

Yuhknoom Ch'een: on his midriff, they placed an heirloom jade jewel (fig. 6) from the era of Sihyaj K'ahk' depicting the image of a king's upper torso, trifurcate blood and gore flowing from it in the manner of the primordial sacrifices that generated the seas.

In the era of Sihyaj K'ahk', larger-than-life versions of this mythical sacrificed king in stucco ornamented the North Acropolis of Tikal, where he had killed the Tikal king and replaced him in 378 CE soon after his arrival at Waka'. Yuhknoom Ch'een brought with him as a gift a set of figurines depicting himself, K'abel, an old howling shaman woman, dwarfs, a hunchback, men and women courtiers, and most significantly, the old king being prayed over by a magical deer wearing the green jewel of breath and life. Chijchan, a deer spirit, was companion and coessence of Kaan lords. Often portrayed as a man with deer antlers, this version was represented by one of the dwarfs wearing the deer as a headdress and carrying a tiny ceramic conch trumpet. The great healing deer is hornless and wearing the short wrap of a female. She is the companion of K'abel, who stands next to her in the funeral. The portly old king wears the coiffure and jewels of Maize, the resurrected god, and a tiny socket and leaves on his head show where a little feather once marked his sprouting. The old king and deer emerge and rise from a square effigy mirror; the real mirror is placed above the head of the deceased. The new king, carrying an enema clyster of his god Akan in the funeral, would be renamed K'inich Bahlam after Sihyaj K'ahk's vassal. Yuhknoom Ch'een went on to conquer Tikal in 657 CE, presumably with his new

vassal. Months later, K'inich Bahlam II planted his first stela directly in front of his father's tomb. It marked the completion of his first k'atun of life and also Yuhknoom Ch'een II's first k'atun of rule.

War, sacrifice, marriage, gift exchange are implicated in this story. K'abel ruled as Kaloomte', superior to her husband but devoted to Waka' as well as Kaan. As a princess, she wore a gift jade mosaic mask, insignia of Kaan, in her hair. She wore it again in 672 in a stela portrait, and after 702 in death in her tomb. Relational economics bound these kingdoms and others in the Classic Maya world's only brief empire (see Freidel and Rich 2010, 2018; Freidel, Rice, and Rich, forthcoming; Freidel et al. 2021; Rich and Eppich 2020; Rich and Freidel, forthcoming; Rich et al. 2010).

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Harrison-Buck delves into controversies of competing economic models to argue the merits of a "relational economy," promoted by sociologist Vivian Zelizer and considered applicable to virtually all economies. This model directs analysts to investigate the mutually interdependent "constitutive relations" inherent in an act of exchange. It elides thereby an artificial divide between social and economic relations epitomized in the dichotomy of gift and commodity economies (Gregory 1982), an issue also addressed in anthropology (e.g., Appadurai 1986; Godelier 1999; Myers 2001; Strathern 1988; Thomas 1991; Weiner 1992). The author's case study applies this model to asymmetrical reciprocal exchange events among the Classic Maya, specifically marriage and warfare, as evident in imagery and hieroglyphic inscriptions. Her additional contribution is to include nonhuman "prestige goods" as relational beings that were also "mutually constituted and generative" together with humans in exchange acts.

My comment highlights two points for further attention. One draws from the author's brief remarks on the "fluid and changing nature of prestige goods," citing Appadurai (1986). "Gift" and "commodity" are not static entities but vacillating statuses within an object's social life (Appadurai 1986:12–13; Kopytoff 1986). Thus, we must follow "things in motion" (Appadurai 1986:5) in different regimes of value (15). This proposition hints at a Heraclitean view of reality, whereby all phenomena undergo constant change, requiring interventions to temporarily stabilize. Fields of action on which actants' subjectivities and objectivities depend are dynamic and mutable. A person or thing can be inalienable in one situation and a fungible commodity in another.

In Maya and Mesoamerican cosmology, reality devolves precisely on "process, movement, change, and transformation," a "process metaphysics" in which processes are ontologically fundamental (Maffie 2014:12). Harrison-Buck mentions one such process, *jaloj-k'exoj* (Carlsen and Prechtel 1991:25–26;



Figure 6. Early Classic heirloom greenstone figure of the upper half of a sacrificed ruler with the left eye gouged and patched. Photo by Juan Carlos Perez, courtesy of the Ministry of Culture and Sports of Guatemala and the Waka Archaeological Project.

Gillespie 2002:73), a dynamic cycle of death and continuity of life that, she observes, loses its suite of meanings if limited to mere economic exchange.

Adopting a process metaphysics raises certain issues, such as treating wife giving as a “sacrificial” act in isolated exchange events rather than as a cascading, consequential process. Marriage is not a one-off exchange but an acknowledgment of the past and an investment in the future. Daughters and sisters are not lost so much as on loan to wife receivers—they are kept while given away (Weiner 1992). Wife providers claim returns on their investments in ritual prestations due especially at life crisis events, including funerals—where they may also claim the body of their consanguine—but also in the continuation of their line through resulting children, the process of *k'ex*. Although marriage might dissolve “former alliances,” as Harrison-Buck asserts, more often alliances are transgenerational as ongoing processes.

Furthermore, exchange relationships between two entities are predicated on contrast or difference, requiring “a process of differentiation” (McKinnon 1991:35; emphasis in original). The specific process of differentiation provides the potential for hierarchy (35). One such process is gender, a complementary code activated in various relationships among intermarrying houses. Wife provider and receiver houses are gendered male or female in relation to each other within larger processes by which the objects and persons exchanged by them are also gendered (McKinnon 1991). Gender in Mesoamerica is fluid and is better understood as a process of gendering (Gillespie 2013; Joyce 2000), not a fixed or inherent category (Strathern 1988).

While Harrison-Buck acknowledges the gendered status of bridewealth such as cacao and cotton cloth, she emphasizes static iconic or indexical properties for these attributions, rather than an ongoing process of differentiation within a more encompassing cultural logic, as Joyce and I (Gillespie and Joyce 1997) sought to accomplish in our analysis. Still to be addressed are the complementary and contrasting items gendered male that are proffered by the wife providers in these situations (202) and the ongoing processes whereby houses try to eventually reclaim their property.

For these things are only “loaned rather than sold and ceded,” especially the inalienable sacra integral to house identity and parted with, “if at all, only with reluctance” (Mauss 1954:42). As Weiner (1992) observed, the paradox of the process of “keeping while giving” is that it “creates an illusion of conservatism . . . a vision of permanence into a social world that is always in the process of change” (8) even as it promotes further change. Thus, historical time is salient because of the futural aspects of exchange (Bourdieu 1977:5), and the materiality of exchanged objects and persons involves entropy and other transformative processes. Marriage exchanges, warfare, and similar means of accruing fame and fortune are strategic and forward-looking. They make history even as that history is carefully curated and referenced to provide a sense of stability.

This brings up the second item that calls for more development, namely, the subjectivation or agency of nonhumans

alongside the humans being exchanged. Harrison-Buck considers prestige goods as relational beings that were “mutually constituted and generative” in exchange contexts. What is their ontological status? As Mauss (1954) put it: “The given is not inert. It is alive and personified” (10). In particular, inalienable objects that compose the house sacra are “personalities” and are “themselves beings” (42). Maya art historians have long recognized the personhood—or godhood—of certain objects claimed by aristocratic houses by the addition of little faces or divine insignia indicating their transcendent power (e.g., Schele and Miller 1986).

However, Harrison-Buck is suggesting that nonmarked objects, including commodified-looking sacks of cacao beans and bundles of cloth, acted alongside humans as mutually constitutive and generative in exchange acts. How they compare to the explicitly personified sacra should prove quite interesting, especially because they may stretch the categorical boundaries of prestige goods. Are they expendable, consumable, or perishable duplicates of the unique sacra? Does their agency in these contexts devolve from their production rather than from inherent qualities? How does their subjecthood compare with that of both humans and nonhuman house property since subjecthood and objecthood are not monolithic statuses? Do they function as mediators or, alternatively, as intermediaries in these social fields (*sensu* Latour 2005:35)? Expanding the implications of a relational economy model beyond individual acts of exchange to account for historical and ontological processes such as these would strengthen its analytical utility.

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In previous publications, Harrison-Buck (2015, 2017; Harrison-Buck, Runngaldier, and Gantos 2018) has challenged established understandings of the ancient Maya by applying relational approaches to a variety of domains such as pilgrimage, ritual, and gender. The current paper extends this exciting and creative line of inquiry to two forms of transactions: royal marriages and the exchange of captives for tribute. For Harrison-Buck, these transactions pertain to a relational economy. This approach moves away from the notion that social relations constrain economic activity and toward the idea that society and economy are mutually constitutive. Royal marriages and ransomed captives certainly lend themselves to such an approach, and others (Tokovinine 2020) recognize the connections that Harrison-Buck sees in these two exchanges. But a skeptic might say that certain anthropologists have always recognized the sociality at the core of such exchanges. That same skeptic might also say that these exchanges are quite distant from the daily activities that comprise the bulk of an “economy” and that the real proving ground for the value of a relational economy approach would be quotidian affairs like hunting, tending a