

# Number, unit, and utility in a Mayan community: the relation between use-value, labour-power, and personhood

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Rather than asking how two use-values can have the same exchange-value, this article asks how two distinct entities can have the same use-value. Among the Q'eqchi'-Maya, substitution (*eeqaj*) refers to activities as disparate as house-building, civil-religious elections, vengeance, loans, illness cures, adultery, and namesakes. Such practices involve the exchange of one entity for another entity, insofar as these entities have shared properties, and insofar as they hold a role in a necessary position. Substitution is interpreted as social processes whereby substances get utilized, unitized, and numericalized, and this local articulation of use-value is theorized in terms of labour-power and personhood.

One of the most emblematic equations of Marx's *Capital* is this: *one bolt of cloth is equal to three bushels of wheat*. Such an equation turns on utilities (wheat and cloth), units (bushels and bolts), and numbers (three and one). In particular, two use-values – each consisting of a particular number, unit, and utility – are equated so far as they have the same exchange-value. Such an equation goes back to Aristotle, who famously inquired into its condition of possibility: how is it that two radically different things can be equated in exchange, and what determines their relative proportion? Nineteenth-century economists – such as Smith, Jevons, and Marshall – were to give a range of interrelated answers: from labour-commanded, through marginal utility, to supply and demand. In this article, a much more basic question is asked: not how is it that two distinct use-values can have the same exchange-value, but how is it that two distinct entities can have the same use-value? In other words, what are the social processes whereby substances get utilized, unitized, and numericalized?

While Marx himself was not particularly interested in such processes – relegating 'the various uses of things,' as well as 'the establishment of socially-recognized standards of measure for the quantities of these useful objects,' to 'the work of history' (1967 [1867]: 43) – they are a condition of possibility for political economy. While historical metrologists and historians of science have analysed the vicissitudes of weights and measures in relation to science, technology, and state-building, the quotidian practices and cultural meanings of measurement have largely been ignored.<sup>1</sup> While linguistic

anthropologists have documented numerical systems and noun-classifiers in relation to cognition and culture, they have been focused on semantic categories rather than social processes.<sup>2</sup> While economic anthropologists have elaborated various modes of exchange, they have tended to treat the utilities, units, and numbers of the use-values being exchanged as given – and hence not in need of interpretation.<sup>3</sup> And while value has long been a key topic for anthropological research and critical theory more generally, use-value itself has not been treated as problematic, or in need of theory.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, the emphasis on exchange-value relative to use-value probably has its roots in Aristotle, who – in first distinguishing between ‘value in use’ and ‘value in exchange’ (2001b: 1137–8) – saw a need to discuss only the latter at length.<sup>5</sup>

The elision of use-value in social theory is best rectified through ethnography.<sup>6</sup> Among speakers of Q’eqchi’-Maya living in Guatemala, for example, the word ‘substitute’ (*eeqaj*) refers to a range of practices which turn on the replacement of a use-value rather than the exchange of one use-value for another use-value. Such activities include house-building, civil and religious elections, soccer goals, vengeful actions, labour pools, loan returns, illness cures, adultery, and namesakes. In particular, all such activities involve the substitution of one entity for another entity, insofar as these entities have shared properties, and insofar as they hold a role in a necessary position. For example, one man may substitute his labour for another man’s labour insofar as men have similar strengths and skills, and insofar as a position in a labour pool must be filled. An effigy of a sick person may also substitute for that person in an illness cure insofar as they have inalienable possessions in common (such as hair and clothing), and insofar as a divinity requires one or the other as compensation. That is, entities within certain domains must have a substitute (lest their role go unfulfilled), and other entities may substitute for such entities (so far as they are judged equivalent as to their number, unit, and utility). In short, if reciprocation turns on different use-values having similar exchange-values, substitution turns on different substances having similar use-values.

This article interprets substitution from the standpoint of number, unit, and utility, and it relates this local articulation of use-value to two overarching concerns of social theory: labour-power and personhood, as theorized by Marx and Mauss, respectively. The following section discusses the word ‘substitute’ from the perspective of the Q’eqchi’ language, and describes the range of practices to which it refers. The third focuses on labour-pooling, a particularly important mode of substitution insofar as the underlying utility is labour-power itself, as mapped onto various types of persons. The final section uses these ethnographic and linguistic details to theorize use-value from the standpoint of substitution, discussing who and what can be substituted, the inherent utilities shared by such substitutes, the quantities in which such utilities typically appear, and the nature of the obligation that requires the substitution itself. It shows the intimate connection between use-value and value *per se*. The remainder of this section describes the ethnographic and historical context in which this research took place.

Alta Verapaz, the department that forms the focus of my study, and the Q’eqchi’-Maya-speakers that make up the majority of its population, have had an unusual history even by Guatemalan standards. In 1537, after the Spanish crown had unsuccessfully tried to conquer the indigenous peoples living there, the Dominican Friar Bartolomé de Las Casas was permitted to pacify the area through religious methods. Succeeding, he changed the name of the area from Tezulutlan (Land of War) to Verapaz (True Peace),

and the Dominicans were granted full control over the area – the state banning most forms of immigration, removing all military colonies, and nullifying previous land grants. In this way, for almost three hundred years, the area remained a somewhat isolated enclave, relatively protected by the paternalism of the church in comparison to other parts of Guatemala. This ended abruptly in the late 1800s, however, with the advent of coffee-growing, liberal reforms, and the immigration of Northern Europeans. Dispossessed of their land, and forced to work on coffee plantations, the Q'eqchi' began migrating north into the unpopulated lowland forests of the Petén and Belize. Within the last forty years, this migration was fuelled by the civil war that ravaged the Guatemalan countryside, with the Q'eqchi' no longer fleeing just scarce resources and labour quotas, but also their own nation's soldiers – often forcibly conscripted speakers of other Mayan languages. In this way, the last century has seen the Q'eqchi' population spread from Alta Verapaz, to the Petén, and finally to Belize, Mexico, and even the United States. Indeed, although only the fourth largest of the twenty or so Mayan languages (with more than 400,000 speakers), Q'eqchi' now probably has the largest percentage of monolinguals, and the fastest-growing and most geographically extensive population of any ethnic group in Guatemala.

The data for this article are based on almost two years of ethnographic and linguistic fieldwork among speakers of Q'eqchi', most of which was spent in Chicacnab, a village of some eighty families (around 650 people) in the municipality of San Juan Chamelco, in the department of Alta Verapaz, Guatemala. At an altitude of approximately 2,400 metres, Chicacnab is one of the highest villages in this area, with an annual precipitation of more than 2,000 millimetres. It is also one of the most remote villages in this area, the closest road requiring a three-hour hike down a steep and muddy single-track trail. Such a relatively high altitude and remote location provide the perfect setting for the existence of cloud forest. And such a cloud forest provides the perfect setting for the resplendent quetzal, being home to what is thought to be the highest density of such birds in the world. Because of the existence of the quetzal, and the cloud forest in which it makes its home, Chicacnab has been the site of a successful NGO-fostered eco-tourism project, the conditions and consequences of which are detailed in my dissertation (Kockelman 2002).

While the majority of villagers in Chicacnab are monolingual speakers of Q'eqchi', some men who have served time in the army, or worked as itinerant traders, speak some Spanish. Almost all the villagers are Catholic. The village is divided by a large peak with dwellings on both of its sides and in the surrounding valleys. It takes about forty-five minutes to hike across the village. At one end, there is a biological station kept by the eco-tourism project and used sporadically by European ecologists, and at the other end, there is a Catholic church and a cemetery. In the centre, there is a small store, a school for primary and secondary grades, and a soccer field. The surrounding landscape is cloud forest giving way to scattered housing sites, agricultural parcels, pasture, and fields now fallow. While all villagers engage in corn-based agriculture, very few villagers have enough land to fulfil all of their subsistence needs. For this reason, many women in the village are dedicated to chicken husbandry, most men in the village engage in seasonal labour on plantations (up to five months a year in some cases), and many families engage in itinerant trade (women weaving baskets and textiles for the men to sell) and eco-tourism (the women hosting tourists and the men guiding them).<sup>7</sup> Against this larger ethnographic backdrop, we may turn to the linguistic details of substitution itself.

### Substitution as word and referent

The following utterances demonstrate the role of the word *eeqaj* in the Q'eqchi' language:

- i.  $x\text{-}\emptyset_a\text{-in-taqla [li w-eeqaj]}_a$   
 Perf-Abs(3s)-Erg(1s)-send Dm Erg(1s)-substitute<sup>8</sup>  
 'I sent my substitute'
- ii.  $t\text{-}\emptyset_a\text{-in-k'e [r_b\text{-}eeqaj]}_a [li k'aru x\text{-}\emptyset\text{-}x\text{-baanu w-e}]_b$   
 Fut-Abs(3s)-Erg(1s)-give Erg(3s)-substitute Dm what Perf-Abs(3s)-Erg(3s)-do Erg(1s)-Dat  
 'I will give the substitute of what he did to me'

In these examples, *eeqaj* shows up in possessed form (via the first- or third-person, singular ergative prefix: *w-* or *r-*). In example (i), the speaker refers to another man as his 'substitute' (for a work-party). Here the possessed noun-phrase ('my substitute', or *li weeqaj*) is the direct object of the transitive verb (as cross-referenced on the verb by the third-person singular absolutive suffix ( $\emptyset$ , a zero-morpheme)). (Cross-referencing is indicated by subscripts.) In example (ii), *eeqaj* in its possessed form is the direct object of the verb 'to give' (*k'ehok*), which is again cross-referenced on this verb by the third-person singular absolutive suffix; and the possessor of *eeqaj* is a relative clause describing the action (in this case, an insult) which the speaker is going to be vengeful for.

In such a role, the word *eeqaj* refers to a range of entities. For example, a newly built house is called the substitute (*reeqaj*) of the owner's old house. It is equivalent to the old house in its ability to provide shelter, a necessary utility. Besides referring to houses for humans, substitution is also used to refer to houses for domestic animals: chicken coops, turkey runs, and pig pens. In this way, shelters for both human life and animal life under human care require substitutes when they wear out. Roofs for human houses used to be rebuilt every five years or so, after the thatch had begun to rot and the rain had begun to leak through. And houses themselves used to be rebuilt, from the ground up, every ten years or so. Within the last several years, however, there has been a surge of house-building, due both to an influx of money from eco-tourists, and to an expectation that there will be more eco-tourists to house in the future. For this reason, many families now have two houses, one built in the older style with a thatch roof, and the other build in a newer style with a tin roof. In this way, there are now many new houses that did not originate as substitutes for old houses. Elsewhere I have interpreted the social conditions and consequences of such serial house-building (Kockelman 2002).

A newly elected village mayor is called the substitute of the previous mayor. He is equivalent to the old mayor in his ability to fulfil a local political duty. Elections – the institutional means for choosing substitutes – are held once a year, and any married men in the village may run. The mayor's main responsibility is to act as a political liaison between the village (*k'alebal* or *aldea*) and the town (*tenamit* or *cabecera*). In this capacity, a mayor helps institute top-down programmes such as vaccinations and sanitation, and helps present village concerns to his immediate superior, the town mayor. For example, a long-term concern of villagers has been to get a road built between the village and the town so that goods may be more easily bought and sold in inter-village markets. (Each of the last several mayors were elected on the promise that they would get the government to construct such a road.) In general, however, a mayor spends most of his time mediating village-internal disputes: fights, wife abuse,

domestic animal pillaging, and water rights. (His authority in such disputes, however, ultimately rests in his ability to enlist the town mayor – to levy a fine, to make an arrest, or to mediate a property dispute.) In addition, he organizes village-wide labour pools: to clean the trail to the nearest village, to build an additional room for the school, or to help a man rebuild his home after a mudslide has destroyed it. Because of his position, a mayor tends to have closer contacts with external institutions: NGOs, churches, national and regional political organizations, anthropologists, and the eco-tourism project itself. And while mayors used to be chosen from among the older men in the village, there is now a widespread opinion that younger men have a better command of Spanish, and a better understanding of the new institutions (two forms of knowledge thought necessary to be an effective mayor). For these reasons, a man as young as 28 has recently been elected mayor, and men as young as 25 have run for the office.

In the religious hierarchy, or *cofradía*, a newly elected married couple (*mertoom*) is called the substitute of the previous couple (*qeeqaj*, or ‘our substitute’). They are equivalent to the old couple in their ability to fulfil a local religious obligation. The *cofradía* in the village consists of six couples, who are entrusted with the physical care of the church. Their weekly duties consist of cleaning and decorating the church, and overseeing the spending of contributions. In addition, whenever the priest comes to give mass (in the past, once a year, but more recently, every month), they provide and prepare food for him and his entourage (usually slaughtering their own chickens for his meals). Each year a new couple is elected for a six-year tenure, during which time they annually move up one position in the hierarchy. Household-internal tensions often arise due to men not wanting to join the *cofradía* (against the desires of their wives – for whom *cofradía* election is one of the only forms of substitution open), yet wanting to be elected mayor (even though they would normally be considered too young). Such a difference between husbands and wives in their desire to join the *cofradía* is probably related to the fact that other forms of village-internal recognition are possible only through village-external social relations – relations which are more accessible to men than women.

One man’s vengeful action towards another man is called the substitute of the other man’s prior insulting or harmful action (recall example (ii)). It is equivalent to this prior action in its ability to settle the score, which is presumed to be necessarily equal. In other words, this form of substitution is the local equivalent of ‘an eye for an eye’ or ‘tit for tat’. Nevertheless, while there are many stories of revenge or justice, the only cases I have experienced have been in situations in which two men are play-fighting or wrestling. If one gets the better of the other – landing a well-placed blow or flipping the other on his back – there is usually encouragement from the spectators to ‘give him his substitute’.

One soccer team’s tying goal is called the substitute of the other team’s previous goal. It is equivalent to the last goal in its ability to even the score. Soccer games usually occur after church on Sundays, weather permitting. (Boys, however, play after school during the week, and on market days there are often inter-village soccer games in town.) They take place in a large field, which was flattened some five years ago by men working together for the explicit purpose of constructing a site for playing soccer. Most men who play soccer are between 15 and 30 years old. Teams are not fixed. Rather, they are drawn up differently each Sunday – either by ‘captains’ taking turns picking men from a line-up, or on a ‘first-come first-served’ basis, as men straggle in from church, lunch, or labour. One might note, then, that in both soccer scores and vengeance tallies,

substitution seems to presuppose that the norm is for both sides to match scores – to have a tie, or come out even. It should be emphasized, however, that while soccer seems to be modelled on vengeance, teams are nevertheless orientated towards winning rather than tying.

A man who sleeps with my wife is called ‘my substitute’. He is equivalent to me in his ability to satisfy a marital responsibility. I do not have good statistics on the frequency of adultery, but insofar as men are often away from the village working on plantations, many men worry about their wives sleeping with other men in their absence. For this reason, a man’s parents will often drop in on their daughter-in-law’s house each day while their son is away – and keep a silent watch to see where the woman goes and who stops by.

A man who takes another man’s place within a labour pool, or fulfils another man’s more solitary labour obligations, is called the latter man’s substitute. He is equivalent to the man in his ability to perform a certain amount of work. Labour-pooling usually occurs with arduous or time-consuming practices such as the clearing and planting of agricultural fields and house-building. But it may also occur with weeding and harvesting, as well as with less agriculturally relevant tasks, such as wood-chopping and cow-tending. It should be emphasized that to substitute for another person in a pool is not merely to return their labour; it is to take the place of a second person who must return a third person’s labour. Thus, if one man is obligated to work for a second man (because they are reciprocating within a pool), but cannot make it because of sickness, he may send a third man as his ‘substitute’. Or, in non-pooling contexts, if a man cannot fulfil a daily household task as obligated by his role in the domestic mode of production (say, chopping wood), he may send his older son in his place. These issues will be taken up further in the next section.

The money returned to another as the settling of a loan is called the substitute of the originally loaned money. Loans are usually made among members of an extended family. For example, a man lends his daughter-in-law money to buy household supplies while her husband is away working on a plantation. Or a married couple lends the woman’s brother money to buy cement for the foundation of his house. These loans are usually less than 100 quetzals (about \$14 US, in 2000), and are paid back within six months, usually without interest. Loans are the only form of substitution in which economic value is the underlying utility and, consequently, in which the utility being substituted may come in any quantity – the unit being the Guatemalan national currency, called the quetzal (or the American dollar), and the number varying. While this mode of substitution looks like money-lending (M-M’), as a form of negative reciprocity involving exchange-value or quantity, it is best to think of it as replacement: one is merely replacing the money with its functional equivalent, or substitute, some time later. Thus, rather than think of loans as a place where exchange-value (money or quantity) begins to invade use-value (utility or quality), it is probably best to think of loans as a place where exchange-value gets figured in terms of use-value. (Q’eqchi’-speakers in the village of Chicacnab also know about usury, or loans with non-kin and non-neighbours, that must be repaid with interest (or M-M’ proper); and their term for interest is *ral tumin*, or ‘offspring of money.’)

In cases where a person has suffered fright (*xiwajenaq*) brought on by a moral breach such as forgetting to pray or deprecating maize, they bury a substitute, or effigy, of themselves in the place where they were frightened. Only in this way may the person not fall ill, insofar as the agency which frightened them accepts the effigy as a substitute

for the person's health. These effigies are iconic indices, consisting of tree-sap, formed in the shape of a person, and mixed with the sick person's fingernails, hair, and clothing. In this way, a substitute that is formed of the sick person's inalienable possessions simultaneously acts as the pledge that affects their cure, and an admission of their culpability.<sup>9</sup>

In cases where a boy is given the name of his father, he is considered his father's substitute. This is the one form of substitution that is not frequently practised, because children named after their parents are thought likely to inherit the bad traits or negative personal tendencies of their parents: a penchant for alcohol or adultery, or a tendency for sloth, illness, anger, or poverty. In this way, a name is intimately associated with the negative characteristics of a person – those personal qualities which will have an effect on their health and economic well-being. For this reason, namesaking is the only form of substitution that has a *negative* obligation – a man should *not* name his son after himself, insofar as the negative traits of this generation should not be renewed in the next generation.

Lastly, there are perhaps an infinite number of other forms of substitution, turning on the replacement of everyday objects of utility, rather than human actors and activities. For example, after I knocked my coffee cup onto the floor, my host told her son to bring me 'its substitute' (*reeqaj*). Or, when the gas in their lamp was all used up, a man suggested to his wife that they go get 'its substitute'. In this way, the accidental loss or normal provisioning of a necessary item (or 'necessity' in the idiom of political economy) entails a substitute. Such processes often involve the most stereotypic of use-values: a bag of salt, a lantern's worth of oil, a set of batteries, a pair of rubber boots, and so forth.

Practices somewhat similar to substitution, and words somewhat similar to *eeqaj*, have been documented in other Mayan communities – albeit in a much more circumscribed fashion. For example, Carlsen and Prechtel (1991) have argued that the Tzutujil word *k'ex* refers to the replacement of older persons with younger equivalents. They refer to this as 'making the new out of the old' and 'reincarnation', and they characterize it as 'relating to the transfer, and hence continuity, of life' (1991: 26). And Mondloch, working with the Mayan language Quiche, has discussed the use of the word *k'e's* in relation to naming practices, describing it as a 'social mechanism for replacing the ancestors' (1980: 9). Similar themes have been echoed by other Mayanists working in Highland Guatemala (Coggins 1989; Ruz Lluillier 1973; Warren 1989). While I have no data on the historical transformations of the word *eeqaj*, in meaning or in form, it may be the case that reincarnation – and the replacement of persons more generally – is the more originary and widespread usage. If so, it would make the substitution of people – not only in namesaking, but also perhaps in civil-religious elections, *qua* mayor and *cofradía* – the more basic process.

More generally, substitution as the replacement of persons relates to the idea of personage (*personnage*), first theorized by Maine (2002 [1866]: chap. 6) in the legal context of inheritable statuses (such as property rights), but made famous by Mauss (1979 [1938]: 11–17) in the religious context of ritual: wherein a finite number of roles, usually marked by names or masks, were inhabitable by members or clans of a bounded society, in the context of ritually replaying the reincarnation of ancestors (also see Allen 1985). In this way, while substitution relates to use-value in a more Marxist sense, it also relates to personhood in a more Maussian sense. In the next section, both these relations come together in the context of labour-pooling, where the underlying utility

is a person's labour-power. Indeed, while the religious-cosmological interpretation of substitution given by scholars such as Carlsen and Prechtel is important, it is also worthwhile maintaining a more worldly interpretation. Wilk (1991: 202), for example, has suggested that labour-pooling among the Q'eqchi' – perhaps the most extensive form of substitution – may be a response both to pre-Hispanic forms of tribute-taking, and to colonial forms of labour extraction.

### **Labour-pooling and labour-power: men, boys, women, and money**

Since agricultural clearing is a key site in which men's activities are unitized and utilized, and one of the last stands of labour-pooling, we may begin with it. Say it is February, and a man has five *tarees* of land (less than a quarter of a hectare) that he wants to sow in the upcoming months. Then, before he begins to sow (and after he has burned any remaining trees or cloud-forest cover), he and four other men will clear the five-*taree* area, each man labouring alone throughout the day on his designated one-*taree* swatch (usually marked out ahead of time by the owner with *retaalil*, or boundary markers). The work itself consists of clearing grass, weeds, small shrubs, and dead limbs from the ground in order that the subsequent planting of seeds can proceed smoothly. The only tools used are a machete and a *lokoch* (a stick in the shape of the number seven (7), usually made at the site from a tree branch). The *lokoch* is used in the following ways: to pull the weeds together and then hold them fast while their roots are cut with the machete; to rake already cut weeds into a pile; and to dislodge rocks and sticks. In this way, all of the men work separately from each other, but engaged in the same relatively repetitive task: rake, hold, slice, sweep; rake, hold, slice, sweep; rake, hold, slice, sweep; and so on.

Such work groups are usually composed of a man's older sons, father, brothers-in-law, and close friends. These men will meet at the owner's house in the morning for breakfast, and be at the site by around seven o'clock. They break only to file their machetes, and to take drinks of coffee or juice brought to them by their host's wife or daughters. In addition, they eat lunch together – usually tamales, but often more expensive, celebratory food like chicken. (This food is prepared by the host's wife, usually working in conjunction with several other women – a point that will be returned to shortly.) Work is usually finished by four o'clock in the afternoon, following which the men return home to wash up, tend to their domestic tasks, and eat dinner with their families. On each successive day, all the same men will again work together, but on land belonging to a different member of the group – working in this way for five days in a row (excluding Sundays) until all the labour has been reciprocated, and each man's plot of land has been cleared. In this way, each man has the tools, skills, strength, and social relations necessary to clear the same area (one *taree*) in the same amount of time (one day). If a man cannot fulfil his obligation to the pool, he can send a substitute in his place: another man who can carry out his obligation for him.

The most socially extended form of labour-pooling is village-wide community service (*sa' komunil*). For example, every two or three years all the men in the village (some 100 able-bodied adult males) get together after church several Sundays in a row to clean and fix the trail that runs to the nearest town. Additionally, each year there is usually some construction activity taking place within the village that benefits all villagers. For example, villagers once constructed a multi-purpose room next to the church. In this case, all the men worked four Sundays in a row: carrying heavy bags of cement from the town to the village, levelling the ground, building the foundation, and

laying bricks. Another key place for village-wide labour-pooling is community-based aid – for example, helping a family rebuild their house after a mudslide has knocked it down. (In the wake of deforestation and lack of terracing, such disasters were almost an annual event during my fieldwork.) In such community-wide labour pools the act of reciprocation – and thus the necessity of substitution – is instantaneous. If one cannot make it to help, one sends along as one's substitute one's oldest son (or the paid oldest son of a family member), as well as an excuse – legal work in town, sickness (no substitute necessary), or prior commitment to a labour pool in another village (but this is infrequent insofar as labour-pooling is usually village-internal).

Once a boy is 15 years old, he may substitute for a man (who would usually be his father, but who could also be his uncle, brother, grandfather, or godfather). In particular, a boy of this age is said to finally possess enough strength (*metz'ew*) and skill (*na'leb*) to be able to endure (*kuyuk*) the labour. Nevertheless, men will often complain if someone scheduled to work for them sends along a 15-year-old son – especially if the boy is either still too weak to carry his weight, or known to be lazy. Boys younger than 15 often tag along with their father to labour pools, working as best they can. However, such boys are not expected to contribute nearly as much labour as a man – indeed, they are not assigned a particular *taree* to cut (in the case of clearing), and instead spend the day clearing the irregular, hard to reach, or unassigned sections of the owner's field. Boys older than 7 may also help their father when he must go into town on some errand while there is still clearing to be done. In such cases, they may work alone, or with their brothers, in fields close to home. And, in relatively light or unskilled work, such as harvesting, a young boy may substitute for his father – not in the sense that the boy is fulfilling his father's obligation to a labour pool, but in the sense that he is carrying out his father's usual domestic task.

None the less, all people agree that if a boy is sent to work in a man's place, and he is still not an adult, terrible things can happen. For example, one boy sliced open his shin with his machete – some thought due to his exhaustion, and others thought due to his lack of skill. In any case, that very morning I had heard the boy's mother warning him not to cut himself, and several times throughout the day she mentioned that she was very worried about him (*mas nink'a'uxlak*). In this way, substitution is a relatively charged issue: the stakes of sending someone too young to substitute can range from bodily injury to social insult.

The only man a woman may ever substitute for is her husband. But even this may occur in only a limited number of situations, most of which do not involve labour pools *per se*. For example, when her husband is away from the village working on a plantation, a woman may weed, chop firewood, harvest corn, or – more and more frequently – guide eco-tourists. In this way, a woman may substitute for her husband in his solitary domestic tasks – not ones that he would do with other men, but rather ones which he is assigned either via his role in the domestic mode of production, or via his relation to the eco-tourism project. (Note that this is similar to the way in which a young boy may substitute for his father in his domestic tasks, as mentioned above.) However, women's substitutability with men is viewed differently depending on whether the viewer is a man or woman. For example, in interviews men would not mention these practices unless prompted, and tended to say that women cannot substitute for men. In contrast, women usually claimed that they can indeed be men's substitutes, and point to exactly these practices as proof. One reason that this is a relatively contentious issue is that there is no third party involved (as there is in the case of labour pools): it is *not* that a

man must reciprocate labour given to him by another man, and that his wife is fulfilling his obligation; rather, a woman is standing in for a man in his usual domestic duties. In other words, women cannot substitute for men in their house-external labour pools (in the sense of standing in to fulfil their husbands' labour obligations to other men), but they can substitute for their husbands in their house-internal or NGO-related tasks.

One reason for the agreement between men and women regarding a woman's lack of substitutability for a man is a shared assessment of women's strength as being less than men's strength. For example, with regard to a man's normal agricultural work, most men say that women do not have enough strength to substitute for them (*lix metz'ew moko tz'aqal ta*). Women usually endorse this view about brute strength. For example, in speaking about why she cannot substitute for a man in labour-pooling, a woman said: 'I cannot endure (carrying) a post; we cannot endure it' (*moko ninkuy ta chaq li oqech, moko tqakuy ta*). Notice, then, that just like the difference in value between quetzals and dollars, differences in strength (*metz'ew*) and endurance (*kuyuk*) are given as reasons for women's lack of substitutability for men.<sup>10</sup> It should be stressed, however, that the bulk of men's labour does not involve carrying heavy objects, so that both men and women tend to focus on the least exemplary, but most difficult, form of men's labour when discussing their views about the physical inadequacies of women.

This agreement between men and women does not, however, extend to their respective assessments of what comprises women's work. This differential assessment is important, for whether or not one thinks a woman is substitutable for a man has to do with how much work one thinks a man or woman usually does, and what strength, skills, tools, and knowledge one thinks this work requires. For example, in discussing whether a woman could be a man's substitute, one man said, 'Women don't work; well they work I guess, but they only make tortillas, or perhaps sew bags or make baskets. Perhaps they collect water. Perhaps they sew. But that's the only work women do.' Contrast this with one woman's account of her daily work:

*Ay, during one day! When the sun rises, I first light my gas. I start the fire. I put in firewood. After that I wash. I fill up water for the coffee. I wash the pans. Perhaps there is no cooked corn, so I start to wash corn. After I finish washing the corn, I start to grind the corn. After I finish grinding the corn, I wash my utensils. After I finish washing my utensils, I start to sweep the house. After I finish sweeping the house, I start to wash my children's clothing. After I finish washing my children's clothing, if I have something to weave, I start to weave. After I finish weaving, I begin to find some food for lunch. I cook the food. I again wash my corn for lunch. After I finish washing my corn for lunch, I fill up water for my coffee. After I finish filling up water for my coffee, I begin to season my food. After I finish doing that, I begin to grind corn until lunchtime arrives. When lunch has passed I don't rest. I wash my utensils again. After I finish that, I go out to look at my plants. When I finish that, with my thread I begin to weave. After I finish my weaving, I begin to wash corn for dinner. I search for food. I again put coffee on to heat up. After that comes dinner. If I don't have cooked corn, I begin to de-kernel corn. I cook the corn until six o'clock arrives in the evening. This is what I do every day. I don't have a day of rest during the year. And don't forget my children and chickens (*she laughs*).*

While women cannot substitute for their husbands within labour pools, they can substitute for each other. In particular, when men are pooling their labour, their wives may pool their labour in order to feed the men; and in the context of such labour pools opportunities for substitution may arise. For example, as mentioned in the case of agricultural clearing, men are fed both breakfast and lunch at the host's house. In preparing these meals, several wives of the men helping the host will help the host's wife cook: making tortillas, preparing coffee, cooking beans, and so forth. However, such

cases of women's labour-pooling are less extensive than men's. For example, the other women will often work in their own homes and merely bring the prepared food to the host's house. In addition, the women who help the wife are the wives of the husband's closest relatives and usually live nearby – if they are not co-residents in the same housing cluster. In such contexts, one woman may send a friend, neighbour, relative, or elder daughter as her substitute (to fulfil her place in the pool); and, as such, women may substitute for each other within such pools. Lastly, the cooking may last only through the morning – after that a woman returns to her usual domestic duties. In sum, while women are implicated in labour-pooling, these activities are small in corporate scope (involving less extensive social relations: sisters, mothers, and mothers-in-law), are reciprocated in relatively short timescales, involve less social interaction and co-ordination, and in all cases take place in a dependent relation to men's exchange. For these reasons, the opportunities for women to substitute for other women are less frequent.

Money may also substitute for men by means of paid assistance in labour-pooling. If a man cannot fulfil his labour obligation, and if he cannot find a man to substitute for him, he can pay another man to work for him. Similarly, if a man does not want to engage in labour-pooling, he may pay others to help him, and thereby opt out of accruing labour debt in the first place. Such a paid man is called a *moos*, from the Spanish word *mozo*, which refers to servants (such as waiters, porters, and farm-hands). During my stay in the village, the going rate of *moos*-labour for one day's work was 15 quetzals (about two dollars), in addition to breakfast and lunch. Men tell me that they arrived at this price by halving the daily wage paid to them at plantations (where the work is longer, more difficult, and comes with the semblance of room and board – a place on the floor to sleep, and unseasoned beans and tough tortillas to eat).

While payment could theoretically come in any price, and labour in any amount, most men resist working for half-days, quarter-days, and the like. That is to say, even though one could potentially work for any sum of money within 15 quetzals (or indeed any area of land within one *taree*), most men still paid their helpers, just as they substituted for each other, in one-day-sized lumps (and, when relevant, in one-*taree*-sized swatches). This is probably for a number of interrelated reasons. For example, labour-time is allocated in one-day intervals rather than half-days or hours (which map onto areas of land and durances of men). Men are usually paid for an amount of work rather than a period of time. Given current techniques and units of measurement, it is difficult to quantify smaller amounts. Thus, not only the underlying utility (strength, skill, knowledge) but also the units of this utility constrain the forms that substitution may take. Moreover, payment probably originated on plantations, in which labour is usually paid in terms of the quantity of bananas or coffee beans collected in a one-day period, rather than the amount of time one engages in some particular task. In sum, money may substitute for men in certain cases, but only at the level of *moos*: one man's daily labour for one lump sum of money. The fineness of the calculation usually goes no further.

We may now return to the relation between use-value, labour-power, and personhood raised at the end of the previous section. Marx famously defined *labour-power* as 'the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in a human being, which he exercises whenever he produces a use-value of any description' (1967 [1867]: 164). As developed in this section, then, the substitutability of certain kinds of people in the context of labour pools turns on their having particular mental and physical (and

social) capabilities in common, as ultimately evinced in the relatively equivalent results of their actual labour (as the exercise of this power). For Marx, labour-power is the ur-utility: when exercised, it not only produces almost all other use-values (cleared fields, chopped wood, harvested corn, warm tortillas, and so forth), it also – under capitalist conditions of production – produces economic value (as expressed in the price of a commodity). In short, labour-power, as the embodied utility of persons, creates a multitude of useful (and often valuable) things.

Marx's original definition, turning on a distinction between labour-power, on the one hand, and its exercise, on the other, maps onto a distinction found in Maine (2002 [1866]: 170) and Linton (1936: 187-8), and echoed in Mauss (1979 [1938]: 11-17), between a *status*, which is a collection of rights and responsibilities (attendant upon occupying some position within the social fabric); and a *role*, which is the enactment of a status (actually exercising these rights and responsibilities). As seen, key modes of substitution turn on various statuses: not just mayor and *cofradía* member, or healthy person and named person, but also male and female, and adult and child. That is, the system of substitution both presupposes and creates various modalities of personhood: in the idiom of Maine and Linton, types of statuses (and those who can inhabit them); and in the idiom of Mauss, types of masks (and those who can wear them).

While both these ideas (labour-power and its exercise, status and role) turn on an essence-appearance distinction, itself grounded in a rather problematic metaphysics, it is useful to bring them together in the context of substitution. It shows the continuity between the utility being substituted in the context of labour-pooling (e.g. mental and physical capability, or creative capacity more generally) and the utility being substituted in the context of civil-religious elections, naming practices, and illness cures (e.g. rights and responsibilities, or personas more generally). In short, as will be generalized in the next section, through the lens of substitution, we may move from use-value proper (e.g. things like houses and salt), through labour-power, to personhood. The practices involving substitution thereby project a local ontology of people and things, as well as the processes that (re)produce them.

### **Conclusion: entities, qualities, quantities, and necessities**

It should now be apparent that substitution is a practice grounded in several presuppositions: what kinds of entities exist in the world; what kinds of qualities (or utilities) these entities share; what kinds of quantities (or numbers and units) these qualities appear in; and what kinds of necessity require the substitution of such quantities of quality. In other words, presupposed by the relatively heterogeneous ensemble of practices involving substitution is a tacit metaphysics of entification, qualification, quantification, and necessitation.

For example, notice that the entities being substituted can be adult male for adult male (labour-pooling and mayor election), father for son (namesaking), married couple for married couple (*cofradía* election), goal for goal (soccer), house for house (house-building), sum of money for sum of money (loans), violent action for violent action (vengeance), and effigy for sick person (illness cures). And notice that the social relations and temporal frames underlying the substitution of such entities range from the intra-personal (in the case of illness cures) to the inter-communal (in the case of soccer goals), and from a single day (in the case of labour-pooling) to a whole

generation (in the case of namesaking). In other words, substitution links radically distinct ontological, social, and temporal frames – indeed, it helps constitute such frames.

None the less, it should be emphasized that it is men, not women, who are implicated in most of these forms of substitution: soccer is a sport played by men; namesakes are usually discussed only in the context of father and son; vengeful actions are carried out between men; adultery is usually understood as a man sleeping with another man's wife, not a woman sleeping with another woman's husband; only men can be village mayor; and, as seen in the last section, it is mainly men – as adult, male persons – who take part in labour pools. In this way, substitution primarily involves men – ontologically, socially, and temporally. Only in cases of illness cures (usually undertaken by women), *cofradía* elections (involving women as much as men), and labour-pooling (in which a woman prepares food for the men assisting her husband) are women explicitly brought into relations of substitution. Quite importantly, then, if substitution is a local system whereby certain entities are rendered equivalent in regard to their use-value, it is also a system whereby other entities are rendered non-equivalent. It is a system of exclusion as much as inclusion.

Moreover, the practical substitutability of such entities rests on their equivalence with respect to certain relatively abstract properties, or 'utilities'. In other words, if equivalence is a condition for substitution as a practice, substitution is a sign of equivalence as a property. So along what kinds of dimensions are the underlying properties of equivalence determined? Recall that adult males are not only equivalent in their capacity to labour and hold the rights and responsibilities of mayor, but also to have sex (dispense semen, parent children). Thus, they may substitute for each other in the context of labour-pooling, mayor elections, and adultery. In this way, men have skills, knowledge (social and practical), strength, and semen in common – all relatively abstract, intangible, or unquantifiable properties. Similarly, married couples are able to fulfil the gendered labour-obligations of *cofradía* service insofar as their respective strengths, skills, and knowledge may be co-ordinated: the women cooking, decorating, and cleaning; the men building, buying, and collecting. That is, they have the strength and skill to undertake the rights and responsibilities that are accorded members of the *cofradía*. In the case of namesaking, consanguineally related kin are equivalent in their capacity to have certain attributes – name, personality, health, and economic well-being. Or, moving from Mauss to Maine, a namesake, or child more generally, can inherit the property rights of a parent, and thereby take on their legal persona. Similarly, illness cures require the equivalence of a kind of iconic-indexical value: the inalienable possessions held in common by a person and their substitute (clothing, hair, and name); or person-internal part-whole relations. Finally, loans are equivalent with regard to their economic value – their price, calculated in terms of local currency. Vengeful acts are equivalent with regard to their retributive value – a calculus of blows and insults. And soccer goals are equivalent with respect to their contribution to the score.

In this way, aside from soccer, vengeance, and loans, all of these underlying qualities turn on embodied equivalences (often male body equivalences): skill, knowledge, strength, semen, and inalienable possessions. Notice how this set of embodied equivalences belongs to a larger set of substances which primarily turns on relatively commonsensical notions of value: score, money, and justice. In short, just as reciprocation (in a market) commensurates across different use-values (so far as they have the same exchange-value), substitution commensurates across different substances (so far as

they have the same use-value). This underscores the fact that utility is the originary form of value.

Notice that while this equivalence in quality may be based in an abstract substance or value, substitutable entities nevertheless come in integer units of number, or fixed units of tenure. That is to say, there are no half-goals, half-men, or half-couples, and there are no half-years, half-days, or half-generations. In other words, substitution requires *units* to be substituted: units that come in basic temporal, substantive, or social quantities which are unable to be further divided; and units which map onto relatively natural entities or time-spans (a male body or a married couple, a day or a generation). In this way, substitution is itself naturalized. That is, unlike stereotypic commodities which often have units such as pounds and pats, or bushels and bolts, the units substituted are usually 'self-segmenting' (Lucy 1992: 58), and hence rather than add a substanceless form (e.g. litre or bushel) to a formless substance (e.g. water or wheat), the entities caught up in substitution seem to involve an inherently formed substance – be it a type of person or a type of thing (e.g. a house or mayor, a married couple or a soccer goal). Such self-segmentation means that what substitution renders equivalent and non-equivalent appears to be naturally rather than socially derived.

Only in the case of loans can a substitutable entity be divided more thoroughly: any sum of money for any sum of money – where the units are usually identical (quetzals, but more and more often dollars) and the numbers are different. As money begins to enter into these relations in place of substitution – especially in the case of house-building, when people begin to pay for labour rather than pool it – seemingly natural and quantized units of duration, quantity, skill, and strength are broken up into abstract and minutely divisible pieces. That is, in contexts where one can exchange such use-values for money, the seemingly motivated numbers, units, and utilities of substitutable entities may be rendered in terms of the seemingly unmotivated numbers, units, and utilities of national currencies. In this way, the exact equivalence of substitutable entities may transform into the commensurable difference of run-of-the-mill commodities.<sup>11</sup>

Lastly, notice that substitution indexes a mode of obligation, or condition of necessity: houses *must* be rebuilt, loans *must* be paid, scores *must* be settled, labour *must* be returned, and so on. These necessities are a matter of course: they are relatively tacit requirements that nobody would ever dispute or even discuss. Indeed, like the units themselves, many of these needs are presupposed, and ultimately naturalized, by the domestic mode of production and its conditions of renewal: replacing a house, raising children, sowing maize, partaking in *cofradía* service, and electing mayors. Compare this mode of obligation with that discussed by Mauss in the case of (reciprocal) gift-giving: the obligation to give, receive, and reciprocate (1990 [1950]: 13). Compare it with the mode of obligation underlying Weber's conception of the Protestant ethic (1992 [1930]: 51): the duty to increase one's capital. Compare it with the mode of obligation underlying contract: while one freely volunteers to transact, one is legally obligated to fulfil the terms of the transaction. And compare it with the mode of obligation underlying religious and ethical values: thou shall not covet thy neighbour's goods, and so on. In contrast, the key obligation underlying substitution is nothing other than the systematic provisioning of social life – including bare life, in its productive and reproductive forms, and political life, in its civil and religious forms.

In short, the many forms of substitution map onto the local expression of economy in the classical sense of Aristotle (and Polanyi), but now generalized to include both

persons and things (as products), and both reproduction and production (as processes). It is an economy in which human capability is calibrated in terms of social necessity: wherein the underlying value is not exchange, but use; and wherein the ultimate end is not riches, but replenishment.

#### NOTES

This essay was much improved by the suggestions of Glenn Bowman and several anonymous reviewers. Elizabeth Povinelli also offered very detailed and helpful commentary on the original dissertation chapter from which this essay originated. Thank you.

<sup>1</sup> Classic works include Alder (2002: 325-46), Galison (2003: 84-155), Heilbron (1990), Kula (1986: 161-266), Schaffer (1997), and Zupko (1990: 113-75).

<sup>2</sup> Classic works includes Greenberg (1990); Lucy (1992: 23-84); and Whorf (1956).

<sup>3</sup> For example, in the classic work of Malinowski (1984 [1922]: 146-94), Polanyi (1957: 43-55), and Sahlins (1972: 191-96).

<sup>4</sup> Classic works include Munn (1992) and Turner (1984). And see also Graeber (2002) for a review and synthesis of the work of Mauss and Marx, in addition to Munn and Turner, as well as a critical overview of the anthropological theories of value more generally.

<sup>5</sup> Aristotle's key writings on the economy may be found in the *Politics* (book I; 2001b) and the *Nicomachean ethics* (book V.5; 2001a). See Meikle (1995) for an elaborate exegesis.

<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere I have provided a more abstract and elaborated theory of use-value, and value *per se*, by synthesizing Marx's theory of value and Peirce's theory of meaning (Kockelman 2006).

<sup>7</sup> The two key ethnographies of Q'eqchi'-speakers have been written by Wilk (1991) and Richard Wilson (1995). In addition to these monographs, there are also a number of dissertations and articles written about the history (King 1974; Sapper 1985; Wagner 1996), ecology (Carter 1969; Secaira 1992; M.R. Wilson 1972), and migration (Adams 1965; Howard 1975; Kockelman 1999; Pedroni 1991) of Q'eqchi'-speaking people.

<sup>8</sup> Q'eqchi' is an ergative-absolutive language: ergative case-marking encodes the subjects of transitive verbs, as well as the possessors of nouns; absolute case-marking encodes the objects of transitive verbs as well as the subjects of intransitive verbs. In these examples, a dash (–) indicates a morpheme-boundary. Also, in the interlinear glosses, the following notation is used: Perf = perfective aspect; Abs(1s) = absolutive, first-person singular affix; Erg(3s) = ergative, third-person singular affix (and so on for other person-number combinations); Dm = determiner; Prep = preposition; Fut = future tense; Dat = dative case.

<sup>9</sup> In the villages where Wilson worked, substitution also refers to sacrificial turkey blood splashed on the walls and floors of newly built houses, so that the house-spirits will not eat the owner's children or domestic animals (1995: 107-8).

<sup>10</sup> Indeed, economic strength is phrased in exactly the same terms as physical strength: 'the dollar is stronger than the quetzal' (*mas li metz'ew li dolar chiru li q'uq*). And speakers will go so far as to speak about economic strength as human endurance, saying: 'the dollar lasts more than the quetzal' (*naxkuy li dolar chiru li q'uq*). In other words, the underlying value of money is phrased in exactly the same terms as the underlying strength or endurance of men. This means that exchange-value tends to be treated in terms of use-value.

<sup>11</sup> Elsewhere I investigate social processes involving eco-tourism in which the fineness of the calculation goes much further: in particular, the minute gradations made available with money (as a particular semiotic technology) get mapped onto various modes of labour (Kockelman 2002: chap. 8; 2006: 76-8). I also examine how such notions of use-value (and utility, as an abstract underlying entity) constrain local conceptions of exchange-value – and hence how substitution as a local process constrains commoditization (Kockelman 2002: chap. 9).

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## **Nombre, unité et utilité dans une communauté maya : relations entre valeur d'usage, puissance de travail et personnalité**

### *Résumé*

Au lieu de se demander comment deux valeurs d'usage peuvent avoir la même valeur d'échange, l'auteur cherche à voir comment deux entités distinctes peuvent avoir la même valeur d'usage. Chez les Mayas Q'eqchi', la notion de substitution (*eeqaj*) renvoie à des activités aussi disparates que la construction d'une maison, les élections civiles et religieuses, la vengeance, les prêts, la guérison des maladies, l'adultère et les surnoms. Ces pratiques impliquent l'échange d'une entité contre une autre, dans la mesure où ces entités ont des propriétés partagées et où elles jouent un rôle dans une position nécessaire. La substitution est interprétée comme un processus social dans lequel les substances sont utilisées, unifiées et rendues dénombrables, et cette articulation locale de la valeur d'usage est théorisée en termes de puissance de travail et de personnalité.

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