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All in the Junkab'al: The House in Q'eqchi' Society

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Abstract

Recent studies examine how individuals create kinship through economic transactions, ritual, and religion. This paper explores how Q'eqchi' women in San Juan Chamelco, Guatemala generate the logics of kinship through marketing. In Chamelco, the Q'eqchi' construct kinship through the local category of the *junkab'al*, 'family', literally 'one home'. Members of Q'eqchi' *junkab'als* create the substance of kinship through shared residence and participation in daily life. Chamelco's women use marketing to establish kinship, incorporating market employees into their *junkab'als*. Since market positions have been passed down in *junkab'als* for generations and constitute the family estate, market women seek heirs to perpetuate them. Participation in market exchange allows Q'eqchi' women to generate their houses and reinforce the *junkab'al* as a local category. This research examines kinship as a fluid construct, characterized by its interaction with other domains, including marketing.

Key Words

Kinship, Q'eqchi', Maya, House, family, alienated exchange, marketing

Introduction

"*Loq'on, loq'on!*", 'Buy, buy!', I called in early 2004, as I sat on the floor of Chamelco's market with a basket of *rax tul*, a zapote-like fruit, assisting Doña Valeria, one of the market's most prominent vendors. I had recently arrived in Chamelco and was learning about Q'eqchi' market

women by trying my own hand at marketing. Although I sold few fruits this day, I established rapport with Valeria. In the coming months, our relationship grew through my assistance in the market and she soon began to refer to me as, “*walib*,” ‘daughter-in-law’. Other market women soon identified me as their “daughter”, “cousin”, “sister”, or “daughter-in-law,” as we created memories by working in the market and attending rituals together. I was no longer simply a *gringa* outsider, but was part of the community as a member of many Q’eqchi’ families.¹

While I initially wondered how my market involvement qualified me as a type of kin virtually overnight, I soon realized that by working in the market, attending ritual celebrations with market women, making overnight visits to their homes, and sharing in their family celebrations, I had begun to fill the criteria of Q’eqchi’ kinship. The Q’eqchi’ category of the *junkab’al*, which glosses as ‘one home’, represents the center of family life. Individuals residing there become family without necessarily sharing a blood connection. Instead, the Q’eqchi’ establish kinship, they say, by forming relationships of trust, affection, and solidarity. During my years in the field, I earned a place in many women’s families by developing these qualities through my continued involvement in the market and in their family lives. This fundamental insight into Q’eqchi’ kinship helped me to understand my own standing in the community and to consider the crucial relationship between kinship and other social realms.

In this paper, I explore Q’eqchi’ *junkab’als* and analyze local criteria for kinship. I argue the *junkab’al* is the dominant category of Q’eqchi’ kinship and that the Q’eqchi’ identify individuals with whom they develop trust, confidence, and affection, earned through shared residence and market activities, as kin. While consanguinity plays a role in governing Q’eqchi’ kin relations, it is not the only, nor the most important, criteria for kinship. Instead, I argue that Q’eqchi’ women use market exchange, among other activities, to create relationships of shared

substance. They not only bring new individuals into their families through marketing, constituting and strengthening the *junkab'al*, but also use their *junkab'al* affiliations to legitimize themselves as marketers. Based on these observations and my interviews with many Chamelqueños, I argue that for Chamelco's marketers and their families, kinship and marketing are inextricably connected social systems.

First, I review the existing body of literature on Maya kinship that posits a patrilineal basis for Maya kinship. Next, I explain the *junkab'al* as a Q'eqchi' kin category and examine the connection between kinship and marketing in Chamelco. By presenting a comprehensive analysis of Q'eqchi' kinship, this paper suggests that scholars focus on the local categories that Maya communities use to define local kinship. It also reveals that one must explore kinship as connected to other prominent institutions, including gift and alienated exchange networks.

From Blood and Biology to Houses and Homes

Early kin studies identified lineal descent and consanguinity as universal determinants of kinship (Radcliffe-Brown 1952:70; Evans-Pritchard 1940; Fox 1967:41). These works suggest that lineage members inherit property, titles, and wealth from the blood-related ancestors through whom they trace descent (Evans-Pritchard 1962: 272-296).

More recent analyses of kinship, however, challenge descent theory and argue that lineage-based models of kinship cannot explain the nuances of indigenous kinship (Kuper 1988; Schneider 1984). Such works argue that genealogical descent does not provide a useful framework for studying kinship because it does not represent "folk models which actors anywhere have of their own societies" (Kuper 1982: 92). Kinship is not a natural institution, but rather a symbolic system that reflects the local values (Schneider 1984:132).

Stemming from this critique of lineage-based kin models, recent research on the “house” as a local kin category proves valuable for understanding indigenous kinship. Levi-Strauss (1982:170-187) proposes the house for societies in which lineal descent cannot explain kinship. Drawing on medieval European houses, Levi-Strauss (1982:174) defines the house as “a corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express in the language of kinship or of affinity, and most often, of both.” Together, this estate defines house members, who forge a bond through their participation in household life. For Levi-Strauss (1987:155-156), the house symbolizes relations both within and beyond it. At the core of these relationships is the union formed by a married couple who becomes the ancestors, whether biological or social, to whom house members attribute their origins. The boundaries of the house are clearest in the house’s interactions with other houses. Houses exist within a system of social hierarchy, occupying ranked positions from which individuals take their identity and status.

Levi-Strauss argues that the house encompasses characteristics typically associated with other models of kinship and social organization:

... the house is therefore an institutional creation that permits compounding forces which

...seem only destined to mutual exclusion because of their contradictory bends.

Patrilineal descent and matrilineal descent, filiation and residence, hypergamy and

hypogamy, close marriage and distant marriage, heredity and election: all these notions...

are united in the house ...” (Levi-Strauss 1982:184).

In other words, the house encompasses ideas and models, previously identified as mutually exclusive, creating a flexible social entity based on shared residence.

While numerous scholars critique Levi-Strauss's "house" as a static typology (Gillespie 2000b: 32), others explore its implication for indigenous kinship. Such studies suggest that the house's architecture reflects its members' collective identity by serving "as a vehicle for the naturalization of rank differences" (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995:11). Patterns of hierarchy also govern relationships among house members since individuals receive differential access to the house's wealth based on their role in the family (Boon 1990:231-232; Gillespie 2000a:8).

While a common physical structure may represent the house, house members do not always reside within it. While some house members leave the physical home to establish their own residences, they affirm their kin ties through involvement in ritual and productive life (Sandstrom 2000:71). Food-sharing also may also create kin ties, since the consumption of food prepared in a common hearth sometimes creates kin ties (Carsten 2004a:40; Gottlieb 1992:62). Individuals develop "shared substance" (Carsten 2004b: 314) with one another through their participation in household life.² Kin ties may develop through the exchange of goods (Bohannan 1955; Piot 1999; Gregory 1982, 1997; Godelier 1999; Uzendoski 2004a, 2005; Carrier and Miller 1999; Seligmann 2001). The Runa of Amazonian Ecuador, for example, transform affinal kin relationships into consanguineal ones—or relationships of "same substance"—through participation in ritual and exchange (Uzendoski 2005:115,117). In each case, houses persist over time by passing down its status, titles, and material possessions to successive generations of house members.

The House and the Maya

While scholars examine the house in global contexts (McKinnon 2000; Riviere 1995; Hugh-Jones 1995; Chance 2000), few examine it as a contemporary Maya kin category. Instead,

many ethnographies of contemporary Maya life highlight lineal descent as a primary pattern of social organization (see Vogt 1964). Hopkins (1969:101; 1988:100-103), for example, states that the Tzotzil Maya trace descent through exogamous patrilineal lines while the Ch'ol also practice patrilineal descent. Haehl (1980) documents patrilineality among the Tzeltal Maya, while Boremanse (1981:18) emphasizes the importance of genealogical descent in Lacandón kinship. Other class ethnographic studies of the Maya argue that the Maya follow a system of bilateral kinship or double descent (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934; Coe 1965; Haviland 1971; Joyce 1981; Marcus 1983; Fox and Justeson 1986).

Though few studies explore Q'eqchi' kinship, Wilk (1991:204-205) identifies the household as the locus of Q'eqchi' economic life. Guatemalan ethnographer Azzo Ghidinelli suggests that kin relations sometimes extend beyond the nuclear family to include adopted children, stepchildren, and employees (Ghidinelli 1975:202). In discussing the family of one Q'eqchi' man, Francisco Caal, Ghidinelli identifies one of his biological children, his adoptive child, Mateo, and Mateo's wife and children, as his family, stating that their proximity to his home and their mutual assistance as the basis of their kinship. Nevertheless, Ghidinelli reports that when asked to identify his family, Francisco did not include his biological daughter and her children due to their distant residence and their lack of participation in his daily life (Ghidinelli 1975: 202). While such ethnography explores the economic basis of the Q'eqchi' household and outlines the composition of Q'eqchi' family, it does not address the logic of Q'eqchi' kinship.

Chamelco and the Construction of Shared Substance

Located in the highlands of Alta Verapaz, Guatemala, San Juan Chamelco has been home to the Q'eqchi' for centuries (Gomez 1984:15; INE 2002:1; Estrada 1979:9; Granados 2004:9).

Archaeological records suggest that Chamelco was a trading center throughout the Pre-Columbian era (Feldman 1985:90), though the *municipio* [municipality] of San Juan Chamelco was officially founded by the Spaniards in 1543. While Chamelco remained an autonomous political unit throughout the colonial period, designated a *pueblo de indios* [Indian town] by the Spanish government, it no longer has political autonomy.

Today, Chamelco's population is close to 40,000 individuals, 98% of whom are Q'eqchi' (INEa 2002:72; INEb 2002:10). . Q'eqchi' is the municipality's primary language, though most community members also speak Spanish (INEb 2002:4). In Chamelco and beyond, the Q'eqchi' are one of Mesoamerica's largest indigenous groups, registering close to one million speakers in Guatemala alone, (INEa 2002:37). Throughout history, the Q'eqchi' have practiced subsistence agriculture, growing *milpas*, 'cornfields,' (Carter 1969; Wilk 1991; Pacheco 1981; Gómez Lanza 1984; Hatse and DeCeuster 2001). In most Q'eqchi' communities, the agricultural cycle begins in January or February, when agriculturalists perform *mayejak*, or 'petition,' ceremonies to ask the mountain spirits to bless the seeds of the crops to be planted (Schackt 1984:18; Adams and Brady 2005). A similar ceremony is celebrated during harvest times, when farmers enjoy the most economic prosperity by selling surplus items in local markets (Wilk 1991).

While an idealized view of Q'eqchi' society posits gender equality and complementarity, (Hatsé and DeCeuster 2001:26; Estrada 1990:241; Adams 1999), in actuality, Q'eqchi' women, like other Maya women, occupy positions of low social status (Adams and Brady 2005). Q'eqchi' women are typically relegated to domestic labor, and assigned responsibilities that center in the home while men play a public role, building houses, working in *milpas*, and working outside the home.

Despite this marked stratification, Parra (1997:57) states that conjugal couples together ground Q'eqchi' social organization. After marriage, a man and his wife often establish a new residence, separate from either of their families, (Parra 1997:57-59). Their new homes, and the household goods within it, become the center of the Q'eqchi' family. Adams (1999:191) situates houses as the center of Q'eqchi' personhood, stating that physical houses serve as the "concrete demonstration of one's heart." The Q'eqchi' personify their houses, referring to each part of the house with names for the body parts (Adams 1999:220). By engendering their homes, the Q'eqchi' affirm the house as constituted through complementary male and female identities.

The Q'eqchi' reinforce the role of the home as the center of family life by paying respect to its living spirit through a *wa'tesink* 'feeding' inauguration ritual. *Wa'tesink* ceremonies are performed late in the evening to satiate the spirit of one's house and of the materials used in the house's construction (Schackt 1984; Cabarrús 1979; Haste and DeCeuster 2001; Adams 1999; Wilson 1995). Rituals include burying offerings under the floors of the new structures, scattering chicken blood, *kakaw* 'cocoa beans,' and other liquids, and praying at the household altar (Estrada 1990; Wilson 1995; Pacheco 1981; Garcia 1976; Adams 1999). Feeding the spirit of new homes is crucial to inhabitants' good standing with the spirit world.

Many Q'eqchi' identify these cosmological beliefs as persisting through time, stemming from the traditions of their most ancient ancestors. That these practices continue to be at the forefront of Q'eqchi' life today stems from Q'eqchi' participation in growing cultural resurgence and revitalization movements (Wilson 1995; Warren 1992, 1996; Warren and Jackson 2002; Smith 1990; Fischer 1996; Sturm 1996; Hendrickson 1995; Brown 1996; England 1996; Adams 2010). As a result of this movement, a new Q'eqchi' identity has emerged, centered on the reviving and re-enacting the practices of the Maya ancestors (Wilson 1991; 1993;

1995). While the resurgence of Maya traditions shapes the social and political environment of many Q'eqchi' communities, the Q'eqchi' communities of Alta Verapaz, and Chamelco in particular, serve as loci of this movement (Adams 2010).

During my year and a half of fieldwork in Chamelco, I worked in the local marketplace. The indoor, municipal marketplace is the town's primary center of commerce, although smaller stores are on every street corner through Chamelco's urban center and *aldeas*, 'villages.' Customers come from both the rural and urban areas to shop in the market and catch up on the town's recent news. Historical records reveal that during the early twentieth century, local women sold salt, *kakaw*, smoked meats, herbs, and soap in an open-air market in front of the town's Catholic church (Goubaud 1949: 46). Chamelqueños explain that their ancestors sold in this market for hundreds of years and thus regard it as the embodiment of their indigenous past.

In the 1960s, the municipal government moved the market and all of its vendors to its current location. (Figure 1 here). Today, 120 vendors, 99% of whom are women by tradition, sell in an interior marketplace built by the municipal government in the late 1990s. Their stalls offer a range of goods, from woven cloth and ceramics to grains, produce, rice, and packaged goods. Butcher shops sell pork, chicken, and beef daily. More than 70% of marketers state that they inherited their occupation from a family member. As a result, they regard marketing as a family occupation and pass it to their heirs. Since marketing and kinship intertwine, kinship emerged as a theme of my investigations.

Q'eqchi' notions of kinship center on the *junkab'al*, literally *jun* 'one' *kab'al* 'home' and used to refer to those individuals who reside together (Caal et. al 2004:97). In Chamelco, the Q'eqchi' distinguish between those individuals with whom they reside, their *junkab'al*, 'family,' and other kin, *komon*,⁴ 'relatives,' who live in separate, often distant, residences. The proximity

of *junkab'al* members and their mutual involvement in household and productive activities leads *junkab'al* members become one's closest family. In contrast, one's *komon*, literally one's 'companions' or 'group' (Caal et. al 2004:105), are "extended" kinspeople who live in separate houses and with whom one interacts less frequently. As a result, Chamelqueños often do not identify their *komon* as 'family' but rather as more distantly related kin.

I asked a representative sample of Chamelqueños, including people all ages and of different religious faiths, including Catholics, Evangelical Christians, and people who practice a Maya religion, or *mayanistas*, to explain the differences between these kin classifications and to explain local ideas of family. One woman explained that "My *komon* is my [distant] family while my *junkabl'al*⁴ is my family that lives in my house. The *junkab'lal* is [the people] with whom you share sadness, happiness, prosperity and poverty. This is your *junkab'lal*." Participation in household life leads *junkab'al* members share a range of emotions and experiences. These emotions, and the memories they create, become the basis of the shared substance that forges a bond between *junkab'al* members. Based on the meaning that Chamelqueños assign to the *junkab'al*, I use the words *junkab'al* and family interchangeably throughout.⁵

The Q'eqchi' practice sharing one's *xeel*, 'leftovers,' best summarizes the logic of the Q'eqchi' *junkab'al*. When the Q'eqchi' eat away from home, they save a portion of their meal, known as their *xeel*, to share with family members. To assist their guests in saving their *xeel*, an event's hosts always place large banana leaves and plastic bags on the tables. Individuals wrap pieces of meat from the meals in the banana leaves, placing them in the plastic bags, which they also fill with several corn tamales. Often, hosts give close friends and family additional tamales, called *pochitos*, or portions of smoked beef or chicken, to increase their *xeel*. One returns home

with food leftovers to share with those at home. This food sharing is a primary way that Chamelqueños create and maintain shared substance with all kin.

A short anecdote from my fieldwork in 2006 explains the *xel* as a symbol of Q'eqchi' kinship. While I was eating lunch with a friend's *junkab'al* I took some meat out of my *caldo*, 'stew', to take home with me. As I wrapped the chicken leg in a banana leaf, a friend commented, "You have learned how to save your *xel*?" When I said that I always saved my *xel* to share with the people with whom I lived, he replied, "For the Q'eqchi', the *xel* represents the importance of the family and of thinking of one's family. To share with family is our ancestors' oldest value."³ Since the time of "our ancestors", he said, "sharing has united Q'eqchi' families."

For the Q'eqchi', the *xel* embodies the way the Q'eqchi' sustain and reinforce family relationships. Sharing is the basic principle underlying the *xel* and the way in which the Q'eqchi' negotiate, maintain, and fortify kin relationships. The *xel* creates integral gift relationships that provide sustenance for one's family and for other Q'eqchi' families. Members of Q'eqchi' houses create kin ties by sharing not only food and material possessions, but in the experiences that define their daily lives. Sharing in mealtime, celebrations, mourning, and productive activities, individual develop kinship over time. The experiences families share in market life provides another means to creating and maintaining kin ties over time.

Chamelqueños put creating and maintaining kin ties through the sharing of one's *xel* reveals that family is the most valued institution for Chamelco's Q'eqchi'. Family lies at the heart of all action. In addition to motivating one's actions, family defines one's status. People who come from what Chamelqueños identify as "good families" ascend to higher status positions. Good families are those that honor the practices of their ancestors, do not engage in

feuds, and are respectful of others. The recognition that one's family receives determines one's own place in local society. Chamelqueños measure personal character against family reputation.

Returning to the logic of the *junkab'al*, we must consider how the Q'eqchi' conceptualize the shared substances that bind them as kin. While the Q'eqchi' sometimes use the notion of "shared blood" to establish kin relations, shared substance extends beyond consanguinity to include mutual cooperation, trust, and confidence. Don Sebastián Si, a mayanista and the former president of the Academy of Mayan Languages Guatemala explained:

It is undeniable that I would consider someone that shares my blood, .. my brother ... my nieces and nephews, to be family. I feel that this is the first way [to look at kinship]. The second way, one of two, to make someone feel like family, to consider some people as family, is ... to have solidarity, companionship, cohabitation, and to share things.

Sebastián elaborated that although the systems of consanguineal and non-blood based shared substance seem to oppose one another, they are based on the same underlying principle: solidarity. Q'eqchi' families are based on not on blood ties, but on the solidarity developed through the shared experience of household life.

Other Chamelqueños indicate that blood ties alone are not enough to designate someone as kin. For example, many Chamelqueños do not include biological siblings, children, or relatives who died at a young age, whom they have never met, or with whom they do not reside as family. One may recognize an individual as blood kin at a one time and later deny the relation due to poor behavior or shameful actions. For example, one marketer related that she would no longer consider a child who joined a gang or participated in violent crime as a part of her family. One Chamelqueño explained that, "When someone commits a mistake, [their family] simply says, *Maak'a inkomonquex*, or 'You are no longer my companion, you are no longer my relative'

... He is automatically disowned by the family.” These statements reveal that for the Q’eqchi’, consanguineal ties are fluid and are dependent on the continued trust, affection, support, and solidarity built through shared residence and participation in daily family life.

Thus, the Q’eqchi’ create shared substance of kinship by building solidarity, providing companionship, and cooperating with one another. Former president of the Academy of Mayan Languages Sebastián Si explained that:

One’s own behavior is what ... makes him part of a family. For example, there are some people ... who bear no blood relation to me, don’t have the same last name, or anything, but we almost consider ourselves to be family. Yes, we are family ... We all love each other, and when they come here, they are welcome, we serve them, give them a place to sleep. In other words, they are part of the family, without having anything to do with consanguinity. They have nothing to do with it, simply because it is rather a question of sharing with one another ...

Most Chamelqueños expressed that what is most important in defining kinship is the love, solidarity, and affection that you develop with those people with whom you share your daily life. One woman expressed “It doesn’t matter, for example, if you couldn’t have children, and you adopted. It doesn’t matter if that person does not share your blood. What matters is that they share your love.” Love and affection become the shared substance that unites kin across religious boundaries and throughout the generations.

Though respect, love, and sharing define Q’eqchi’ shared substance, one does not recognize all individuals with whom he shares these qualities as kin. One merchant discussed the boundaries between kinship and friendship, explaining that the Q’eqchi’ often transform close friendships into shared substance (Carsten 2004). Nevertheless, she identified those

individuals with whom she resides as her closest family. Thus, the household constitutes the foundation of Q'eqchi' shared substance.

The *Junkab'al* in Q'eqchi' Society

Throughout life, each Q'eqchi' is a part of several *junkab'als*. Though one is born into his parents' *junkab'al*, children never refer to their families as *junkab'als*, and instead identify each family member according to their specific relationship to them.⁵ Later in life, the Q'eqchi' form their own *junkab'als* once they marry or when they establish a new, separate residence with a partner or with their own children. For example, Doña Sara, a married mother of four children, explained that she formed her *junkab'al* when she got married, adding that “[The *junkab'al* forms] when a family splits off from the rest of the group. When I married, I formed my own *junkab'al* because I went to live in my own house, and I split off from the rest of my family.” Other Chamelqueños concur that while marriage initiates a new *junkab'al*, the birth of children strengthens it.⁶

Nevertheless, while marriage, celebrated through a civil or church union or both, serves as one step in defining the *junkab'al*, it is not always a necessary one. For example, couples who live together without a formalized union, '*juntados*', literally 'joined' without the binding ties of a legal union, create a *junkab'al* by establishing their own residence or by having children together.⁶ Also, single mothers and their children may establish a new *junkab'al* by founding a new residence, separate from that of their extended family.

While new *junkab'als* emerge in this way, parents continue to include their children as part of their *junkab'als* even after they establish their own. When children establish their own residences as adults, they continue their family connection through the memories that they share.

One's own *junkab'al* is an extension of that of their parents, and they participate equally in each throughout their adult lives.⁶

Since one remains a part multiple *junkab'als*, the history of one's childhood and that of his adult life connect. The history of one household and its members intertwine with those of the other as individuals claim descent from the founders of their parents' *junkab'als*. *Junkab'al* members pass down stories of their ancestors, who form the legacy of their houses, from generation to generation. In this respect, the memory of deceased ancestors and the past experiences of the house, govern the *junkab'al* as a single social entity over time. These stories, and the identity they create, not only unite past and present *junkab'als*, but also constitute the shared substance that binds *junkab'al* members.

My analysis of more than 50 Q'eqchi' families reveals that most *junkab'als* are comprised of individuals connected through various means. While most families include a married couple and their young children, one or more of their parents, and other 'extended' family members, the number of family members residing in a single Q'eqchi' household can range from two to twelve or more. For example, one market woman identified her husband and four grown biological children, an adopted daughter, and several household employees as *junkab'al* members. Another woman identified her husband's aunt, with whom she has lived since she was thirteen, as her closest kin. She explained that she is kin, "because we live together and we get along, let's say, really well together. If I get sick, she is there. She worries and cares about me a lot." In other words, experience and support built through household life create the solidarity of kinship.

Q'eqchi' *junkab'als* also include various adopted relatives. More than 32% of market women's *junkab'als* recognized at least one adopted family member, including children, siblings,

and household and market employees and their children. Many adopted children, usually girls, come from the rural *aldeas* of Chamelco where overburdened birth parents cannot care for them. In other cases, families adopt children who have been orphaned or abandoned. While adoption often allows a child better educational opportunities, it also provides the adoptive family with an additional source of labor.⁷ Adopted children become full-fledged family members by developing shared substance with the *junkab'al*. Q'eqchi' *junkab'als* are especially likely to adopt children when parents are unable to have biological children.⁸ (Table 1 here)

In addition to adopted children, some Q'eqchi' families include godchildren in their *junkab'als*. Many Chamelqueños bring godchildren to live with them to honor the vows of godparenthood (see Vogt 1969) that they undertake by providing them with improved educational and economic opportunities. Although they may study at the local night school or on the weekends, these young people work for their godparents or in other jobs during the day. Godsons provide manual labor around the house or in the family's agricultural fields, while goddaughters cook, clean, make tortillas, wash clothing, and care for small children. In some cases, market women also include their goddaughters in their market work. For example, one marketer, Doña Rogelia brought her goddaughter, Luisa, to live with her when she took over her mother's market business several years ago. Luisa performed important household tasks in the early morning and late evening hours, and during the day, worked with Rogelia in the market. Luisa learned to tend to the market stall and took over full responsibility for the business. When a market stall became vacant in early 2006, Rogelia helped Luisa to establish her own new business. Luisa thus justified her positions in Rogelia's *junkab'al* by working with her in the market as well as in house. (Figure 2 here) Like other adopted family members, godchildren become *junkab'al* members by providing domestic labor.

A prayer that I observed following a *wa'tesink* 'feeding' ceremony (García 1976; Estrada 1990) in September 2005 reinforces the role of adopted kin in Q'eqchi' *junkab'als*. One evening, while performing a *wa'tesink* to inaugurate their new kitchen, Doña Rogelia, her husband, and children gathered around the household altar to bless the new structure. As Rogelia prayed, she asked God to protect her house, its contents, and her *junkab'al*.⁹ In doing so, she listed the names of her children, grandchildren, husband, and godchildren, affirming her godchildren's *junkab'al* membership through prayer.

Domestic employees also become *junkab'al* members by working and residing in the house. Performing household tasks, employees create the shared substance of kinship. Many of Chamelco's marketers, for example, hire young people to assist them in the market. Since their houses are located in close proximity to the market, these individuals often move in with them. By sharing in market and household life, they develop shared substance with market women and their families. For example, one woman recounted that for many years, a young boy lived with her and worked with her in the market, tending to her stall and running errands with her. She raised him and he shared her home until he married a few years ago. This boy became family, she said, by working with her in the market and residing with her family, demonstrating the solidarity that grounds local kinship. Thus, like all members of Q'eqchi' families, domestic and market employees earn their place in the *junkab'al* by enacting local notions of shared substance. Marketing, then, serves as another means of establishing shared substance, since market women use their work in the market to recruit new individuals into their families and generate the solidarity upon which kin relationships are based.¹⁰

Nevertheless, while employees constitute the *junkab'al*, not all such employees become a part of it. My good friend and longtime marketer, Doña Sara, explained that she has had several

household employees. While a few of her employees never joined her *junkab'al* because they worked for only a short time, established no familial bonds, or resided elsewhere, Sara has another employee who has lived with her for eight years. “She has lived with us for a long time, and well, she is a very respectful girl, and I have confidence [in her]...” she explained, stating that she considers her a *junkab'al* member as a result. Like other kin in the *junkab'al*, domestic employees establish the shared substance of kinship by residing, not only working, in the household.

The distinction that Doña Sara makes between her employees raises an interesting question about the boundaries that delineate Q'eqchi' *junkab'als*. Though I have emphasized the household as the core of Q'eqchi' kinship and family life, the boundaries that establish *junkab'als* and separate them from others remains unclear. While previous literature on the house argues that the physical structure of the house frequently demarcates the *junkab'al* as a social group, the boundaries of established Q'eqchi' *junkab'als* often extend beyond mere roofs, walls, and doors of houses. Many Chamelqueños consider the physical house as the foundation of family life because it is the place where they can be together as a family and escape the frustrations of life outside of the household. However, the limits of the land on which one lives, in addition to the house itself, often serves as the boundary that divides *junkab'als*. For example, Doña Sara explained that while she has her own house in which she resides with her husband, children and employee, she also shares her land with her grandmother, mother, and siblings, who occupy a separate dwelling. While Sara and her family consider each dwelling to constitute a separate *junkab'al* divided by their physical structures despite their close proximity, the community at large recognizes them as a one family because they share the land. Sara explained, however, that they refer to them not as a *junkab'al*, but as “*wib'kab'alex* [‘you are two

families’]. They say this because we are two groups together, because the Tz’ib’ Cu family and the Cu Chen family both occupy the same land.” In other words, though they represent two distinct families, society defines them as a single unit based on land boundaries.

In addition to serving as *junkab’al* boundaries, Q’eqchi’ houses embody *junkab’al* identity. On a physical level, the architecture of houses represents the social position of their members because families with lower status often live in houses made from *che’* or ‘wooden planks’ and *lámina* or ‘metal’ roofs, while higher status families reside in houses made from the finest quality materials, including concrete block with and tile or wooden roofs. Often situated on large, centrally located pieces of land, these houses have tile floors, in contrast to the dirt or bare concrete floors in other Q’eqchi’ houses. The internal structure and furnishings of the house also reflect the status of its members, since higher status houses are often divided into several rooms, while lower status families reside together in a large, undivided room. While these families often live without running water or electricity, high status families in Chamelco’s urban center have electricity, running water, and even computers, telephones, televisions, and Internet access. As a result, the elaboration of Q’eqchi’ houses and their furnishings often distinguish them from one another, reflecting the identity of the *junkab’al* and its members.

The physical house also embodies *junkab’al* identity as the center of family ritual and productive activity. For example, many Q’eqchi’ houses display religious altars in common living areas. These altars contain statues of Catholic saints, candles, relics, and heirlooms, such as vases, dishes, or ancient Maya artifacts. These altars are family ritual centers because prayers or other ceremonies that take place in the house initiate there. In addition to praying at household altars, the Q’eqchi’ also practice curing ceremonies in their homes. Household members define their personal and family identities through such rituals. The house is a locus of

activity, including parties, special dinners, and receiving visitors on the weekend or during evenings. Hosting such events elevates one's status.

Q'eqchi' houses also are centers of productive activity. Market women, for example, process and produce many of the goods they sell at home. One lifelong marketer, for example, not only grew blackberries on the land behind her house, but also processed and fermented them to make blackberry wine in her home. The blackberries, as well as the processed wine, were top selling items at her market stall. Likewise, pig butchers have a specific structure on their properties dedicated to butchering. Such activities reinforce the household as a physical determinant of Q'eqchi' identity.

The family's estate, known in Q'eqchi' as the *junkab'al* (see endnote 5), also plays a prominent role in defining *junkab'al* identity. For the Q'eqchi', the *junkab'al* includes animals, land, dwellings, statuses, titles and heirlooms belonging to family members and having been passed down for generations. For Chamelco's market women, market positions constitute a crucial part of the *junkab'al* and become "inalienable possessions" of the household (Weiner 1992). Kockelman (2007) demonstrates that such inalienable possessions define Q'eqchi' personhood and ethno-linguistic identity. The critical link between these possessions and family identity leads the Q'eqchi' to bequeath their *junkab'als* only to family members because, as one man explained, "one wants to conserve what he has done. One leaves these things to his family, because the family appreciates them. If you leave them to another person, who knows if they will take care of them or sell them. This is why it must remain in the hands of the family." *Junkab'al* members must preserve the household estate to ensure the things that define them as individuals and the *junkab'al* as a unit persist.

For market women, market positions and the “*derechos de vender*,” literally ‘rights to market’, or the right to sell and own a stall in the market, constitute a crucial part of the *junkab’lal*. Women inherit market positions from *junkab’al* members. They learn the skills necessary for marketing, including how to interact with clients, order merchandise, weigh grains, and manage their inventory, from female *junkab’al* members. Women also inherit their commodity specializations and clientele from their *junkab’al*. As a result, those women whose families have been in the market the longest are the most legitimate marketers. Clients prefer to buy from these women and they have the greatest success, both in profit and status, in the market. Since women who enter the market independent of a *junkab’al* connection rarely achieve the same status as those with long market histories, women strive to keep such positions within the *junkabl’al*, bequeathing them only to *junkab’al* members. (Figure 3 here)

I asked market women and municipal officials to explain the significance of keeping market positions in the family. First, they relate that market positions allow them to sustain their families financially. For example, one market woman said that, “One sells to ensure a better future, because, while it is true that being a professional has advantages ... having one’s own business is a great blessing because one always has money on hand.” Market women also want to make sure that the work they invest in marketing is not wasted. If their market businesses fall outside of their families, they will fail because new proprietors will not care for them. For the same reasons market women do not bequeath market positions outside their *junkab’als*, they do not turn them over to the municipal government. Because women invest themselves and their families in the market, they keep positions in the *junkab’al*.

More importantly, however, keeping a family presence in the market helps market women to not “resign themselves to forgetting something so beautiful that comes from a long

time ago ... They came to the market as children, they had their children here, and now they grew up, they are adults, and they leave their lives there [in the market].” Market women, and the ancestors from whom they inherit their stalls, become an inextricable part of the market through the transactions they have with clients (see Mauss 1990 for the personification of exchange). Their spirits endow their businesses and their physical market stalls. As a result, designating a market heir helps women to ensure that, as one marketer explained, women “won’t be forgotten ... They like to always have a presence. For example, my grandmother gave us the land we live on, and for that reason, she is there with us ... she is alive there, through the land.” As *junkab’al* possessions, market positions fill a similar role for marketers and their families. They are the vehicle through which individuals are remembered and families are generated and maintained. Market women thus explain that by leaving market businesses in the hands of *junkab’al* members, they ensure that they will define the *junkab’al* for generations to come.

Nevertheless, although Chamelqueños state that any *junkab’al* member may inherit market positions or other parts of the *junkab’al*, in practice, they do not all receive equal access to it. The Q’eqchi’ consider some *junkab’al* members to be legitimate heirs while others are less desirable. Gillespie (2000a) and Boon (1990-231-232) explore how such internal hierarchies may lead members to receive differential access to the house’s estate. Though the Q’eqchi’ consider all members of their *junkab’al* as kin, status differences emerge between house members. For example, in all *junkab’als*, elder kin hold the highest status, earning the respect of younger kin. Nevertheless, some Q’eqchi’ families demonstrate an apparent preference for biological heirs. In such cases, consanguineal kin appear to have higher status within the *junkab’al* than adopted kin and receive preferential access to *junkab’al* possessions.

For example, one woman with whom I worked closely talked at length about her four biological sons and her siblings. When I visited her home, I was surprised when a young girl, her daughter, greeted me at the door. She had recently adopted Alba, she said, who had been abandoned by her biological mother. I noted that my friend scolded Alba more than her biological children and while she took her sons, one of whom is Alba's age, to local celebrations, she rarely invited Alba. She explained this difference by saying that Alba was a nuisance to take out in public. While she clearly favored her biological children, she stated nevertheless that Alba was an important part of her *junkab'al* and that she would receive an education and learn to sell in the market, just as her other children had. I struggled to understand this contradiction.

Nevertheless, after reflecting on this issue, I realized that while an apparent preference for blood kin shapes the interactions between and the status of household residents, this tendency is not really based on blood connections but rather on how long an individual has resided in the *junkab'al*. Chamelqueños do not view blood kin as the most legitimate family members because the consanguine ties they have bind them more closely than social ties do, but because these kin have usually lived in the *junkab'al* the longest, usually since birth. Chamelqueños state that while adopted children and other *junkab'al* members can leave the family at any time should they have a disagreement, biological kin rarely do since they have "nowhere else to go."

In fact, a closer examination of this phenomenon suggests that individuals residing in the *junkab'al* the longest have higher status in the household even when they have no blood tie to *junkab'al* members. Elder house members may bequeath their estate to such *junkab'al* members because they know that these possessions, which play an integral role in defining the house's identity, will stay in the family. As a result, I argue that longstanding residence in the house, rather than the blood ties themselves, are the basis of the house's internal hierarchical order. In

the case I discuss above, the marketer's apparent preference for her biological children is due to the fact that they have lived with her longer than her adopted daughter has. As a result, I suggest that individuals living in the *junkab'al* the longest, or working in both the house and the market, then, become most closely associated with the house. They thus hold the highest positions within the *junkab'al* and become its preferred heirs.

In other cases, however, the Q'eqchi' select heirs based on other criteria, rather than blood ties or the length of time associated with the *junkab'al*. For example, in the case of market positions and 'rights to market,' kin who have a longstanding affiliation with the *junkab'al* often become women's first choice as heirs since they trust them to protect the family legacy. While market women sometimes designate biological children as market heirs, they often do not, especially when those children pursue other professions or reside outside of their household. Instead, women identify those *junkab'al* members that they believe will do the best job of running the business, who have learned the skills necessary for marketing, or who show a great passion for marketing. In other cases, they choose heirs based personal attributes, such as moral behavior, character, or actions. They do so because they view marketing, like all *junkab'al* possessions, as a privilege or *si*, 'gift' that their ancestors gave them and that they pass on to their own descendants. To make certain that these gifts, and the memories of the ancestors who gave them, are honored, women give them to those who will most value them. By selecting as heirs women under whom their businesses will flourish, market women revere their ancestors while protecting the businesses that define individual and *junkab'al* identity. In other words, what matters most in selecting a market heir is that a kinsperson demonstrates her interest in and ability to value and care for the market positions. Thus, they ensure that market businesses, which form the core of family identity, define the *junkab'al* throughout successive generations.

Conclusion

To conclude my analysis of the *junkab'al* as a Q'eqchi' kin category, I return to the story with which I began this article. During my first venture into marketing in Chamelco, I failed to sell any fruit because community members could not contextualize me within market women's *junkab'als* and thus did not recognize me as a legitimate marketer. Nevertheless, by assisting market women in their stalls, visiting their homes, and accompanying them to celebrations, I developed the solidarity that grounds Q'eqchi' kinship and several market women identified me as *junkab'al* members. As part of several Q'eqchi' families, my status in the community changed. I was invited to both family and community based celebrations, included in ritual events, asked to participate in processions, and often left to tend the market stalls by my new kin. In fact, market women often asked me to "fill in" for them while they ran quick errands, picked their children up from school, or visited with friends. In contrast to my early market experience, clients showed no hesitation to buy from the stalls under my care. I realized that community recognition as a member of market women's *junkab'als* legitimized me as a marketer.

These experiences highlighted that the inextricable link between kinship and marketing determines the way in which the Q'eqchi' conceptualize kin relations and think about market life. Not only do Q'eqchi' women use marketing to generate their families by bringing new people into them and creating the shared substance of kinship, but they use the *junkab'al* to define their market businesses. Family connections make women "legitimate" marketers, contributing to their success in marketing. Simultaneously, women use marketing to generate their families, create kin ties, and define family identity. This study suggests that the household

and market are mutually-defining systems that Chamelqueños use to sustain the values of Q'eqchi' family life.

In contrast to previous studies of contemporary Mesoamerican kinship that posit that lineal descent governs Maya kin relations, this research provides a detailed account of Q'eqchi' kinship and reveals the *junkab'al*, or 'house', as the dominant category of Q'eqchi' life. For the Q'eqchi', genealogical relatedness presents an incomplete model of kin relationships that cannot explain the logic of indigenous kinship. Instead, the house is rich with complexities that shape how all Chamelqueños view the world in which they live. The *junkab'al* gives them the flexibility to incorporate a wide-range of individuals into their families through adoption, marriage, employment, *compadrazgo*, and marketing. To understand Q'eqchi' kinship, then, one must first analyze the social phenomena, such as the memories, love, and affection, that individuals residing in the same household share and that create the solidarity of kinship.

A detailed examination of the logics of the Q'eqchi' family reveals that *junkab'al* members identify one another as kin based on the memories, experiences, affection, and solidarity they develop, rather than through consanguinity alone. They develop these qualities through common residence, daily activities, and marketing. Thus, the *junkab'al* serves as ritual, religious, and productive center for Q'eqchi' families, thus defining its members' identities. As a result, members of high status houses assume high status social identities perpetuated through the house's *junkab'lal*, or 'estate'. Titles, vehicles, possessions, land rights, and other valuables constitute Q'eqchi' *junkab'lals*. The Q'eqchi' keep this estate in the family by designating *junkab'al* heirs who protect the inalienable possessions that ground their identity.

For market women and their families, the "rights to market" constitute a crucial part of *junkab'lals*. Since women inherit their market positions from female *junkab'al* members, they

recognize marketing as an occupation that defines *junkab'al* identity. It also gives them a way to honor the family members who bequeathed them their positions. By turning to the family to designate a market heir, women ensure that possessions, and the memories of the ancestors who created them, remain in the family. These memories, and the act of marketing, become the shared substance that sustains the *junkab'al* over time.

Thus, by revealing the *junkab'al* and market as mutually encompassing systems, this research critiques existing models of the "house" that present it as a bounded group tied to a physical place. In Chamelco, the house is not a static entity, fixed in time and space to a specific location. Rather, it is a category that allows people the flexibility to adapt their families in culturally meaningful ways and to bequeath the memories that define shared substance and ground family identity to new generations of kin. This research demonstrates that one cannot understand local kin categories without examining their implication in other prominent domains. It also critiques formalist economic theories, revealing that to understand the complexities of market systems, one must examine their relation to the categories, such as kinship, that structure local life.

Endnotes

1. I thank the community of San Juan Chamelco for hosting me during my field research. I also thank Florida State University and Florida State University Department of Anthropology for financial support. I thank the National Science Foundation for Doctoral Dissertation Research Improvement Grant #0613168. I bear sole responsibility for the results expressed herein.
2. "Shared substance" refers to the idea that a substance, such as blood, breast milk, food, or residence, links individuals as kin (Carsten 2004b:314).

3. I was unable to record this conversation and reconstructed it in my field notes.
4. The Q'eqchi' word *komon* may be an incorporated loanword derived from the Spanish word *comunidad*, 'community.'
5. While Chamelqueños sometimes interchange the words *junkab'al* and *junkab'lal*, a technical difference distinguishes them. The president of the Q'eqchi' Academy of Mayan Languages explained that "the *junkab'lal* are one's belongings while the *junkab'al* is a group of people and their children." Thus, "*junkab'lal*" refers to the family's estate in contrast to "*junkab'al*," which refers to the family itself.
6. My translations of Q'eqchi' words into English are limited by the vocabulary available for discussing such concepts in English. Because terms like "*junkab'al*," "*komon*," "*xel*," are grounded in the values and logics of Q'eqchi' language and culture, there is no true gloss for them outside of their cultural context. As a result, my translations are rough and are not literal.
7. *Junkab'als* take their names from the last names of its founding members. For example, if Maria Tz'ib' and Rafael Can married or established a new residence together, their *junkab'al* would be known by all as the Can Tz'ib' *junkab'al*. In cases where a single parent establishes his or her own *junkab'al*, the *junkab'al* takes its name from the last name of the parent who founds it.
6. Though many couples formalize marriages through civil and religious ceremonies, others choose simply to live together, or *juntarse*, rather than formally wed. 7. Family members do not rank their participation in *junkab'als* but rather participate equally in both [their parents' and their own] *junkab'als* throughout their lives. Likewise, the community identifies one's participation in both one's childhood and adult *junkab'als* as equal.

7. To officially adopt a child, parents file legal documents with the municipal government. Other families unofficially adopt by raising the child without filing paperwork.
8. Though Spanish kin terms differentiate biological children, or *hijos*, from adopted children *hijos de casa*, ‘children of the house’, Q’eqchi’ kin terms do not.
9. During such prayers, Chamelqueños pray out loud, in soft, murmured tones.
10. Market women form kin ties with clients when their children intermarry or by serving as godparents to each other’s children.
11. Q’eqchi’ men contribute little to the *junkab’lal*, since they often hold no steady employment.