UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY

ARCHAEOLOGICAL INSIGHTS FROM COLONIAL AND POST COLONIAL NORTH AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

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The 2010 AAA meetings provided a fruitful theme—circulation—for exploring archaeological understandings of identity, a key emphasis of archaeological research for the past decade or so. AAA session participants examined the topic of social and cultural identity from the viewpoint of different colonial encounters and their legacies in the North American continent and Caribbean. Colonization created a new circulation of peoples, ideas, materials, and practices that had both complementary and contradictory currents for colonizers as well as native residents. Historical and anthropological works have underscored the importance of the colonial period as a testing ground for cultural identity (for example, Ethridge 2010; Wolf 1996) and that identity is enacted and expressed through material culture. Few publications, however, have brought together data from different colonial contexts (English, French, Spanish, etc.) in a broad swath of North America (including Central America, Mexico, and the Caribbean). Session participants took as a starting point the idea that social space, including landscapes and built environments, is the arena for the negotiation of identity and that material culture provides the building blocks from which social identity is constructed. Although the papers discussed a wide array of contexts and historical time periods, a few key themes were persistent elements in the papers: (1) creolization or ethnogenesis; (2) generational change (over short or long spans of time); (3) alignment or orientation; and (4) labor regimes. These themes, which I will discuss in more detail below, underscore the general emphasis on identity existing within and resulting from a network of social relations (including class, race, and gender) and as a means to create solidarity and mobilize groups (see McGuire and Wurst 2002).

Creolization and Ethnogenesis

An important issue in anthropological understanding of identity is the maintenance of groups despite changes in membership and practices over time. The often harsh world of colonial interactions—uprooted peoples and oppressive practices—transformed the lives of all of the involved parties. In some cases, such as French settlements in the upper Mississippi, people maintained their Frenchness in their use of long lot farming, town organization, and house construction methods and floorplan well into the 1830s, long after colonial power passed from the French to the British and finally to the independent United States (Scott 2010). Maintaining Frenchness within a shifting social and political context was done by re-creating French spaces as much as by continuing language and religious practices (Scott 2010).

Jay Edwards (2010) proposed that a detailed sequence of stages in French creolization is shown in the development of what he termed the "linear cottage." He persuasively argued that current creolization theory is too generic to greatly aid understanding; a nuanced approach to the development of creole identity requires sensitivity to the details of historical developments. Vlach (1975) and Edwards (2008) have shown that the "shotgun" or linear cottage has clear African roots in the West African *ti-kay* cottage. Even though this linear house plan is relatively awkward because of a lack of a hallway, the form spread rapidly in New Orleans after the great influx of refugees from St. Domingue in the early nineteenth century. By the 1840s, the linear cottage was a common house type, embellished with stylish details that melded popular aesthetics with the refugee house plan. Later in the nineteenth century, linear cottages were built well beyond New Orleans and the French creole world. No simple evolutionary scheme accounts for the development of the linear cottage, but rather each period has a constellation of economic and social factors that encouraged the reproduction of this distinctive social space.

Extreme conditions of colonialism spurred the development of new identities, or ethnogenesis. Card (2007) has argued that the at times violent and coerced dislocation of people from diverse backgrounds together into single communities

as part of the establishment of Spanish towns created the necessary environment for ethnogenesis. Pedro de Alvarado founded San Salvador as a capital city in the province of Guatemala, in what is today El Salvador. San Salvador did not last long in its initial incarnation in central El Salvador—a little over 20 years—before the capital was moved to its current location. This early San Salvador displayed all of the elements of a Spanish villa, including regularly spaced *trazas* (town grids), a church, and a central plaza. Like most Spanish colonial towns, it also brought together people from near and far, such as local Nahua-speaking Pipil as well as native auxilaries from Tlaxcala, Mexico. The second generation was the first to grow up in the colonial town, and the material culture expressed and enacted a new colonial identity rather than holding tightly to traditions from before contact.

Generational Change

While archaeologists tend to emphasize incremental change over long periods of time, colonial examples provide a view of rapid adjustments to new social, political and economic conditions as well as their long-term repercussions. Delle (2010) persuasively showed that enslaved laborers in Jamaica experienced dramatic reorganization of their living environment at the hands of governing authorities with the full emancipation of the workforce in 1838. Likewise, changes over very short periods of time can be seen in the ceramics of the short-lived town of Ciudad Vieja (San Salvador). Even though the ceramics of this Spanish colonial town largely looked like Pipil tradition ceramics in form, paste, and surface treatment, ceramic forms offered a notable exception: brimmed plates. Majolica produced in Europe in the sixteenth century has a well-dated sequence of forms of plates, and Card (2007, 2010) was able to tie the plate forms at Ciudad Vieja into a seriation of majolica plates (Figure 1). On the basis of this fine-grained seriation, Card examined the change in ceramic manufacturing techniques after just one generation. While the first generation of potters and consumers at Ciudad Vieja had a range of pastes and surface treatments, the second generation had a much more consistent style that incorporated a characteristically Spanish and stylishly current form into the dominant wares from the site.

Much like the short-term changes in central El Salvador, in what is today's western El Salvador identity was fluid during the entire span of the colonial period. In the sixteenth century, this region stood at perhaps the political and social margins of the Spanish Atlantic, yet was a central component of the early colonial economy because of the region's unsurpassed production of cacao. The potential for rapid, immense wealth in cacao trade encouraged what Spanish

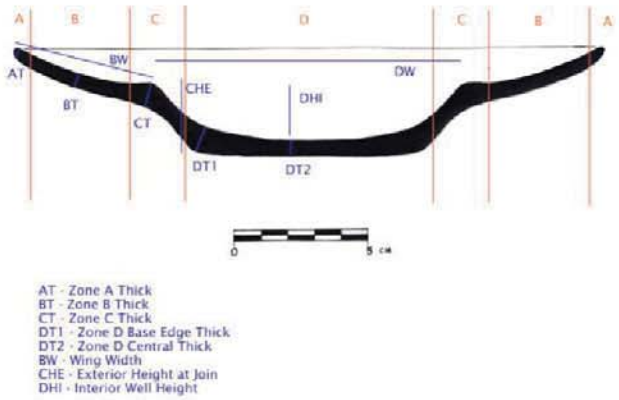

Figure 1. Zones of sixteenth-century coarse earthenware brimmed plates from Ciuda Vieja (El Salvador) measured by Jeb Card to detect ceramic microtraditions and generational change. Image courtesy of Jeb Card.

officials saw as overmuch circulation among Spaniards and local residents, emigration of wage laborers, and intercolonial maritime trade. Colonial officials repeatedly attempted to define the extent and nature of social and economic exchanges through conceptual and material frameworks such as laws, regulations, and the organization of the built environment. Throughout the colonial period, indigenous Nahua-speaking Pipil maintained a distinct identity despite unrelenting efforts by political authorities to recast colonial subjects as either *indios* or later, as citizens of the state. The Izalcos Pipil were clearly related in many different ways to the literate cultures of the Nahuas of Mexico, including the Aztecs. Both archaeological and documentary evidence support the idea that before Spanish contact the Pipil were operating according to Nahua social, political, and economic concepts and that the Izalcos region was an important component of the southern portion of the Nahua world (Fowler 1989; Sampeck 2007, 2010a). By the nineteenth century, political and economic efforts in the name of "progress" focused on creating a rationalized social order, with autonomous individuals as self-regulating members of the newly independent nation (Delle 2009). The material expressions of Pipil identity during these centuries was not static, but instead was reformulated and negotiated within the confines of pueblos, haciendas, and villas, so that people individualized mass culture through everyday practice, altering everything from utilitarian objects to street plans to rituals, laws, and language to make them their own. This activity of re-use provides opportunities for ordinary people to subvert the rituals and representations that institutions seek to impose upon them.

In Europe around 1500, a new concept of urban planning emphasized regulated geometries of grids and long, straight streets, carefully positioned public buildings, and planned vistas as a civilizing force. The *villa* (Spanish town) was the seat of royal Spanish power and the supposed home of all Spaniards in the region, while the *pueblo* (Indian village) was to be the residence of indios. In the Izalcos, these ordinances were hardly observed. Spaniards scandalously lived in the principal Izalcos pueblos even though they were nominally *vecinos* (official residents) of Sanitago de Guatemala. The enclosure of the *solar* (private household lot) in town as well as larger enclosures that defined the private property of the hacienda contrasted with communal land and Nahua ethics of free circulation and symmetrical access.

To see whether these tenets of spatial relations were archaeologically visible, I assessed 165 Irrarraga through Shupan phase sites for nucleation by basic criteria of the distance between structures or activity areas (Figure 2; Sampek 2010b). In the Postclassic Irarraga phase, more dispersed forms make up the majority of the built environment. In the conquest and early colonial period López phase, a strong preference for nucleated settlement emerged, indicating a dramatic contraction. The strategic re-organization in part seems to be an immediate reaction to the threat of the Spanish (a flight to the hills) as well as the successful implementation of the policy of *congregación* (forced resettlement into pueblos), which established the Spanish model of urban power. Another dramatic re-orientation occurred in the subsequent Marroquin phase. Less aggregated settlement forms make a resurgence, nearly returning to pre-conquest levels. This settlement change might indicate a return of Nahua modes of organization due to rebounding population after the initial shock of conquest, coupled with the strategy of the Spanish to permit some degree of indigenous self-determination. The pre-contact pattern is not completely recreated, suggesting a balancing act between following the ordinances for *congregación* and meeting the need and desire for dispersed settlement.

In the subsequent late eighteenth and early nineteenth century Shupan and Tensun phases, isolated structures became most common. It appears that the Shupan phase witnessed the dominance of the individual farmsteads, perhaps in response to the rise of haciendas and increasing emphasis on private land ownership. The trend toward increasing social and political emphasis of the self-regulating individual citizen embedded within a mode of individual accumulation seems to have on-the-ground correlates. Eliminating communal holdings was increasingly the focus of policy dictates and legislation in the shift to independence. The message here is that the citizen was no longer to pursue traditional

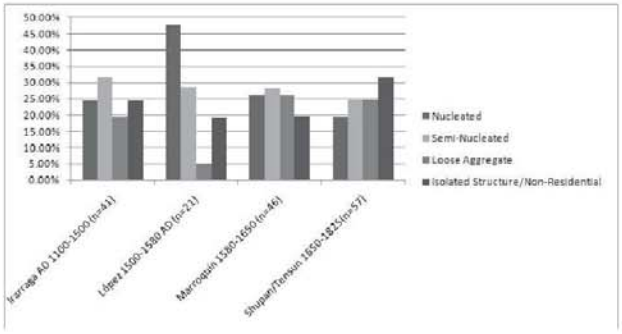

Figure 2. Relative frequencies of settlement types in the Izalcos region of El Salvador.

ways of operating, yet the ways that people used these spaces, shown by portable material culture such as ceramics, suggests Pipiles maintained their social groups (Sampek 2010b). By the end of the nineteenth century, the Pipil of this region still exercised power that was not fully countered until the *matanza* (massacre) of 1932.

Alignment

Part of the framing of identity during the colonial period through the nineteenth century occurred through orientation of physical space to create and/or inhibit social interaction. Several examples of physical orientation directly challenged the institutional power that underlay them. The town plan of eighteenth-century Nuestra Señora de los Morenos de Amapa (Amapa), a maroon (escaped slave) community under the jurisdiction of Spanish colonial Vera Cruz, Mexico, showed the discursive relationship of marginalized peoples and centers of power through display of civility in architectural regularity, order, and taste (Amaral Lugo 2010). Re-figuring of the landscape through new alignments such as *trazas* or other orthogonally-oriented plans was an important tool for creating new social orders that particularly altered class relationships (Delle 2010; Kyle 2010; Sampeck 2010a). In other cases, the material expressions of self and group alignment were less in the form of architecture than in portable material culture, such as British ceramics (Mayfield 2010) or German-language newspapers and foods (Dretske 2010).

Alignment helped create a center or axis for belonging and had a larger structuring effect in material and social relations. One particularly powerful example of alignment was the case of the Cherokee townhouse in the early historic period. Chris Rodning (2010) demonstrated that the townhouse was the pre-eminent public space for the Cherokee of the eighteenth century. Not only was this a place for important decisions to be made by clan members, but also served as the place to negotiate with colonial traders. Once the townhouse

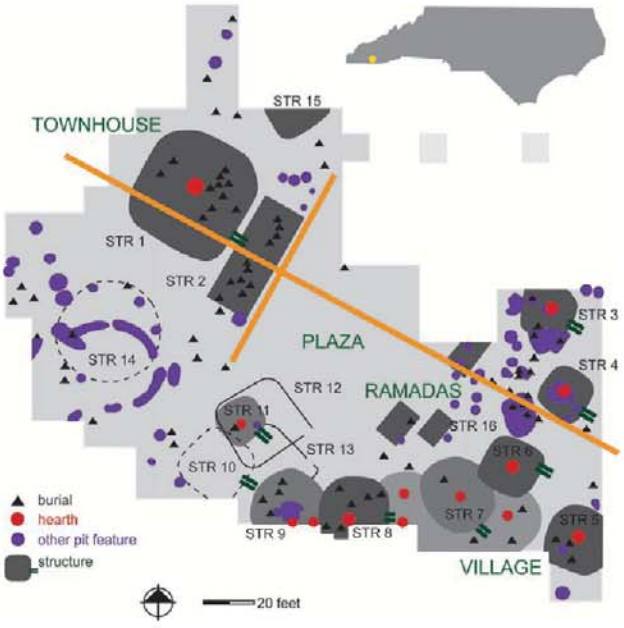

Figure 3. The alignment of the townhouse and the town of Coweeta Creek. Image courtesy of Christopher Rodning.

was erected at the site of Coweeta Creek, the alignment to that structure was maintained in subsequent new constructions throughout the town (Figure 3). Furthermore, a series of burials in and near the townhouse were aligned according to the townhouse plan, indicating that the social memory of the burials reinforced the townhouse orientation and each burial's orientation to previous interments.

Labor Regimes

The creation and maintenance of identity occurs in part through work. Many session papers highlighted the nature of labor, its organization, and the ways material culture was used for work and was a product of labor. Many facets of identity had a role in the organization and action of work, and labor was a way to organize groups. For example, the managers of Marshall's Pen in Jamaica used a ranked ethnic taxonomy to determine the occupations of the various members of the community and their overall value to the estate (Delle 2009, 2010). This racial hierarchy was shown in the valuation list, which identified people by name, age, "colour," whether African or creole, occupation, and gender. Much like the Spanish colonial policy of *reducción* (to make orderly), missionaries and planters in Jamaica cooperated in the design and construction of post-emancipation townships as part of the concerted effort to re-enculturate the newly freed laboring population simultaneously to the demands of wage labor and ethical living (Delle 2009). Earlier, pre-emancipation settlement consisted of a clustered series of houses, while the later village was rationally organized into rows of houses lining either side of a central road.

A focus on work also encourages us to think about the use of space and the networks of relationships emanating from work. Edwards noted that one use of the linear cottage was for rent. These domestic spaces were important sources of revenue for free women of color who rented out apartments to the rush of northern males flooding into the Crescent City to seek their fortunes from 1810–1840. The economic context of the linear cottage fostered the popularity of the architectural form.

During the early Republican era (mid nineteenth-century) in the Izalcos region of El Salvador, different labor environments were tied to vastly different daily lives and expressions of self and group membership. In the highly hierarchical, centralized setting of indigo production, laborers lived on isolated hilltops and used mostly local earthenwares and lead-glazed redwares. The settlement around the casco (big house) of a coffee hacienda also had centralized locales for labor to which worker domestic space was intimately tied. While the casco regions had a large variety and quantity of costly imported English tablewares, laborers appeared to have made use of these wares, too. The region with the greatest variety and costliest imported wares was in the region affiliated with communal cacao production. Here, the residents, who did not have impressive domestic constructions, used English wares in conjunction with local, traditional earthenwares as well as European style lead-glazed redwares. Brookens's (2010) data show that there is no easy correlation of class, ethnicity, and occupation with material culture, but that laborers dealt with the pressures of the modernizing state work environments in part through making elements of popular culture their own.

Final Comments

This session brought together material culture studies on British, French, and Spanish colonial contexts in today's United States, Mexico, Central America, and the Caribbean to show how new American identities emerged from the interplay of traditions and innovations within the crucible of colonialism. While much of this interplay involved native peoples' relationships to their ancestral homelands, the shared experience of everyday life created group identities that crosscut other, at times conflicting, identities such as race, class, and gender (Conkey and Gero 1991; McGuire and Wurst 2002; Sluyter 2002). The ordinary objects and routines of daily life, including concepts of landscape (how they were

represented and by whom), and how it was lived, provided ways to mediate between individuals, groups, and institutions (Spiers 2002:222). The key concepts of creolization, generational change, alignment, and labor encourage us to think about identity in specific, substantive ways that emphasize the dynamism and complexity of past lives.

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