

## **Gender, Male Homosexuality, and Power in Colonial Yucatán**

*by*  
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Scholars have been studying the history of homosexuality for two decades, but only rarely have they ventured beyond the study of homosexuality in modern Europe and the United States. In the past several years, others have begun to challenge the Eurocentric biases of these works. One set of issues often overlooked by both Latin American historians and historians of homosexuality in general is the connection between homoeroticism, colonialism, and discourse among the Maya of Yucatán. Examining the colonial years, one can establish a variety of power dynamics at work. The Spaniards asserted their own power in an attempt to create an effective labor force made up primarily of Yucatec Maya (see Patch, 1993), while Maya nobles maintained power over the populations under their control (see Roys, 1943; Quezada, 1993: 125-138; Restall, 1997). I suggest that gender and homosexuality were central to power dynamics in the colonial situation.

The few major works on homosexuality in colonial Latin America have focused on the building of community, the berdache in indigenous societies, and the use of discourse (see Sigal, 2002). Historians have found that, in colonial Brazil and Mexico, men found other men who wanted to have sex with them. In urban environments these men engaged in a wide variety of sexual activities and even formed their own subcultures with their own rules of engagement (see Gruzinski, 1985; Mott, 1989). The berdache, a cross-dressing Native American figure, has intrigued anthropologists for the past century. While most of the scholarship has related to nineteenth-century North America (see Roscoe, 1998), many academics have assumed that the berdache existed in colonial and preconquest Latin American indigenous societies. Indeed, such a cross-dressing figure does appear to have existed, but his meaning is in dispute (see Trexler, 1995; Horswell, 2002). Early modern Europeans engaged in some discussion of homosexuality, and scholars have begun to analyze this discourse. This article expands on this scholarship by attempting to understand indigenous discourse as well.

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LATIN AMERICAN PERSPECTIVES, Issue 123, Vol. 29 No. 2, March 2002 24-40  
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Homosexuality was not an undifferentiated sexual identity in the colonial era. The distinction between the “active” and the “passive” was particularly strongly marked, and there existed a variety of theories regarding the putative “causes” of “sodomy,” itself defined in an imprecise and seemingly obscure manner (see Bleys, 1995; Sigal, 2002). Elites in Hispanic societies used concepts of male passivity to structure a gendered discourse of warfare (see Bleys, 1995; Trexler, 1995: 38-63). To discredit their enemies, they charged them with sodomitic passivity. Some of this discourse assumed commoners guilty of endemic sodomy. Alternatively, commoners were seen as lacking sodomy precisely because they were not as corrupt as the elite. Whichever view was taken, the sexual ethos asserted a marked sexual difference between elites and commoners.

Elites among the Maya considered passivity in males feminine and viewed the vanquished warrior as symbolically if not actually passive. The Maya nobles, lords, and priests at the time of the Spanish conquest used this notion of activity and passivity to assert their ability to harness the powers of the gods for community well-being. They ritualistically raped the gods, thus asserting themselves as the active partners to the passive gods. The Maya appear to have viewed this act as a way to harness sacred power. Maya elite discourse did not place commoners in the realm of endemic sodomy but viewed them as blind followers of the nobles. Thus, when the elites were corrupt, sodomy reigned throughout society. When “good” nobles came to power, sodomy was curtailed, perhaps to nonexistence. This discourse asserted that the commoners were followers of the nobles and that the central issue was not commoner sexuality but noble control.<sup>1</sup>

In both the Spanish and the Maya case, notions of same-sex sexual desires and behaviors were constructed in a gendered universe to assert the superiority of one elite faction over another. What was at stake in this discourse was nothing less than the establishment of a hegemonic ideology. This article analyzes the place that homosexual desires and acts were given in the literature of both the Maya and the Spaniards in colonial Yucatán.

### THE SETTING

Yucatán was not an ideal place for a Spaniard to live. Lacking in the mineral wealth of Peru or the extensive tribute mechanisms of central Mexico, the Yucatecan economy left much to be desired. Still, many Spaniards settled in the cities of Mérida, Campeche, and Valladolid and attempted to establish

themselves as overlords to the Maya who lived there. But this was not to be. Relatively low numbers of Spanish immigrants, economic pressures, periodic Maya resistance, and, perhaps most important, Maya understandings of European ideas within a Maya cultural framework prevented them from establishing hegemony over Yucatán (see Farriss, 1984; Clendinnen, 1987; Jones, 1989). Nonetheless, while no real cultural conquest seems to have taken place, the Spaniards influenced Maya culture through vast changes in the systems of meaning that the Maya used to make sense of the world.<sup>2</sup> As indigenous culture and religion took on Spanish and Christian elements, Maya rituals allowed for the survival of a mixed tradition at least through the middle of the nineteenth century (see Bricker, 1981).<sup>3</sup> Thus what happened to the Maya may more appropriately be called the development of a hybrid culture after some centuries of struggles for hegemony.

When discussing a topic such as the sexual culture of the Maya people, one may be tempted to ignore colonial rule and Spanish influence, assuming that the Spaniards were not as concerned with sexual culture as they were with economics and religion. But colonialism always necessitated some cultural changes on the part of the colonized peoples. Many of these changes were gradual, influenced by contact between individuals from different cultural groups (see, e.g., Farriss, 1984: 286-351; Restall, 1997). The changes among the Maya influenced the meanings placed on sexual behaviors. The Spanish introduced the concept of sin, changing the ways in which the Maya may have defined certain sexual acts (Sigal, 2000: 53-61). At the same time, the Maya influenced the new hybrid culture, often not by actively resisting Spanish intrusion into this sphere but by continuing to engage in many traditional practices even as these practices were being reconceived in a Hispanic Catholic framework.<sup>4</sup> Even the most traditional practices were changed, however, and more customs were inscribed with new meaning.<sup>5</sup>

Colonialism influenced homosexual practices and desires by reconfiguring the cultural matrix within which those practices and desires were formulated. To the Maya, Spanish colonization meant slow and subtle change leading to a hybrid culture that mixed traditional Maya and Spanish concepts (see especially Farriss, 1984; Clendinnen, 1987; and, on the meaning of "hybridity," Vattimo, 1988: 153-162). The hybridity changed meaning by, for example, asserting that sodomy was both sinful and accepted as part of colonial Maya ritual, the apparent contradiction being resolved by the ritual itself. Colonialism produced a new and different culture within which the Maya could assert meanings and understand homosexual acts and desires.

### COLONIAL POWER

When the Spaniards colonized Yucatán in the sixteenth century, they did not effectively penetrate much of the countryside. The rural areas remained, for the time being, essentially Maya territory. Even by the middle of the nineteenth century, much of the peninsula remained in Maya hands, despite the presence of a few creoles and mestizos (see Rugeley, 1996: 1-32). The rural economy, with a few exceptions, simply was not strong enough to attract significant numbers of non-Maya people. The Hispanic population centered in the three main cities. The early Spanish settlers wanted to make the Maya an effective labor force and to attract as many Europeans as possible, for a larger European population would enhance their status by giving them “seniority” over later arrivals. It is in this context that the documents discussing homosexual acts must be read.

In contemporary stories about Mayans, literate early modern Spaniards read that Bernal Díaz del Castillo (1989: 7-8) had found many idols of men committing sodomy with each other. Díaz, writing from Guatemala late in his life, intended his work to counterbalance Hernando Cortés’s self-presentation as the great hero of the conquest. He wanted the crown and the Spanish public to know that he and the other conquerors had distinguished themselves in battle (see Brading, 1991: 46-54). Attempting to correct a perceived wrong, he insisted that his account of the conquest was accurate, and the idols that he found (and smashed) were details that legitimated his narrative.

Contemporaries may also have read the *Relaciones Histórico-Geográficas*. These documents—surveys that, from 1579 to 1581, were sent by the crown to local Spaniards—were of varying degrees of accuracy, but most of them agreed that sodomy did not exist among the Maya of Yucatán. Antonio Gaspar Chi provided much of the testimony on Maya morality (De la Garza et al., 1983: 165), and, apparently wanting to be accepted in Spanish society, he attempted to make the Maya acceptable to Spanish eyes (Jakeman, 1952: 38-39; Clendinnen, 1987: 94). He told a story of a time when sodomy had existed, only to be destroyed by the lord Tutul Xiu (De la Garza et al., 1983: 165):

These natives did not eat human flesh, nor did they know the nefarious sin as in other parts of the Indies. It is said that in the time of a Xiu lord, they had punished this sin by casting those found guilty in a burning furnace, and that today this furnace exists in the ancient city of Mayapán . . . where the said Tutul Xiu lived and commanded the land.

The narrative suggested to the Spaniards that the Maya system of morality was not too different from their own; sodomy, connected with cannibalism, was punished by death. Chi, a relatively Hispanicized Maya (see Jakeman, 1952: 38-39; Clendinnen, 1987: 94), knew that the Spaniards considered sodomy sinful and therefore presented the preconquest Maya in such a way as to increase their prestige. In doing so he supported his own position as a legitimate leader of a society that, he would have argued, the Spaniards should have seen as noble.

A similar example, written over a century later, exists in the writings of Diego López de Cogolludo (1954), often considered the primary early historian of Yucatán. Cogolludo wrote extensively of the conquest and early settlement of Yucatán but had little to say about Maya sexual behavior. Like other early historians, he was more interested in economics, politics, and religion. When he did provide such descriptions, however, he tended to present them as the authoritative word on the Maya. He balanced Díaz del Castillo's findings on sodomy with the assertion of the Spaniard Gerónimo de Aguilar, who had lived for eight years as a Maya captive, that the "nefarious sin" did not exist in Maya society (Cogolludo, 1954: 329). This strategy—balancing one "expert" against another—was an attempt to convince readers of the objectivity of his account. For Cogolludo what was important was his own expertise on Maya laws and customs, and he did not find any laws that pertained to sodomy (see Cogolludo, 1954: 331, on the laws regarding adultery).

In each case people were using their understanding of colonial Spanish sexual norms to suggest a similarity with or difference from Maya preconquest sexuality in order to gain power in the colonial system. For each writer, the hegemonic power to create sexual definitions was an important point of the narrative. The nineteenth-century traveler/anthropologist Charles Etienne Brasseur de Bourbourg (1857-1859: 67, 77, 173, cited in Bleys, 1995: 122) reported that sodomy was present in the founding myths of several of the Mayan peoples, where it was said to belong to outsiders or to the realm of ritual. Long before the Spanish conquest, he said, the Olmecs, in conquering the Quiché Maya of Guatemala, had demanded that the people give them two young men for the purpose of sodomy, and the people had had no choice but to give in to this demand. In Yucatán during the same time period, there was a strong association between ritual and homosexual behavior, and when the Toltecs arrived to conquer the region they had brought more sodomy and public sex of all kinds.

A Maya-language text contextualized by a series of Spanish-language texts from the Inquisition also shows how stories of homosexual desire were used to assert colonial power. This document, which reached the offices of

the Inquisition in 1774, used extraordinarily explicit sexual language in accusing four priests of improprieties and contrasted them with Maya people (Archivo General de la Nación, México (Inquisición) [hereafter AGN-I], 1187, 2, 59-62):

Only the priests are allowed to fornicate without so much as a word about it. If a good commoner does that, the priest always punishes him immediately. But look at the priests' excessive fornication, putting their hands on these whores' vaginas, even saying mass like this. God willing, when the English come may they not be fornicators equal to these priests, who only lack carnal acts with men's anuses. God willing that smallpox be rubbed into their penis heads. Amen.

I, father, the informer of the truth.<sup>6</sup>

This text as a whole represented an attack on the priests, its author turning the rules of Christianity against the representatives of the church (see Restall and Sigal, 1992; Restall, 1997; Sigal, 2000: 63-73). The Inquisition case of which this document is part involved a Franciscan friar, Fray Manuel Antonio de Rivas, who had been accused of various improprieties. The four priests discussed in the petition were actively involved in the case against the friar. Rivas was accused of making "heretical propositions." He was also accused of the "nefarious sin," but this accusation disappeared early in the case. The document in question was part of the defense case, and it is likely that its production was influenced by Rivas. The argument was used to defend Rivas, and the petition was received soon after he was charged with sodomy. The anonymous author of the text seems to have decided that he could not charge the four priests with homosexual sodomy, perhaps because that charge was being used against his sponsor and would have seemed fabricated under the circumstances.

Taken at face value, the claim reveals the author's jealousy. He wanted the priests brought back inside the community. There was a symbolically homoerotic/homosocial desire, however unconscious, on the part of the male members of the community. The priests had become outsiders to the community, and the petitioner wanted them to regain their status as insiders. He wanted them to penetrate the community and his own heart—to give him the attention given to the women.

Of course, the conscious motivation for the petition was to defend a particular friar. The charge of homosexual sodomy was used on both sides of the argument, in both cases in order to assert power and gain prestige. In an accompanying note, an Inquisition official in Mérida called the charges against the priests "audacious" and "unfounded" (AGN-I, 1187, 2, 62). The

fact that some Maya people involved themselves in power struggles where the results would probably have little effect on them highlights the displacement strategy of colonialism. By getting the Maya involved in these types of disputes, supposedly to curb abuses against them, the Spaniards displaced much anticolonial fervor. The colonial authorities remained uncriticized as the Maya engaged in a battle that was largely irrelevant to colonial rule and to their lives (see also Stern, 1982: 115-119; Kellogg, 1995: 214-215).

All of these documents represent Spanish attempts to write history on the basis of material desires and constraints that have much more to do with Spanish society than with the Maya. They show the ways in which colonialism made use of a particular sexual paradigm. Homosexual desires and acts were used to assert power in the Spanish colonial political system.

### ETHNICITY

Maya society at the time of the Spanish conquest was organized in terms of the *cah*, a largely independent city-state usually in alliance with other such states (see Restall, 1997). Many centuries before the conquest, the various Mayan peoples were organized into kingdoms dominated by a few central cities (see Fash, 1991; McAnany, 1995). The Maya left most of the pyramids and the cities surrounding them about A.D. 900 (see Hammond, 1982; Coe, 1987). By the time the Spaniards arrived, all these attempts had failed, and Maya ethnic identification was closely aligned with the city-state (see Quezada, 1993: 32-38; Restall, 1997).

However, there were some hints of a broader perception of ethnicity. The *Books of Chilam Balam* discuss the differences between the Itzá and the Xiu in detail (see Edmonson 1982: xvi-xx). The Itzá were most often considered despised outsiders, members of a different ethnic group heavily influenced by central Mexico (Coe, 1987: 144). Large parts of the *Books of Chilam Balam* were diatribes against the Itzá.<sup>7</sup>

A central role was reserved for sexual insults against them. In one case they were said to have stolen the anuses of children and committed sodomy with them (Fontes Rerum Mexicanarum, 1980: 6r; Edmonson, 1982: 84). In other cases homosexual sodomy, divided into active and passive roles, was used to assert the difference between the perceived Maya "self" and the "other," seen as someone with a Nahuatl name, thus influenced by central Mexico and likely of Itzá descent. A certain preconquest era was said to have ended because of the misdeeds of two lords, Kak u pacal and Tecuilu (Gordon, 1913: 6r; Barrera Vásquez and Rendón, 1948: 72; Roys, 1967: 141; Edmonson, 1986: 61). Kak u pacal was translated as "fiery glance," and

Tecuilu came from the Nahuatl *tecuilonti*, meaning “the active partner in the act of sodomy” (Molina, 1992: 16).<sup>8</sup> The active partner in the act of sodomy was given a name from Nahuatl, perhaps signifying his role as an outsider and a conqueror from or influenced by central Mexico.

For the Maya the difference between the active and the passive partner was central. The active partner was viewed symbolically as a paragon of masculinity: he was the conqueror, the victor in warfare. While he might be denigrated if he came from a hated group, his masculinity was affirmed by his conquest. When the discourse was related to warfare, the evidence of a hierarchical active/passive dichotomy was very strong. A Chontal Maya town is named Cuylonemiquia, “the killing of the passive partner in sodomy” (Scholes and Adams, 1938: 91). Here space was used as a marker of sodomy as well as a marker of war (Trexler, 1995: 74). In warfare the difference between the active and the passive sodomite was tantamount to the difference between the winner and the loser. Thus, in the above case, Tecuilu was the winner, the conqueror, and the Chontal Maya town was perceived symbolically as the place where an enemy was defeated.

Another place-name mentioned in the anonymous Inquisition petition certified the relationship between sexual desire, stratification, and space. Pencuyut, “the fornicating coyote,” is a Yucatecan town (AGN-I, 1187, 2, 61). This place-name may have presented the coyote, a symbolic representative of the Nahuas, as either the active partner and thus the winner or the passive partner and the loser (the name, which has no grammatical markers, might in fact be extended to “where we fornicated with the coyotes”). Either way the ethnic distinction was marked by a division between active and passive sexual functions.

In another situation, the prophet Chilam Balam stated (Gordon, 1913: 107; Barrera Vásquez and Rendón, 1948: 202-203; Roys, 1967: 168-169; Edmonson, 1986: 76):<sup>9</sup>

The three children of your strength are the bearers of the land of the younger brothers. They have surrendered their spirit, and the hearts of the flowers are dead. Also [dead] are those who are often back turners, those who are spreaders: Nacxit Xochitl, with the flowers of his companions, the two-two day lordship [i.e., brief, because of their corruption], the crooked in their thrones, the crooked in their flowers. Two-two day people are their words, two-two day are their seats, their gourds, their headdresses, the lust of the day, the lust of the night, the monkey of the world. Their necks are twisted, their faces are wrinkled, their mouths are slobbering in the lordship of the lands, oh, lord.

The destruction predicted here was the Spanish conquest (Gordon, 1913: 105-107). The “back turners,” the younger brothers, were representatives of

the Itzá,<sup>10</sup> followers of Nacxit Xochitl, the flower people, those influenced by central Mexico. They lost the war and were degraded in Maya eyes by their perceived cowardice. They then turned their backs to the Spaniards who defeated them, ritually sodomizing them.

The flowers here symbolized the sexual acts performed ritually between the Spaniards and the backsides of the Maya. They were an important ritual element in Nacxit Xochitl's name and in the Maya text.<sup>11</sup> The younger brothers lost their hearts and their spirits to their older brothers (the Spaniards), who then killed their flowers by symbolically engaging in sodomy with them. The Maya fighters, defeated and sodomized, were effectively feminized in a discourse that masculinized the winning warriors, the Spaniards. Archaeologists have found figurines showing Itzá men engaged in activities represented by this final statement—slobbering, effeminate, lunatic.

Sexual insults, often related to sodomy, presented and supported the theme of social death and destruction. Warfare was linked to sexual desire in an attempt to stipulate difference between ethnic “self” and “other.” Like warfare in early modern Europe, Maya war was often about the protection of the integrity of the community against perceived invasions from outsiders (see Bleys, 1995; Trexler, 1995). This protection was based on the notion of ethnicity constructed through sexual desire.

## CLASS

When the Spaniards arrived in Yucatán, they found a society that they believed could be compared with their own. The Maya had a stratified social hierarchy with nobles considered a separate group from commoners (Farriss, 1984: 227-255; Patch, 1993: 68-81; Restall, 1997). While there were opportunities for advancement, most commoners remained such all their lives. The wealth of the nobles was far from impressive compared with Spanish wealth, but they had a wide variety of advantages over the commoners (see Hunt, 1974; Patch, 1993: 230). Nobility was a central component of Maya life, as the nobles were marked as those who could trace their lineage through generations. This relationship existed most strongly in the Maya historical chronicles, which stressed noble privileges but also pointed to divisions among nobles (see Maya Society, 1935; Barrera Vásquez, 1984). Commoners were marked as those who were dependents of the nobles in patron-client relationships (Farriss, 1984: 174). Nobles and commoners existed in a structure that was represented culturally as a system of debt. Commoners owed the nobles their bodies and lives and paid this debt by working for them and providing

them with tribute. The nobles owed the commoners protection, and they paid this debt by invoking the sacred world and leading the people into battle. The colonial years reduced the opportunities for the nobles to meet the debt they owed to commoners. It was the Spanish clergy that invoked the sacred. Because the threat of war was not immediately apparent, protection in this sphere was not seen as needed. The commoners did need protection from the Spaniards, but the nobles were often useless in preventing an *encomendero* or *hacienda* owner from abusing them (Farriss, 1984: 175-177).

Nobles who had held political office before the conquest continued to do so (see Quezada, 1993; Restall, 1997; Thompson, 1999).<sup>12</sup> Those who had engaged in spiritual pursuits, however, had difficulty maintaining their power. They were ineligible to be Catholic clergy, and Maya priests recognized by the Spaniards were barred from any formal office in the church. At the center of colonial rule, nobles received positions in the local church, leading them to mix preconquest sacred rituals with Christianity (Farriss, 1984: 310-314). On the margins, they continued to invoke the traditional gods, thus maintaining their privileges (Clendinnen, 1987: 129-207; Scholes and Adams, 1938).

Elsewhere I have described in detail the relationship between Maya political leadership and pederastic homosexual desires and acts (Sigal, 1997). Maya regional political chiefs instructed noble male youths in the art of leadership, symbolically represented as an exchange of knowledge regarding blood and semen. While it is unclear if sexual acts took place, the symbols represented the idea that the leaders were required to teach noble male youths their sexual duties. These pederastic rituals allowed the leaders to assert power over the other nobles of the community. This dynamic was intended to control nobles and their sexual behaviors, but also to manipulate commoner desires. These were represented as tests of noble knowledge in which only the legitimate were able to answer the questions posed. This exchange of knowledge and (symbolically) of semen protected the people from illegitimate leaders.

In the prophecy of Chilam Balam quoted above, the leaders lost their offices to the Spaniards because of both their role as the symbolically constructed passive partners and their lust. Their sexual desires were out of control, and the Spaniards were able to defeat them. Chilam Balam argued that nobles needed to control their sexual desires, for if they did not, they would not know their ancestors and others would come and ritually sodomize them.

The symbolic sexual regulations for nobles extended to attempts at the margins of colonial rule to harness the power of the sacred. In order to gain this power, shamans and curers asserted their control over the gods by raping

them. The shaman (suggested in these cases to be male) made demands of the male god (El ritual de los Bacabes manuscript, 122; Roys, 1965: 42; Arzápalo Marín, 1987: 357-358).<sup>13</sup>

I cast a spell to forcibly cut and pound the lust of creation and the lust of the night. The body of wood and stone does not sleep, does not curl up. As I hurl stones at you, as I slap you with a log and a staff, you four gods, you four *bacabs*, my sign is submerged. I am submerging/penetrating you with the genitals of your mother and the genitals of your father. You are the lust of the women's children, the lust of the men's children. Amen.

Penetrating and raping the god in this way, he harnessed the immense power of the sacred for himself (see Sigal, 2000: 150-182). The discourse and the performance of the ritual (which may or may not have included the performance of sexual acts) allowed the shaman to show that he was in control.

Perhaps the most important structural element here is the concept of penetration, which was closely associated with rituals related to warfare, disease, human sacrifice, and penis piercing. The same-sex rape represented in this text was connected ritually with penis piercing and human sacrifice. The penetration shown later in the document involved the term *pudz*, usually used to describe the knife the Maya used in ritual sacrifice (Barrera Vásquez et al., 1991: 678-679).

Noble desires were linked to the sacred and to political power. Commoner sexual desires and acts were less important in these texts and in Maya society as a whole. Commoners were often perceived as sexual agents who could not control themselves (see Sigal, 2000: 227-232). Maya sexual discourse stressed differences in class and status.

### **RAPE, GENDER, AND HOMOSEXUAL DESIRE**

If a male noble could rape a male god, what does this say about normative understandings of rape and homosexual acts? It certainly does not allow one to conjecture that the Maya approved of homosexuality and rape. It is common knowledge today that rape is an act invested with power. For the colonial Maya, this was certainly true, but in a different way. Rape of a god was a way of harnessing the power of the sacred sphere. It was also a way of symbolizing the unpredictability, irrationality, and omnipotence of the sacred, for if the parents of a god could help in the act of rape against their son, then they could do anything. It was this "irrationality" of the sacred that allowed the nobles to understand the world in which they lived. No doubt this could have

served a functional purpose, since in times of misery the nobles blamed sacred forces and thus perhaps prevented rebellion. However, the Maya would not have understood such functionalism. Both nobles and commoners imagined a world in which the sacred had an order that they could not comprehend. It was only the priests and shamans, steeped in ritual as they were, who could have begun to comprehend the sacred order. But even these priests could not understand the entire sacred sphere. The gods developed a system that could not be seen with any clarity and that required acts that were unacceptable in normal human affairs (see Farriss, 1984; Clendinnen, 1987; 1991; Sigal, 2000). These sacred rituals, along with the political rites designed to maintain noble status, had been major public events before the conquest. Through the colonial years, they would become shrouded in mystery, hidden from the Spaniards and thus from most of the Maya.

Ethnic status changed throughout the preconquest and colonial years but remained an important marker. Difference in sexual status stood as a sign of these divisions. While the signs were never so clear as to say that ethnic insiders played the “active” role while the outsiders played the “passive” role, it was clear that the texts marked difference based on an active/passive divide. These signs were used to separate Itzá from Xiu in the Maya historical texts, but complaining about the Itzá would not have sufficed to separate “self” from “other” during colonial times. Ethnicity during colonial years became more localized, and the written documents do not mark a reflective discourse on such localization.

Through this structure of marked difference, the nobles retained some of their status throughout the colonial period. To maintain power, they focused their attention on colonial mechanisms. Identifying with colonial power gave them some separation between themselves and commoners.

Most of the documents cited here were late colonial productions and thus represented a hybrid colonial order. Maya cultural discourse mixed with Spanish culture to produce various hierarchies of difference. We see these discursive shifts as elements of a complex cultural matrix: colonial power in Yucatán is marked by signs and symbols of homosexual acts and desires.

## NOTES

1. On the importance of the sexual behaviors of the nobles, see the *Books of Chilam Balam*, especially the three most accessible and most important: the Chumayel (Roys, 1967; Edmonson, 1986), the Mani (Craine and Reindorp, 1979), and the Tizimin (Edmonson, 1982). On the rape of gods, see Roys (1965) and below.

2. Robert Ricard (1966) proposed the idea of a “spiritual conquest,” using the reports of friars to show that the mendicant orders had converted the Indians and conquered their non-Christian beliefs. Many historians took Ricard’s views to be self-evident. Charles Gibson (1952; 1964) first challenged Ricard. Since Gibson, many scholars have shown that no such spiritual conquest took place (see particularly Burkhart, 1989; Klor de Alva, 1991; Lockhart, 1992). Farriss (1984) and Clendinnen (1987) show the survival of indigenous beliefs among the Maya; Clendinnen shows the lengths that the Spaniards would go to in order to alter indigenous culture and speaks of the development of hybrid cultural formations.

3. Bricker clearly overestimates the importance of preconquest survivals; see Rugeley (1996) for an alternative view. Rugeley points out that many changes took place in Maya culture through the years. The hybridity of European and indigenous norms today points to a world that never was thoroughly Hispanicized (see Burns, 1983; Hanks, 1990).

4. The same can be said of the Nahuas of central Mexico (see Clendinnen, 1991; Lockhart, 1992: 442-446).

5. This is not to suggest that these traditional practices would not have changed before the Spanish conquest. Meanings appear to change constantly for a variety of reasons, some related to colonialism and some not. For the preconquest Maya, traditional sexual meanings changed because of pre-Hispanic colonialism and other events (see Sigal, 2000). On reinscription as a reaction to colonization, see Bhabha (1995).

6. “Chenbel padresob ian u sipitolal u penob matan u than yokllob uaca u ment utzil maceuale tusebal helelac ium cura u dzaic u tzucte hetun lae tutac u kabob yetel pel lay yaxcabcachob tumen u pen cech penob la caxuob yal misa bailo u yoli Dios ca oc inglesob uaye ix ma aci ah penob u padreilobi hetun layob lae tei huni ma u topob u yit uinicobe yoli Dios ca haiac kak tu pol cepob amen ten yumil ah hahal than.” I thank Matthew Restall for alerting me to the presence of this petition and the Inquisition file.

7. Even the *Book of Chilam Balam of Tizimin* (published in facsimile as *Fontes Rerum Mexicanarum*, 1980), a text heavily influenced by the Itzá, criticized the original Itzá conquerors. The bulk of the anti-Itzá rhetoric, however, came from the *Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* (published in facsimile as Gordon, 1913).

8. The passive partner was *cuiloni*.

9. “Ox al a mukil x cuch lum ydzinil dzaman yol cimen ix u puccikal tu nictéob xan ah uaua tulupoob ah ua tan cinoob nacxit xuchit tu nicté u lakob ca ca kin y ahaulilob coylac te tu dzamoob coylac te tu nictéob ca ca kin uinicil u thannob ca ca kin u xecob u luchob u pocob u co kinnob u co akab u maxilob yokol cab kuy cu cal mudz cu uich pudz cu chi ti yahaulil cabob yume.”

10. Trexler (1995: 81), looking at this same passage, asserts that the Maya “showed their rear ends” to the Spanish conquerors. While the implication is correct, Trexler is relying on an older translation.

11. The nahuatl *xochitl* translates as “flower.” On the flower as a metaphor for sexual desire and warfare, see Clendinnen (1991), León-Portilla (1992), and Sigal (2000).

12. Of course, there were changes in the powers of those political offices.

13. “Tin can xot cuntah tin can max cuntah u col chab u cool akab ma uen ci ma coy la ci uinicil tun uinicil te tumenel tin chim tex tah lah tex tu cal ual tu cal xol cex can tul ti ku cex can tul ti bacabe dzam tun yn uayasba ca tin dzam chektahech tu ca cobol a na tu ca cobol a yum cech u cool ale u cool mehene Amen.” The components of *dzam chektahech*, “submerge,” *dzam* and *chek*, both had sexual connotations. *Dzam* represented the idea of impregnating someone, while *chek* was a word describing some generalized sexual activities.

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