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FAMILY AND KINSHIP. Despite some cultural and temporal variations, widely shared kinship practices and organizing principles can be delineated and traced over time in Mesoamerica. Some of this homogeneity can be traced to Spanish colonialism. The adoption of Spanish bilateral kinship terminology, administrative policies affecting household size and organization, marriage, inheritance, and gender status, and changes to demographic patterns and economic structures all contributed to decreasing the size and importance of extrafamilial kinship units after the Spanish conquest. Nevertheless, many pre-Hispanic kinship principles and practices have continued into the present in traditional communities.

Kinship is a fundamental mechanism for organizing persons into groups, each with its own identity and property, and for creating personal networks among many individuals beyond these groups. Although families are the most visible kinship groups in contemporary Mesoamerica, kinship principles are integrated with the organization and operation of larger-order territorial and economic units. Kin relationships are integral to economic exchanges, social control, recruitment to religious organizations, and urban-rural migration patterns; in the past, kin-based structures played a more fundamental role in organizing all of society. Thus, kinship is not independent of the other factors that integrate persons within society. In Mesoamerica, kinship is intimately interconnected with locality (residence). In practice, a commitment among persons to work together for their mutual benefit within a household or other territorial unit may be as important as biological relationships in the formation of what are usually identified as "kinship" groups. As a strategy for social reproduction, kinship groups and kinlike relationships need not be restricted to persons linked by actual consanguineal (biological) or affinal (marriage) ties, nor are strict rules of descent, marriage, or inheritance imposed that may constrain people's opportunities to optimize their chances for survival. Although patrilineal (father-child) tendencies in descent and locality preference are typical, there is always an element of choice in relationships based on kin ties.

The family is the basic unit for the organization of la-

bor and for the transmission of practical knowledge in traditional communities. More fundamentally, it is the primary focus of loyalty and mutual support and is the major source of social identity and personhood. Names are important symbols of social identity based on kin group membership. Personal names are sometimes passed down through family lines and are bestowed at baptisms or similar familial rites, some of which existed in the pre-Hispanic era. Patronyms (surnames inherited from the father) are commonly employed to indicate membership within a larger network of kin, forming name groups that are often exogamous (out-marrying) as an expression of the closeness of their members' relationships to one another. Name groups also existed prior to Spanish contact, especially among the Maya, and have sometimes been confused with lineages.

Names may also be bestowed based on residence, so that toponyms (place names) which function like surnames are adopted by everyone residing within a locality, whether or not they are kin; this may obscure the distinction between kin ties and co-residence as a mechanism for group membership. Non-kin may be accepted as members based on their cooperation in economic and ritual activities, in effect becoming "fictive" kin through their participation and joint investment in the success of the unit. By their contribution to the agricultural labor needed to sustain the group, and to the ritual activities that maintain the group's spiritual well-being, they effectively express the relationships to others that are expected of kin (and by the same token, actual relatives who refuse to contribute to the group's well-being may be obliged to relinquish membership).

Another ancient and widespread means of expressing group membership and identity is to consider kin group members as descendants of the same ancestors, although it is usually not necessary to trace actual genealogical ties to founding ancestors. The demonstration of a group's common origins is accomplished instead through the curation and ritual veneration of property believed to have been acquired by the ancestors, including land and water rights, heirloom objects, the actual remains of the dead (which in the past were often interred in or near the residence), and

such nontangible property as the names and even souls of predecessors. Most domestic groups erect a shrine in the form of an altar or cross for family devotions to ancestors or other spirit guardians. There is a common belief that the house itself contains a soul or spirit, which must be ritually sustained and which is metaphysically linked to the well-being of family members. Evidence for the antiquity of these beliefs includes the archaeological recovery in residential contexts of burials, heirloom items, and objects of ritual use such as bloodletters and figurines, as well as epigraphic and ethnohistoric information on the transfer of names through family lines.

The principal indicators of kinship organization are terminological systems, kin group types, and customs pertaining to marriage, residence, and inheritance. In Mesoamerica, bilateral terminologies are most common, and this was apparently the case even before Spanish contact. Bilaterality reveals a structural equivalence of



Young Tepehuán couple with child in Durango, Mexico. Photograph courtesy of Michael Hale.

males and females in the construing of descent ties to their progeny, and it results in a greater emphasis on the coalescence of cognatic rather than unilineal descent groups. Typically, lineal distinctions are made in kin terms for the parents' and children's generations, while cousins and siblings may be called by the same term (a system ethnographers call the Hawaiian type of kin terminology). Indigenous kin terms are frequently differentiated by the sex of the speaker as well as that of the referent, and by the relative age of speaker and referent, indicating the importance of gender and age differences in the operation of relationships among close kin. These differences are also exhibited in the authority and gender structure within families. Elder males typically command the obedience of younger members, which is a frequent source of conflict where the former control family-owned agricultural land. Although male and female children may have equivalent inheritance rights to some property, a patrilineal bias in the transmission of surnames and the control of agricultural land by males are typical. Men and women contribute differently to the household through their complementary labors, so that both genders are necessary for social production; women are responsible for domestic tasks, including weaving, and men for the bulk of agricultural work and some specialized crafts. The Highland Maya area today exhibits far greater variation in kinship terminology than the rest of Mesoamerica, including the Omaha type reported in some Tzeltal and Tzotzil communities. In this kin terminology system, most of the mother's male relatives are referred to by the same term, obscuring generational differences and treating them as a collectivity. The Maya area also has the most instances of the few reported unilineal descent groups.

The basic kin group type is the nuclear family, which may form an independent household. Still today, and much more so in the past, nuclear families are constituents of extended (joint, multiple) families that function as corporate groups. They tend to own or manage agricultural land in common, efficiently pooling the labor of several adult males. The extended family members who form a single consumption unit or domestic group may co-reside as one household with walls erected to separate the nuclear families; or the individual nuclear families may have separate dwellings, often spatially contiguous within a cluster or compound. Such dwelling clusters have been found archaeologically, indicating the longevity of this family type. Even where the nuclear families maintain their own households and budgets, they may cooperate in agricultural labors as a non-residential extended family. The extended family ideally is composed of three generations: a spousal couple with their married sons, who bring their wives into the family (virilocality), and their grandchildren; the adult daughters marry out. However,

other compositions are not uncommon, including the inclusion of sons-in-law, widows, and collateral kin into the extended family.

The composition of the extended family is best understood as the outcome of a developmental cycle. The "Mesoamerican developmental cycle of domestic groups," as described by David Robichaux (1997), typically begins with virilocal postmarital residence, as men bring their wives to their father's domestic group until they can establish their own residences, usually near the husband's parents (viri-neolocality). It culminates with the death of the parents and the inheritance of their dwelling by the youngest son. Although this pattern is widespread, variations exist to allow for the exigencies of individual situations, such as a lack of sons, insufficient agricultural land, or the varying market value of men's and women's labor. Another major source of temporary variation in this cycle is the practice of bride service, especially in the Maya area; in the past, this practice required a new husband to live with his wife's family for one or more years before he could bring her to his parent's home (uxori-virilocality).

In the past, young men in many parts of Mesoamerica would live in segregated men's houses prior to marriage, which was typically arranged with the aid of matchmakers, usually in the service of the groom's family. Today, elopement as an alternative to arranged marriage is more common. In addition to bride service, specialized objects were once commonly exchanged between the bride's and groom's households to confirm the marriage. Polygyny, most likely more widespread in the past, is still known, but it represents a tiny fraction of all marriages. Divorce or separation is not uncommon. With the exception of incest prohibitions, other formal marriage rules are generally lacking; however, some customary subdivisions (*barrios*) are endogamous (in-marrying) or exogamous (out-marrying). Local communities tend to be endogamous in practice.

Although unilineal descent groups were never a dominant organization in Mesoamerica, in the pre-Hispanic period long-lived cognatic corporate groups controlled land and resources, including labor, primarily among the nobility. Members of the noble estate were organized into groups often referred to in the native languages as "houses," which were structurally equivalent to the noble houses of feudal Europe. The heads of noble houses were the lords and rulers, and the houses were apparently considered related to one another in terms of real or fictive kinlike ties. Houses maintained tangible and intangible property over many generations through the recruitment of new members via both marriage and descent, so that some property rights were obtained and held through women as well as men. In some cases, commoners were attached as hereditary clients to the various noble houses.

The best evidence for noble houses (e.g., *teccalli* in Nahuatl) is in Nahua Central Mexico and the Maya area.

Larger territorial units—the customary subdivisions or wards of communities and *municipios*—were also organized by means that parallel or overlap with kinship ties. Various local terms, the subdivision typically combines elements of kinship and locality, although there are some non-localized groupings. These subdivisions provide for social and economic interactions among their members, including the same benefits that family members would provide for one another, such as sharing food and labor. These units are also a source of status and identity, and membership may be by birth or marriage within a particular subdivision, or by other demonstrated kin ties to subdivision members. Like families, some subdivisions have their own symbolic identifiers in the form of group shrines, shared surnames, or the expressed belief in a common origin. Although some subdivisions have overt societal roles—such as the sponsorship of religious cults or the regulation of marriage—their function as a means of establishing bonds of relatedness among multiple domestic groups may lie dormant for long periods, to be triggered only by certain events over which intracommunity factions emerge. Many communities, especially in the Maya area, are described as being organized into dual *barrios*, which tend to be endogamous.

Fictive kinship as ritual co-parenthood (*compadrazgo*) is yet another means of creating a kinlike relationship between two or more families for various purposes. Although the *compadrazgo* system is a Spanish introduction, there is evidence for the pre-Hispanic practice of choosing "godparents" as sponsors for children during baptismal or puberty rites in both Central Mexico and Yucatán. It fits within the general practice of extending kinlike ties to others in the community as a means of enlarging personal networks for strategic purposes.

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FARMING. See *Agriculture and Chinampa Agriculture*.

FASTING. Refraining from food and water is practiced by many indigenous groups throughout Mesoamerica as part of ceremonial life, but the topic has not been studied extensively. Fasting falls under the broader ethnological category of sacrifice, about which there is an abundant literature. This brief essay describes several forms of fasting observed by ethnographers and considers possible explanations for the practice.

Fasting is not simply the refusal to eat; it includes restrictions such as drinking water only at night, consuming food only at a specific time, and omitting salt or chile from all food. Sexual abstinence frequently accompanies fasting, and both may be observed for periods as short as three days or as long as a year. Fasting is conditioned by age, gender, kinship ties, social position, and specific ceremonial contexts. For example, sometimes these restrictions are required of persons before they assume ritual posts or perform specific ceremonial obligations. Fasting and sexual abstinence are often observed by all participants in certain rituals—such as those performed to bring rain for planting maize or to end a drought—by those departing on pilgrimages to sacred places, and among extended kinship networks during curing ceremonies. These practices may be necessary before people ingest ritual foods or other substances and before they handle ritual objects or religious images.

It is instructive to consider why various forms of fasting and sexual abstinence are so widespread. In Mesoamerican cultures, human action is regarded as a necessary complement to divine and natural forces in order to achieve specific objectives, such as the beginning or cessation of annual rains, the productivity of cultivated plants, harmonious relations between the living and the dead, and fertility among humans and domestic animals. All the components of a ceremony—special foods and flowers, weavings and clothing, candles and incense, fireworks, particular forms of music and dance, and so on—constitute ceremonial offerings in themselves. The overall efficacy of each ceremonial event depends on the proper execution of its complex, interrelated parts.

Some ethnographic data suggest that fasting and sexual abstinence protect humans against natural and supernatural forces that reside in sacred places or that may be released in certain ceremonies. It is significant that these prohibitions most often accompany rituals concerned with diverse aspects of production and reproduction in agriculture, those for preserving or restoring health, and those associated with diurnal or seasonal changes in nature. My research suggests that many Mesoamerican ritu-