been unaware of their common ‘Mayahood’” (2001: 3). When Fischer comments that “identifying oneself as Maya rather than a person from town X or a speaker of language Y no longer raises eyebrows in Tecpán and Patzún,” he is drawing upon fieldwork conducted in Guatemala as recently as the 1990s (2001: 245).

The sum, then, of these three phenomena—Spanish ethnoracial concepts that developed in the 16th Century, the rhetoric of race and polarizing violence of the Caste War, and 20th-Century ethnopolitics—has been, to paraphrase the Comaroffs (1992: 61), a process of reification that has given Maya ethnic identity the false appearance of being an independent factor in the ordering of the Yucatec social world.

While non-Mayas consistently saw “Indians” and “Mayas,” the Mayas themselves held to their own less monolithic identities. Schackt has expressed concern that his position “that Maya identity is not ancient but under construction in the present” might be taken as suggesting it to be “spurious or inauthentic” (2001: 10). His fear is not groundless; at a recent panel discussion, my assertion of the same argument was taken as showing “lack of respect” for Mayas, a reaction that supports the very point that Maya identity is presentist and politically—rather than historically—rooted.<sup>16</sup> As Schackt observes (2001: 10), construction or invention does not imply inauthenticity, as invention is “a necessary dimension of all cultural processes.” Crucial to understanding the cultural process of Maya ethnogenesis in the 20th Century—and my argument that such an ethnogenesis did not occur in previous centuries—is an understanding of how that process is rooted in both 20th-Century politics and an invented ancient Maya identity (hence the current Maya “revival,” “renaissance,” and “resurgence”).<sup>17</sup> In between those modern and ancient points lie three or four centuries of “Maya” history during which Maya peoples refused to accept categories of identity assigned to them, be it *indio* or *Maya*. In a sense, then, the Maya struggled for centuries in the face of steady opposition *against* their own ethnogenesis.<sup>18</sup>

## Acknowledgments

An initial, briefer version of this article was presented as a paper on the March 2000 LASA/Miami panel “Rethinking Maya Identity in Yucatán, 1500–1940.” Another briefer and somewhat different version, titled “The Janus Face of Maya Identity in Post-Conquest Yucatan,” is included in Hostettler and Restall (2001: 15–23). I am grateful to Robert Carmack, Quetzil Castañeda, Ben Fallaw, Wolfgang Gabbert, Ueli Hostettler, James Muldoon, and anonymous readers for comments made on earlier versions of the paper and article.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Bricker et al record the variant of *mayab*-*t'ään* (*mayab*' is entered in the same dictionary as “flat”).

<sup>2</sup>A similar statement is made in the *relación* of “Quinacama” (1: 254). Wolfgang Gabbert comes to the same conclusion regarding the origin of the term (2001: 25–34). Munro Edmonson remarks that “the modern name of the Maya may be derived from Mayapan” (1982: 10), but he cites Alfred Tozzer, who merely states that the peninsula was called “Maia” without speculating as to the term’s etymology (1941: 7, 9); later Edmonson suggested that the name was derived from the *may* cycle of 13 katuns (1986: 5, 9), a theory that Castañeda finds persuasive (1996: 13).

<sup>3</sup>The earliest attestation of *cax* that I have seen is mid-17th Century; by Beltrán’s time, it had become a dictionary term—“Gallo de Castilla *Ahcax*” and “Gallina de Castilla *Yxcax*” (Beltrán de Santa Rosa 1746). One could argue that turkeys did have sacred associations, as they were traditionally used in sacrificial rituals; but that does not mean that turkeys were always imbued with sacred significance. Such an argument is stronger with respect to the *maya bat* entry in the 17th-Century *San Francisco* dictionary, as *maya* is clearly being used here to describe something historically distant and possibly with vague sacred associations—an ancient “Maya axe,” as opposed to the metal axes that Mayas had been using for a century by the time this dictionary was compiled (see mention of this entry, the dictionary’s dating, and citations below).

<sup>4</sup>On petitionary discourse among Mayas and Nahuas, see Restall (1997b: 255–59; 1997a: 251–66) and Karttunen and Lockhart (1987). The 1668–69 petitions are in the AGI (*Escribanía* 317a, 2, various folios). For a discussion of possible Spanish and Maya roles in the formulation of a series of petitions in Maya from a century earlier, see Restall (1998a: 151–68).

<sup>5</sup>On the Itzas of the Peten and their Yucatec origins, see Jones (1998: xix, 3–107). This would not be the only instance of a Maya people adopting as a group or ethnic label the name of a founding ruler or dynasty; the Quichés did it too (see Hill and Monaghan 1987: 32–33).

<sup>6</sup>Juan Martínez Hernández also published an edition of the *Motul* in 1931, but, as William Gates observed in a review, it was so riddled with errors of transcription—over a hundred in the first ten pages alone—as to be “nothing short of disastrous” (1931: 93). In contrast, I have yet to note a single transcription error in the Arzápalo edition.

<sup>7</sup>Robert Chamberlain and Ralph Roys used the term “tribe” (see especially Roys 1943), and their influence can still be seen occasionally in print; see Rugeley (1996: 8), for example.

<sup>8</sup>I am indebted here to an anonymous reader for JLAA, who pointed out the possible applicability to the colonial period of a piece by Carol Smith (1987), arguing for the compatibility of local community identities with an ethnically marked class identity among modern Guatemalan Mayas.

<sup>9</sup>The seminal study to demonstrate the central role played by dividing lines between ethnicities in identity formation was of course Fredrick Barth’s 1969 edited volume. The literature on ethnic bound-

aries since 1969 is too substantial to cite, but two recent studies of the topic as applied to Yucatan by European scholars are Hervik (1999) and Gabbert (2004).

<sup>10</sup>Studies of race in modern Latin America tend to make the misleading assumption that modern categories have exclusively 19th-Century roots (Knight 1990; Stepan 1991), without considering the 16th-Century impact of the New World discoveries and invasions upon European conceptions of “nations” and “peoples” (Elliott 1970) and the subsequent development in mid- and late-colonial Spanish America of “modern” notions of race (Kellogg 2000; Cañizares Esguerra 1999).

<sup>11</sup>Other Spaniards, almost all Franciscans like Landa, also wrote accounts of Yucatec history that included discussions of Maya culture, but they tended to devote their attention more to Spanish achievements, especially those of the Church, and to view Mayas through the prism of their evangelizing, “civilizing” endeavors; a good example, though unpublished in English, is Cárdenas y Valencia’s 1635 manuscript (in the BL).

<sup>12</sup>For another example of racist stereotyping of “Indians,” see the 1845 description of Mayas by the Yucatec priest Granado Baeza (quoted in Hervik 1999: 38). There are numerous primary and secondary sources available on the broader context of Spanish attitudes towards various native groups in the Americas; a primary example already mentioned is Landa (1959: first eleven “chapters”), while secondary examples include Elliott (1971), Keen (1971), Todorov (1984), and Restall (2003).

<sup>13</sup>Landa wrote a vast study of Yucatec Maya history and culture, called, according to its genre, his *Recopilación*; the work appears to have been lost in the late-17th Century, with the only surviving traces being the compilation of excerpts, some of which may not have been written by Landa himself, cited above as his *Relación* (see Restall and Chuchiak 2002).

<sup>14</sup>On Cárdenas’ interpretation of the righteous role played by the “Maya race” in the war, see Fallaw (1997: 560–65). See Gutiérrez (1999: 42–44) and Wolfgang Gabbert’s article in this issue of JLA for more discussion and references on interpretations of the war as one of “ethnic liberation.”

<sup>15</sup>Tax’s analysis is similar to the argument I have made on the centrality of the municipal community, or *cah*, to colonial Yucatec Maya identity and organization (mentioned above, also see Restall 1997a). Denise F. Brown (1993) similarly emphasizes the role of the *cah* among present-day “rural” Yucatec Mayas.

<sup>16</sup>Panel on “Ethnicity” at the conference on *A Country Unlike Any Other(?): New Perspectives on History in Yucatán*, Yale University, November 2000.

<sup>17</sup>Schackt (2001: 12) cites a 1997 *Newsweek* article, a 1996 issue of the Guatemalan magazine *Crónica*, and the title of Wilson (1995) for uses of these terms, respectively.

<sup>18</sup>Arguably such a struggle continues through the 20th Century; for example, see Gutiérrez (1999: 54) for a contemporary Maya woman’s reaction to “‘being told to be a Maya’ without being sure what it is to be a Maya.”

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AGEY. Archivo General del Estado de Yucatán, Mérida, Yucatan.  
AGN. Archivo General de la Nación, Mexico City.  
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JCBL. John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence.  
TLH. Tozzer Library, Harvard University, Cambridge.  
TULAL. Latin American Library, Tulane University, New Orleans.

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