ALL IN THE **JUNKAB’AL**: THE HOUSE IN Q’EQCHI’ SOCIETY

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**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 raxtul, 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 pieces of fruit 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 became part of the community as a member of many Q’eqchi’ families.

While I initially wondered how my market involvement qualified me as a type of kin, I 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 partially filled 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 performing the shared substance of kinship 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 Q’eqchi’ 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 and perform 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. 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. This article’s comprehensive analysis of Q’eqchi’ kinship suggests that scholars should 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 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 is not 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 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 trace their origins. The boundaries of the house are clearest in the house’s interactions with other houses. Houses exist within a hierarchical system, 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 other kinship 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 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 unites people (Carsten 2004a:40; Gottlieb 1992:62). Individuals develop “shared substance” (Carsten 2004b: 314) with one another through their participation in household life. Kin ties also develop through the exchange of goods (Bohannan 1955; Piot 1999; Gregory 1982, 1997; Godelier 1999; Uzendoski 2004, 2005; Carrier and Miller 1999; Seligmann 2001: Little 2004). 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 their status, titles, and estate to successive generations.

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, ethnographies of contemporary Maya life highlight lineal descent as a primary pattern of social organization (Vogt 1964). Hopkins (1969:101; 1988:100–103) states that the Tzotzil Maya trace descent through exogamous patriline 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. Others argue that the Maya follow a system of bilateral kinship or double descent (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934; Coe 1965; Haviland 1971; 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. Ghidinelli (1975) suggests that kin relations sometimes extend beyond the nuclear family to include adopted children, stepchildren, and employees. Ghidinelli states that one Q’eqchi’ man identified one of his biological children, his adoptive child, and his adoptive child’s wife and children as his family, citing their proximity to his home and frequent interaction in his life as the basis of their kinship. Nevertheless, Ghidinelli (1975) reports that this man did not include his biological daughter and her children as family due to their infrequent interaction. While these ethnographies explore the composition of Q’eqchi’ families, they do 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 (1984:15; INE 2002:1; Estrada 1979:9; Granados 2004:9). Chamelco remained an autonomous political unit throughout the colonial period, designated a pueblo de indios ‘Indian town’ by the Spanish government. Today, it no longer has political autonomy.

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 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, (Hatse and DeCeuster 2001:26; Estrada 1990:241; Adams 1999), in actuality, many Q’eqchi’ women, like other Maya women, occupy positions of low status. Q’eqchi’ women typically perform domestic labor in the home while men tend their milpas and work 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 household goods, become a part 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 parts 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 their homes’ 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; García 1976; Adams 1999). Feeding the spirit of new homes is crucial to inhabitants’ good standing with the spirit world.

Many Chamelqueños state that these cosmological beliefs persist through time, stemming from the traditions of their most ancient ancestors. The prominence of these practices and beliefs today stems in part from Q’eqchi’ participation in the Maya resurgence movement (Wilson 1995; Warren 1992, 1996; Warren and Jackson 2002; Smith 1990; Hendrickson 1995; Brown 1996; Englund 1996; Adams 2009). Participants in this movement define their contemporary identities through the revival and re-enactment of practices they attribute to the ancient Maya (Wilson 1991; 1993; 1995; Adams 2009).

During my year and a half of fieldwork in Chamelco in 2004, 2005, and 2006, I worked daily in the local market. The indoor, municipal marketplace is the town’s primary center of commerce. Customers come from rural and urban areas to shop in the market. This market has occupied a prominent place in Chamelco’s town center for almost a century. Historical records reveal that in the early twentieth century, 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). Today, Chamelqueños regard the market as an embodiment of the past, explaining that their ancestors sold in it for hundreds of years.

In the 1960s, the municipal government moved the market and all of its vendors to its current location (Figure 1). 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 seek heirs for market positions. 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’, a term 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 involvement in household and productive activities leads junkab’al members become one’s closest family. In contrast, one’s komon, literally one’s ‘companions’ (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 of all ages and faiths, including Catholics, Evangelical Christians, and people who practice a Maya religion, or mayanistas, to explain the differences between these kin classifications. One woman explained that “My komon is my [distant] family while my junkab’al is my family that lives in my house.5 The junkab’al is [those] with whom you share sadness, happiness, prosperity and poverty. This is your junkab’al." 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.6

The Q’eqchi’ practice sharing one’s xeel, roughly glossed as ‘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 xeel 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 xeel?” When I said that I always saved my xeel to share with the people with whom I lived, he replied, “For the Q’eqchi’, the xeel represents the importance of the family and of thinking of one’s family. To share with family is our ancestors’ oldest value.” Since the time of “our ancestors,” he said, “sharing has united Q’eqchi’ families.”

For the Q’eqchi’, the xeel embodies the way the Q’eqchi’ sustain family relationships. Sharing is the basic principle underlying the xeel and the way in which the Q’eqchi’ negotiate, maintain, and fortify kin relationships. The xeel creates 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 also the experiences that define daily life. 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.

The emphasis that Chamelqueños put on creating and maintaining kin ties through the sharing of one’s xeel reveals that family is Chamelco’s most valued institution. 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 high status positions. A municipal official explained that: “Good families are those that, although they are humble, although they come from very simple beginnings, still conserve their good traditions, good morals, and good understandings.” In other words, a “good” family is one that respects and practices the traditions of their ancestors, that does not create problems with friends or neighbors, and that is understanding of Q’eqchi’ value. By demonstrating these qualities, a family achieves recognition by creating a good reputation and high social status. Chamelqueños draw on their junkab’al’s reputation as the foundation of their personal identities.

Doña Rogelia, a close friend and lifelong marketer, elucidated the link between the junkab’al and personal identity. In Chamelco, she said, one’s own actions reflect the integrity of one’s junkab’al. For example, when a young woman marries, she must know how to handle daily domestic tasks,
such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry. In the past, the Q’eqchi’ widely practiced patrilocal residence. When the bride went to reside with her husband’s family after marriage, her in-laws expected her to have all the skills necessary to run a household. Rogelia described the series of rigorous tests that her in-laws put her through as a newlywed to demonstrate her worth. On one occasion, she recalled, they made her grind two pounds of dried chile by hand with a grinding stone. Although the chile powder burned her skin, nose, and throat, she endured this task to prove herself a capable wife. Had she failed to do so, it would have reflected badly on her family for not preparing her for adult life.

While one’s actions can harm one’s family’s reputation, they can also enhance it. An individual who earns prestige in the community by proving himself to be intelligent, generous, or of good character not only enhances his own identity, but also that of his junkab’al. For example, families in which one or more children graduate from high school or college gain status since Chamelqueños greatly value education. Likewise, the status women achieve through marketing extends to all members of their junkab’al. Other prestigious positions and titles, such as serving as prayer leaders in local churches or as ritual leaders in cofradías ‘saints’ day brotherhoods,’ also enhances both one’s personal identity and that of their junkab’al.

Returning to the logic of the junkab’al, we must consider how the Q’eqchi’ conceptualize and perform the shared substances that bind them as kin. While the Q’eqchi’ do use the notion of “shared blood” to establish kin relations, it is not the primary way that they do so. Instead, shared substance extends beyond mere consanguinity to include mutual cooperation, trust, and confidence. Don Rafael Can, 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.

Rafael elaborated that although systems of consanguineal and non-blood based kinship seem to oppose one another, they are based on the same underlying principle: solidarity. Q’eqchi’ families are based on solely 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. One local resident related that some people no longer consider a child who joined a gang or participated in violent crime as family. Another 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’, consanguine ties are fluid and dependent on continued support and solidarity built though participation in family life.

Thus, the Q’eqchi’ create shared substance of kinship by building solidarity, providing companionship, and cooperating with one another. Rafael Can 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…’ (Kistler 2010: 60–61).

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 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 relationships of shared substance (Carsten 2004b). 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. 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.” While marriage initiates a new junkab’al, the birth of children strengthens it.

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 junkab’als by establishing their own residence or by having children together. 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 in 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 and through their continued interaction. One’s own junkab’al is an extension of that of their parents, and they participate equally in each throughout their adult lives.

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, unite past and present junkab’als and 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
Table 1: Select Q’eqchi’ Kin Terminology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Q’eqchi’</th>
<th>Spanish</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>nab’ej</td>
<td>madre, suegra</td>
<td>mother, mother-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yuwab’ej</td>
<td>padre, suegro</td>
<td>father, father-in-law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b’eelomej</td>
<td>esposo</td>
<td>husband</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ixaqilb’ej</td>
<td>esposa</td>
<td>wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>yumej</td>
<td>hijo de mujer</td>
<td>son of a woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ko’b’ej</td>
<td>hija de mujer</td>
<td>daughter of a woman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>alalb’ej</td>
<td>hijo de hombre</td>
<td>son of a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rab’in’ej</td>
<td>hija de hombre</td>
<td>daughter of a man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kok’al</td>
<td>hijos general</td>
<td>sons and daughters</td>
</tr>
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<td>na’chinb’ej</td>
<td>abuela</td>
<td>grandmother</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wa’chinb’ej</td>
<td>abuelo</td>
<td>grandfather</td>
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<tr>
<td>iitz’inb’ej</td>
<td>hermano/a menor de</td>
<td>younger bro./sister of woman</td>
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<td></td>
<td>mujer/hombre</td>
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<tr>
<td>iitz’inb’ej</td>
<td>hermano/a menor de</td>
<td>younger bro. of man</td>
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<td>hombre</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>chaq’ na’b’ej</td>
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<td>older sister of a woman</td>
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<td>mujer</td>
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<tr>
<td>anab’ej</td>
<td>hermana mayor/menor</td>
<td>older/younger sister of man</td>
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<td>hombre/mujer</td>
<td>man/woman</td>
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<td>tío, tía</td>
<td>uncle, aunt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>iib’ej</td>
<td>nieto</td>
<td>grandson</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*I compiled this table using data collected from interviews and the official dictionary of the Q’eqchi’ branch of the Academy of Maya Languages Guatemala (Caal et al. 2004). In this table, I list the kinship terms in their unpossessed and undefined forms. When possessed, most Q’eqchi’ kinship terms take a prefix and lose the suffix –b’ej (see Kockelman 2007).

and support built through household life create the solidarity of kinship (Table 1).

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. 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.\textsuperscript{11}

In addition to adopted children, some Q’eqchi’ families include godchildren. Many Chamelqueños bring godchildren to live with them to honor the vows of godparenthood (see Vogt 1969) by providing them with improved educational and economic opportunities. Although they may study at night school or on the weekends, these young people work for their godparents or in other jobs during the day. Godsons provide manual labor, 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 justified her positions in Rogelia’s junkab’al by working with her in the market as well as in house (Figure 2). 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*. 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. Through household tasks, employees perform the shared substance of kinship. Like all members of Q’eqchi’ families, long-term domestic employees earn their place in the *junkab’al* by developing solidarity through participation in daily life.

Marketing serves as another means through which some Q’eqchi’ families perform shared substance and create the logic of the *junkab’al*. Through marketing, Chamelco’s women generate kinship both within and beyond the market. Many women identify several other market vendors as family based on their descent from a common ancestor or from kin ties developed through marketing itself. 79% of market women state that at least one family member also sells in the marketplace. Of these women, 38% claim two or more relatives among the population of market vendors, including their mothers, children, sisters, aunts, grandmothers, in-laws, and cousins, among other kin.

Many of contemporary marketers trace their houses’ histories back to the few women who sold in Chamelco’s original marketplace generations ago. One large network of vendors traces their house’s history back to the late Doña Selena Chen. Today, more than 23 of Dona Selena’s descendants have sold in the market. This phenomenon is not limited to this particular family, as there are several other large kin networks in the market today. These kin networks determine not only contemporary vendors’ commodity specializations, but also their physical location in the market as the stalls run by members of the same family are often grouped near each other. In this respect, market stalls serve as physical manifestations of the *junkab’al* in the market as well as inalienable family possessions (Weiner 1992).

Many market women also form kin ties with other vendors with whom they do not share common ancestors through the solidarity they develop through shared participation in market life. Regardless of shared ancestors, many market women use kin terms when referring to one another. They do so because they develop the shared substance of Q’eqchi’ kinship through the support and compassion they show each other in the market. Throughout my time in the market, I often saw women assist one another in a number of ways, sharing high quality goods for sale, filling in other stalls for absent owners rather than competing for clients, loaning money, and providing moral and physical support in times of need. Through these means, and through the shared experience of marketing, many vendors perform the shared substance of kinship.
Many women also perform the logics of the *junkab'al* in the market by developing kinship with clients and with others. The role that market women play in sustaining Q’eqchi’ families by providing them with reliable access to subsistence goods in the market often translates to friendship and kin ties with clients. Through the bonds of market exchange, vendors and their clients develop inextricable ties that connect them beyond the market (Piot 1999; Weiner 1992; Uzendoski 2004, 2005). Market women often serve as godparents to their clients’ children and become part of their families through *compadrazgo* ‘godparenthood’ and their involvement in family celebrations, ritual events, and daily life. Lending an ear in the market and providing support during clients’ times of need further cements their place as part of some clients’ families.

Another way that market women perform the logics of the Q’eqchi’ *junkab'al* in the market by using marketing to bring new members into their *junkab'al*s. Some women hire young men or women to assist them in their market stalls. Since market women’s houses are located in close proximity to the marketplace, market helpers often move in with them and their families. By sharing in market and household life, these individuals create the solidarity and share the experiences that ground Q’eqchi’ kinship.

A conversation with a lifelong vendor, Doña Blanca, explores how market women generate kinship in the market. She explained that for many years, a young boy lived and worked with her in her stall. She raised him and he shared her home until he married a few years ago. This boy became family, she said, by residing with her and working with her in the market, demonstrating the solidarity that grounds Q’eqchi’ kinship:

> We ate together at one table, we slept under one roof, we went to Cobán together, or if I had another commitment, he would go to my business. I would tell him, “Well take care of my customers, sell, I trust you.” And he would tell me, “Look, I paid this bill,” or “I bought such-and-such and thing because it sold out.” It was great. He was like my son.

While the boy entered the household as an employee and not through a consanguine tie to Blanca and her family, he became part of her *junkab'al* by sharing in household and market life. This example is just one of many that demonstrate that market women use commodity exchange to generate kinship in the market.

Nevertheless, while some household and market employees become a part of 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, 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. However, the limits of the land on which one lives, in addition to the house itself, often serve 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 shares her land with her grandmother, mother, and siblings, who occupy a separate dwelling. While Sara and her family identify each dwelling as a separate junkab’al divided by their physical structures despite their close proximity, others recognize them as a one family because they share land. Sara explained, however, that they refer to them not as a junkab’al, but as “wib’kab’alex [‘you (plural) are two families’]. They say this because we are two groups together, because the Can Cu family and the Cu Chen family both occupy the same land.” In other words, though they represent two distinct families, others define 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 wooden planks and 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 ritual and productive activity. For example, many Q’eqchi’ houses display religious altars in common living areas. These altars contain statues of Catholic saints, 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. The house is a locus of other activity, including hosting parties and receiving visitors on the weekend or during evenings.

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 preserve the household estate to ensure the things that define them as individuals and the junkab’al as a unit persist.

Nevertheless, although Chamelqueños state that any junkab’al member may inherit the junkab’al, in practice, they do not all receive equal access to it. The Q’eqchi’ consider some junkab’al members to be preferred 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 their house’s estates. 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 their closest 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 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. Longstanding residence in the house, rather than the blood ties, 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. Individuals living in the junkab’al the longest, or working in both the house and the market, become most closely associated with the house. As a result, they hold the highest positions within the junkab’al and become its preferred heirs.

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’al. 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 identified as the most “legitimate” marketers because their
market roles are supported by their family histories. Clients prefer to buy from these women and they have the greatest success, both in profit and status, in the market.

In contrast, women who enter the market independent of a junkab’al connection rarely achieve the same status as those women with longstanding family histories of participation in the market. Their lack of success stems in part from the fact that, in contrast to other vendors, their work in the market does not represent a continuation of their family histories. The prestige that women earn in the market comes not from financial wealth accumulated through marketing, but from the personal characteristics they exhibit in interactions with clients, their role in sustaining Q’eqchi’ families by providing them with access to subsistence goods, and their work in continuing the practices of their market ancestors (Kistler 2010). By continuing family histories in the market, women serve as embodiments of Q’eqchi’ values (Kistler 2010). Women who become vendors without a family history of market participation do not achieve the same status as others because their work is not a continuation of ancestral practice. The role of market histories in legitimizing marketers leads women to keep market positions within the junkabl’al, bequeathing market stalls and the rights to market only to junkab’al members (Figure 3).

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.

When selecting market heirs, market women use a variety of criteria. Family members 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 continue to define the junkab’al throughout successive generations.

Conclusion

To conclude, 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 with other vendors and clients, but family connections contribute to women’s 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.

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,
Ashley Kistler

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’al, or ‘estate’. Titles, vehicles, possessions, land rights, and other valuables constitute Q’eqchi’ junkab’als. 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’als. 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.

By revealing the junkab’al and market as mutually encompassing systems, this research reveals that the house is not merely a static entity, fixed in time and space to a specific location. Rather, the house 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 both within the home and beyond. 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 use pseudonyms for all participants in my research.
2 I 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 and opinions expressed herein.
3 “Shared substance” refers to the idea that a substance, such as blood, breast milk, food, or residence, links individuals as kin (Carsten 2004b:314).
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’al, a technical difference distinguishes them. The president of the Q’eqchi’ Academy of Mayan Languages explained that “the junkab’al are one’s belongings while the junkab’al is a group of people and their children.” Thus, junkab’al 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, and xeel 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 I was unable to record this conversation and instead reconstructed it from my field notes.

8 Junkab’als take their names from the last names of their founding members. For example, if Maria Tz’ib’ and Rafael Can married or established a new residence together, their junkab’al would be known 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.

9 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.

10 To officially adopt a child, parents file legal documents with the municipal government. Other families unofficially adopt by raising the child without filing paperwork.

11 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.

12 During such prayers, Chamelqueños pray out loud, in soft, murmured tones.

13 Some Q’eqchi’ men contribute little to the junkab’al, since they often hold no steady employment.

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