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Author: Osorio, Laura Ann
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Chapter 2: Fieldwork: Narrowing the Focus; Philosophies of Being and Materiality in Santa Elena, Yucatán.

As shown above, in the first part of Chapter 1, this thesis is primarily a discussion of art in the Maya area. In order to form an understanding of the production and reception of this creative material culture, it is necessary to reach an understanding of the main actors in this process with a view to showing how the artists and the participants in these programmes understood the materials that were worked on to produce them. Of equal importance, this text sets out to make a theory for the experience of Being, speaking both bodily and intellectually, since this is at the root of the engagement and reception of these programmes. Sub-chapters 1.3 and 1.4 have shown how worked matter, the material environment, and the repetition of culturally specific actions and rituals create a dialectic that is cumulative and is the ongoing process of community identity. As such, to speak of Maya art, we should be speaking of contemporary Maya communities. Ethnographic research in the Maya area (and in the field of ethno-archaeology at large) has been useful in mining the present to shed light on the past. One such example of successful ethno-archaeology is evident in Boteler Mock's (1998) collection of contemporary dedication and termination rituals that shed light on the archaeological record. The people of Santa Elena, as experts in their ancestral culture, put forward their theories on aspects of personhood and materiality, and these philosophies can enrich the interpretation of art in the Maya area. Furthermore, we need to pinpoint why we engage in the study of ancient Mesoamerican societies, and this is where the ideas and contributions of the residents of Santa Elena are of particular relevance.

The ethnographic research discussed in the following chapter was conducted in the form of semi-structured interviews. That is to say, although I generally centred my questions around the philosophies discussed in Chapter 1, dialogues were predominantly led by the interviewees. The objective was to foster a creative and mutually-interactive dialogue, in which ideas could arise organically. These "interviews" were conducted with people in the village, men and women of all ages. Many of the interviewees were people who are experts in community history and healing (such as spiritual and physical healers). Others were younger members of the community, whose creative and intelligent input supplemented these interviews and provided a lens with which to think about the role and opinion of those experts. The research period was four months long (January 15, 2010 to May 15, 2010). I interviewed over fifty people, the majority of whom were from Santa Elena. Others were from nearby communities: Ticul, Kantunil and Chicxulub. Direct

reference is made to twenty-one participants in the following chapters, as their contributions were most illustrative of the themes and theories that arose. These participants are not named, because I do not have authorisation to reveal all of their identities. They are contributors and our personal communication is comparable to personal communication with people in the academic profession. I have attached letter numbers to each participant, not to insinuate that their responses are quantitative but so that the reader can follow the letters throughout the sub-chapters and, if desired, get a sense of which themes and topics were touched upon by which contributors.

2.1 Introduction to Ethnography in the Maya Area.

The preceding theoretical outline has been an attempt to explain how it may be possible to use religious and historical conceptions and narratives to elucidate community approaches to existential thought, creativity and materiality. Ethnographic research in Mexico has leaned towards recording alternative ("non-Western") cultural phenomena such as *wayjel* (Rosales Mendoza 2008, 116), dualism or balance, and evenness, *paarejoj* (Kray 2005, 340), including hot and cold (Lopez Austin 1996, 116-117, Guiteras Holmes 1965, Adams and Rubel 1967, 335, Currier 1966, McCullough and McCullough 1974, Redfield and Redfield 1940, 64-65, Kray 2005, 344-345), and studies of flexible personhood, such as the *chulel* and animate entities (Pearce 1984, Gossen 1974, Lopez Austin 1996, Martínez González 2007). Research connecting this aspect of Being with external forces in the air (Adams 1952, 34, Marshall 1986, 162) has pointed towards the harm that these imbalances can cause. In Yucatán, for example, Villa-Rojas (1987) speaks of the *kinam*, which "hot" people are said to have. It is this *kinam* that can cause *mal de ojo* (harmful effects on those who come in contact with them) (1987, 381). The implication is that imbalance (of any kind) can not only be of harm to the individual, but is also harmful to the community; "the belief in forces in the air and of heat demonstrate the necessity for balance between the cold and hot elements that constitute the human being" (own transl of Martínez González 2007, 161). A recent term for these elements of Maya thought is, therefore, "animated entities; a structured unity with the capacity of independence, under certain conditions, from the organic place to which it belongs" (Martínez González 2007, 154).

Ethnoarchaeology in the Maya area has tended to focus on artefact analysis, as a way to make connections between contemporary and pre-Hispanic production practices and social thought in the Maya area (for example, Hayden and Cannon 1984). The semi-structured interviews that took place in Santa Elena touch on broader, or more abstract, understandings of worked matter and the natural environment. The religious and material overhaul of the Spanish conquest, followed by postcolonial stress and modernity, has resulted in splintered reception systems. It is clear that it is hard to construct an understanding of pre-Colombian Mesoamerican relationships to community, natural environment, the sense of self and Being, and so to creative action and work (Hatala 2010, Little 2004, Watanabe and Fischer 2004); "…when speaking of local Maya communities it is essential to adopt a critical stance toward unbridled claims of static "traditional" knowledge or ways of life that are insulated or hermetically sealed from externally-generated influences" (Hatala 2013, 16). Any continuity that we can speak of is better defined as belonging to a reception dialectic that began with the Spanish Conquest and the introduction of Catholic European material culture, and still continues through increasing globalisation, specifically in this context, for example, as smaller religious sects, such as the Jehovah's witnesses, become involved conceptually and visually.

It has also been argued that the term "Maya" as an identity marker is inaccurate (Restall 1997). Words such as "Indian", *ladino*, *mestizo* and "indigenous" have no equivalent meaning across the Maya world (which is spread over seven nations), or even throughout Yucatán, which contains linguistic and cultural diversity (Sullivan 2000). It has also been shown that these terms are not solely ventriloquism of the subaltern; "Maya ethnicity" is neither a pre-given, substantive identity and belonging, nor is it an artificial imposition of the state. Instead, it is a mediated and arbitrated "middle" zone created through mutual, if also unequal accommodation and, often antagonised, negotiation of interest" (Castañeda 2004, 52). There are very few, if any, concrete values and the task here is to align certain themes, in an attempt to sketch a theory with a culturally specific lens.

2.2 Preliminary description of the Fieldwork Location.

The State of Yucatán.

In the southern peninsula of Mexico, the State of Yucatán borders the states of Campeche and Quintana Roo, as well as the Gulf of Mexico. As part of Lowland Mesoamerica, the area was first settled by the Preclassic Maya (1200 BCE - 250 CE) in circa 200 BCE (Hatala 2013, 16), who appear to have lived in egalitarian permanent communities and developed an agricultural economy (Peregrine and Ember 2001, 379). The peninsula is said to have flourished in around 700 CE (Hatala 2013, 16) when the Chanés, who first inhabited the southern sites of Bacalar, later moved north to found sites such as, Chichen Itza (Peregrine and Ember 2001, 353). The coastal (northern) Tutul Xiues later settled in the region and after many battles with the Cocomes and Itza (descendants of the Chanés) formed the Mayapan league. This league disintegrated in the 12th century and left the Maya civilisation in smaller areas of local control (Peregrine and Ember 2001, 357).

Yucatán was conquered approximately twenty years after the Conquest of Mexico (1521), by Francisco de Montejo, after a series of battles with the indigenous people. Mérida (now Yucatán's capital city) was built in 1542 by his son, Francisco de Montejo y León. The city was built on top of a pre-Colombian site, T'ho, and stones from T'ho's buildings were used for the churches and other colonial structures. Although the Maya overlord, Nachi Cocom, besieged the city in attempt to push the Spanish out, he was defeated, consolidating Spanish victory. The city is still referred to as T'ho, in Yucatec Maya, evidencing the continued memory of this older place in the present.

Anti-colonial tension, due to widespread and long-term repression and violence (for example, the burning of several thousand objects and codices by Diego de Landa at Mani in 1561) resulted in a rebellion in the 18th century, under Jacinto Canek. This rebellion was rapidly aborted, but established underlying tensions in the area, which would lead to the major social upheavals of the Caste War (1847-1901) (Bricker 1977 and Alexander 2004).

The Caste War began as an insurgence by the Maya of the south-east of Yucatán and the *Yucatecos* (Spanish descendants) of the north-west. There were huge losses to both sides, and although the war is said to have ended in 1901, when the Mexican army occupied the city of Chan Santa Cruz, disputes between communities that did not accept

Mexican control continued for another ten years. As such, the Caste War is fresh in the oral histories of the older generations of Maya people in Yucatán.

Santa Elena, Yucatán.

The community of Santa Elena lies in the region classified as the west side of Yucatán (Figure 8 shows a map placing Santa Elena in the context of the surrounding communities). With another, smaller, community, San Simón, it comprises one of the one hundred and six municipalities in the state. The town is at an altitude of approximately thirty-one metres and occupies a surface area of 694.90 square kilometres. Santa Elena borders Muna, in the north, Oxkutzcab, in the south, Ticul, to the east, and Halacho to the west. The state of Campeche lies to the south. There are approximately three thousand people living in Santa Elena. Figure 9 shows an aerial view of the town centre, with its prominent central church, San Mateo.

The plains have clay deposits and a rocky floor, with low tropical shrubland (Figure 10). From north-east to south-east there is a hill, of approximately one hundred metres in height. There are no overlying bodies of water but water flows underground, collecting in *cenotes*, from which fresh water can be extracted. Water pools form where the roofs of these underground lakes have collapsed. The region is classified as subhumid, with rainy summers that are interrupted by dry spells. The medium yearly temperature is approximately 25° C and the median precipitation level is approximately 70 ml. Winds blow from the south-east.

The predominant part of the region's low-lying shrubland is classified as a low deciduous forest, and there are sections to the south and to the east that are classified as medium deciduous. The predominant flora include: Ceiba trees (this tree appears in Maya origin myths, for example, the Popol Vuh, and is known as the central world tree that connects the underworld, Xibalba, with the terrestrial world and the skies, the *balché* tree (from which a sacred Maya alcoholic beverage is made), the cedar, poppy and mahogany. With regards to fauna, birds such as swallows, doves and *chachalacas* predominate, as well as lizards, snakes, raccoons and rabbits. There are various domesticated animals, including pigs, chickens and turkeys, and there is a widespread tradition of deer-hunting in the surrounding forest land (León and Montiel 2008).

The History of Santa Elena.

The area was inhabited by the pre-Colombian Maya (circa 600 - 1000 CE) in the Classic period. The settlement was called Nohcacab, "the great place". The settlement lies near to Uxmal, Kabah, Xcoh, Nohpat and Muchich. It is not clear when it was settled by the Spanish, but there is evidence that it was established as an *encomienda* in 1627. The imposing Catholic church, San Mateo (seen in Figure 9), was built on pre-Colombian remains in 1779 and is accessible by a high stairway. After Mexican Independence and the inclusion of Yucatán in the Republic of Mexico, Santa Elena fell under the religious and political area of Ticul. Santa Elena was burned down during the Caste War, at which point many of the Spanish, mulatto and mestizo population moved to Merida. The priest who presides at Mass in Santa Elena lives and works in Ticul, in spite of the fact that Santa Elena was declared head of its own municipality in 1918. Figure 11 shows a traditional house, although many houses like this, with earth floors, are being replaced by "Western"-style concrete houses with concrete floors.

Two hundred and thirteen German immigrants from Hamburg moved to Santa Elena in 1865-66 to initiate a farming colony under an initiative by Emperor Maximilian I. This farming colony was called the Villa Carlota. The farming colony dissolved relatively quickly but it is possible that several German families remained in Santa Elena. The restoration of San Mateo church in 1980 led to an excavation which uncovered twelve coffins containing partially mummified children (aged three to six), some of the remains of which are displayed in a small museum behind the church (Huchim Herrera 2013). It is assumed, through an analysis of their dress and privileged burial position near the altar, that these children were among the German immigrants. There is photographic evidence that people in positions of privilege (for example, those who owned and lived in the surrounding *haciendas* of Yucatán) were also buried according to these customs (Huchim Herrera 2013).

It was my aim to investigate the attitudes and theories of Maya people who lived close to and engaged with archaeological and historic sites in a non-academic or archaeological context. The decision to use Santa Elena as a base to conduct the following interviews was made thanks to Dr Josep Ligorred (2010), INAH Yucatán. He confirmed that, largely, members of the community were comfortable with researchers conducting anthropological and archaeological studies. That these interviews would not interrupt or aggravate the local population was of premium importance.

2.3 Personhood in the Maya Area.

Certain ethnographers have documented that the Maya believe in the *chulel*, which is a soul composed of thirteen parts (Whittaker and Warkentin 1965, 88-89, Pearce 1984, 159). This, in itself, could be interpreted as significant, showing that the Mesoamerican worldview holds that human essence is divided into distinct sections, as if people were made up of a sum of parts. Within this logic, one may assume that a part, being an element of the self, is thereby personalised. It has been shown that much ritual activity is concerned with the loss of one of the parts of a person's *chulel* (Pearce 1984). One of the most dangerous periods for the *chulel* is infancy, and spun cotton is tied around the wrist and ankle of a baby to secure the *chulel* until baptism, when it becomes more firmly fixed (Pearce 1984, 159). The *chulel* of a child is guarded meticulously; "Places where the child has been playing or sitting for any length of time are carefully swept, to ensure that no parts of the chulel are left behind to wander aimlessly or fall victim to the earth owner" (Pearce 1985, 159). Purportedly, among the Tzetzal of Tenejapa, "Just as a house is dedicated, a newborn child is socially confirmed in its animation by means of ritual cleansing, measuring, naming, feeding, clothing, guardianship, and transfer of animacy" (Stross 1998, 36). This may signify that it is acts of acculturation that fix a person's spiritual make-up, supporting the theory that basic human essence and biological determinism do not, and perhaps did not, exist within the Maya worldview. The loss of the *chulel* in adulthood has also been described as a potential threat and can be instigated by certain activities such as sexual intercourse, physical excitement or drunkenness (Stross 1998, 36). This theory is supported by similar finds in the ethnographic record. One such example is Gossen's study of the Chamula, in which he adds that the soul can lose one of its parts due to human activity such as "sexual intercourse, fight, excitement, pleasure, anger or an accident" (1989, 257 and Gossen 1975, 451). This is similarly attested by Watanabe (in Bricker and Gossen, 1989, 263). These actions or feelings create an imbalance, which is related not just to community and individual, but to the cosmic order; "To fall into abuses, such as to be lazy, drink too much, conduct oneself in an excessive and lustful manner, and use aphrodisiacs and hallucinogens, with the express intention of obtaining pleasure, not only damages the person involved, and their community, but also the cosmos in its totality" (own transl of Rosales Mendoza 2008, 113). The fact that alcohol may liberate the *chulel* is reminiscent of the widespread and socially sanctioned use of *aguardiente* (homemade sugar cane spirit) in Maya daily life. The widespread use of alcohol is attested in many ethnographic sources; for example, the emotive story of

Juan de Chamula related by R. Pozas, in which he is driven to irrecoverable alcoholism through his engagement with socio-religious duties. It has also been attested that the Maya use alcohol in religious ceremonies, believing that communication with the ancestors is negotiable through the offering of alcohol and "each drink consumed in the ceremony is also a drink that is consumed by the Ancestors" (Fabrega and Silver 1973, 246). Arguably, the use of alcohol (alongside other devices) could loosen the divisible parts of the Being of both spectators and religious art objects. Furthermore, it has been shown that ritual incantations are used in this transition, as is evidenced in the mortuary traditions of the Tzetzal; "The timing of lamentations, just before the body is lowered into the grave, suggests a communion, or at least communication between the soul of the deceased and the souls of those left behind, and may reference a transmission of life-force between the world of the living and the Otherworld" (Stross 1998, 37). It has been recorded that some Maya people also believe that when a person dies their *chulel* travels to the land of the dead, where it remains for a specific amount of time until it is ready to rejoin the living world and inhabit the body of another human.

Ethnographic literature on this subject implies that the self is potentially recyclable and does not belong to a particular person and that bodily fluids can and should be transferred between people and the natural environment; "It is commonly thought that blood (red) will nurture land, prevent diseases of men and/or help them to recuperate from disease" (Barrera-Bassols and Toledo 2005, 30). This may indicate that were a person's aim to achieve "individuality", as European philosophy defines it, a person would have to be capable of manipulating his or her self. It is, furthermore, implied that partibility is negotiated on a ritual basis, both in persons and in the worked matter. In the case of worked matter, materials would have to be brought to life through rituals, as well as, perhaps, through other artistic/stylistic devices. This research raises questions regarding the negotiability of self, since identity fluctuates and is subject to external forces and circumstances.

Various recent publications in the field of Maya studies have attempted an understanding of Classic Maya personhood through ethnographic and epigraphic research (Houston and Stuart 1996 and Houston and Stuart 1998). This discussion has centred around the reading of the Classic glyph, u-ba(h), which has been linked to modern Maya languages in the form bah: "…the entries from Tzotzil and Yucatec Maya define bah and its lexical derivations as aspects of appearance, a recognisable "visage," or overall mien" (Houston and Stuart 1998, 77). This research indicates that the use of u-ba(h), associated with Classic Maya figural images may be related to the Maya 'kuh and Aztec concept of

teotl, whereby a larger unity of energy constitutes a divinity that is connected to the life-force attributable to “objects” (Hvidfeldt 1958, 76-100 and Boone 1984, 44), and thus portraits; “Evidence now suggests a Maya (and probably Mesoamerican) understanding of representation that is quite similar, making use of an extendable essence shared between images and that which is portrayed” (Houston and Stuart 1998, 86).

Stephen Houston, in his most recent publication (2014), illustrates the processual nature of working matter, through human energy and agency; “Among the Maya, matter stores energy and latent potential” (Houston 2014, 5). Colouring, for example, in Maya glyphic adjectives, is expressed as “becoming red” or “becoming green/blue” (chakjal and yaxjal respectively) (Houston 2014, 9). Through this lens, in which the nature of being is impermanent, it can be shown that human skill lends personhood to active materials. In light of research conducted by Stone and Stuart on text and images wrapped around stalagmites and stelae, it has been shown that, “the more unusual skill (among the Classic Maya) is to distinguish between stones with energies and those without, and to prime the first for some special function” (Houston 2014, 91-92). Houston shows that, though it would be impossible to attempt any summary of the ways (ethnographically and archaeologically) that energy is conceived in the Maya world, past and present, “…broadly, such energies lie within human grasp, controllable by ‘magic and prayer’” (Houston 2014 79).

Following various (semi-structured and unstructured) interviews with members of the community in Santa Elena, the existence of *chulel* was not explicitly confirmed. However, there are various themes, similar to those raised in the ethnographic literature, which can be applied or compared to the sketch of Maya existential rationality. The role of alcohol, for example, as a forceful substance, is attested in a number of narratives. One such example was given in an exchange with two young women (A and B), within a larger discussion of the *viento malo* or *iik naal* (also recorded by Barrera-Bassols and Toledo 2005, 30).

On the way to a healing man (*h-men*)’s house to ask for information on the subject of thoughts surrounding the *viento malo*, the two women were asked what they perceived to be the role of the *h-men* in the community. This question was posed in the hope of understanding the sort of respect held for his profession, or the various reasons why people might go to him for help. Both women responded that the bad wind (*viento malo*) could be brought by a bird, *kuy* (perhaps an owl), if it happened to fly over your house at night. It was asserted that if there were a child in the house (children and, in particular, babies are more vulnerable) who catches the *viento malo*, it would almost surely die.

Babies, in particular, are protected in the company of drunken men and, in some cases, when a drunken man passes by the house or the land surrounding the house. The remedy for the presence or closeness of such a person to a baby is to sprinkle alcohol in the baby's face. Pregnant women are also a threat (on the basis of their volubility in the hope having a healthy child) (see also Guiteras Holmes 1965 and Stone 2011). Hungry or thirsty men, who have come from work in the *monte*, may also make a baby cry and instigate illness. Those who have a dark patch in their iris are generally feared as they may be the cause of bad health. The remedy for all of the above occurrences is affection and fresh air.

It could be argued that the passive effect of alcohol is similar in nature to the uses of alcohol attested in earlier ethnographic investigations. In this instance, however, it is not the consumer of alcohol him or herself who is affected but a person who is nearby. Conversely, it may be the case that the alcohol has loosened the structured self of the drunken person, making his Being forceful to other members of the community, whose self is still immature (children and babies). The possibility that alcohol serves as a loosening agent that can affect personhood is not made explicit through this narrative, however. From the accompanying detail relating to ill health caused by unknown external forces, what appears to be the case is that various states of elevated experience, stressful or otherwise, can be harmful to children (concur with Lopez Austin 1996, 115-122). It could be inferred, broadly, that it is an imbalance of energy that can be harmful to the stabilising personhood of the infant. It is not surprising that the precise cause of the instability varies in different accounts, nor that over time these effects are attributed to different materials. The point is that forces act upon people in delicate states, and that ritual action must be taken to rectify any damage. There might be various explanations as to why children or babies are more unstable. Perhaps the implication is that cultural conditioning fixes personhood, and that babies have yet to learn the movements and actions necessary to deflect potential harm, and so in their ignorance must be protected by others. This may be, in part, an elaborate, and very real, symbol for the role of parenting in general.

A belief in the existence of “Being” as an entity independent of the body can be evidenced from further communication in a variety of interviews. One such example concerns the attitude of many people from Santa Elena to the nearby archaeological site (Xcoh), which is not open to the public. The site consists, largely, of a temple structure, which stands on one of the highest hills in the surrounding area, and thus affords a view of Santa Elena and Ticul (the nearby, larger village). Through the floor is an entrance to a lower level that leads to a narrow airless tunnel at the base of which is a small body of water. Although young boys (interviewed) are in the habit of visiting the site, there is much

reticence on the part of a good majority of the people living in Santa Elena towards visiting it. Two main reasons for this were presented among the various interviews; one of these is the distance of the site from the village, in the *monte*. The conceptual separation of these two spaces, even though there are parts of the *monte* that are well known and used (they are farmed) is notable. The second reason for not wanting to visit the site is related to the negative (or perhaps simply powerful) energy that surrounds the place. In a discussion with a young woman (C), it became clear that it was the history of archaeological sites that inspire caution in people. It was later explained by a man in Kantunil (D), who was an expert in the medicinal and spiritual uses of local plants and had been a student of the aforementioned healer in Santa Elena (E), that the spiritual remains of so many deceased people caused strong forces that are capable of displacing a person's Being and cause physical or psychological discomfort. Another interview with a woman (A) who works at the women’s aid centre, regarding the village cemetery, provided further information on this topic. According to this woman, a girl had been killed near the cemetery and had suffered from a particularly violent death (the details of which were not communicated). Sometime later a temporary train track had been laid around the village for one of the festivals, and the girl's ghost boarded the train, imposed a *viento malo* on the driver and caused a crash. It could be postulated that this belief in the existence of a life-force after death implies a looser understanding of personhood, which could shift from different physical spheres and have a concrete effect on them. Furthermore, in spite of the fact that the story couches the influence of the murdered girl in very European terms, as a ghost, it is clear that the *viento malo* is regarded as a comparable force. It is unclear from these accounts whether it is a personified entity that remains in spite of, for example, death, or if it is the life force in the form of negative energy that remains and has agency. It is possible, and seems plausible, that both conceptions exist alongside each other. If this is the case, there are interesting implications in terms of the forms of fluidity of personhood, and how it relates to artistic and religious material culture. It would appear that one of the outstanding elements of the existential philosophy of Santa Elena relates to the continued presence of the energy of people who are no longer present, or even alive. Furthermore, in corroboration of the earlier treatment of the role of alcohol, it is forceful actions or substances that can have the strongest impact on the inner Being of nearby persons. The forces that affect the people (agents) of Santa Elena are also not temporally fixed. There is a transfer of energy that does not begin and end, but is caught up in a chain. This attitude and philosophy can be associated with agriculture. Food and fuel, within an agricultural system, are negotiated cyclically and do not have marked lifespans.

The two women who participated in the interviews described had been asked to visit the *h-men* (E), a man who was famous for being able to cure spiritual diseases. The physical manifestations of these diseases could have been inflicted by negative energy, whether naturally or by the hand of a person seeking, through specified ritual or posthumously, to harm. This man is also said to be able to cure illnesses that will not dissipate in spite of medical treatment, that have no scientific or rational reason to persist (although in these cases it has also been argued that a third party, with destructive intentions, is involved). An example of this was given by one of the young women (C). The grandmother of this young woman (C) was wheelchair-bound from the age of 58, and the doctors at the hospital are unable to find a reason, or cure, for this (she is immobile to the point of being unable to lift herself out of her hammock). It was interpreted by the woman's family that the illness was caused by the parents of a friend of her son's. This son had been a soldier and had instigated a fight with a close friend of his (who was also a soldier). The son died, accidentally, during this fight, unfortunately leaving a large debt to the friend's family unpaid. The bereaved parents, who were unable to pay the sum, were blamed by the living soldier's family for the situation, and told that they would pay the price in another way. Thus, presumably, this disagreement was the cause of the woman's early incapacitation.

The *Wayjel*.

Another (well-documented) Mesoamerican phenomenon that may indicate certain aspects of conceptions of personhood, and that has been shown to be shared by the Maya, is personhood that links two entities, in which an animal and a human share a *chulel* (Magril 1988, 259, Pitarch 1996, 79, Aulie and Aulie 1998, 55, Martínez González 2007, 159). This has been documented at Zinacantán, where the people are said to believe that the identity of the *nagual* is revealed to its human counterpart in a dream; "At the birth of each Zinacanteco, the Ancestors place the chulel of the child into an animal born at the same time" (Pearce 1984, 161). The ancestors protect the *chulels* of the *naguales* in mountain corrals (this is where the *nagual* is pointed out to the dreaming human). The human (and animal) can die if the *chulel* of its counterpart is called upon by an enemy and destroyed; "A recurring characteristic in animated forces is that they are linked to external elements that allow them to regenerate and restore themselves during ordinary cycles in a human life" (own transl of Martínez González 2007, 154). There are various accounts of situations in which an animal is shot in the forest and a human in a

neighbouring settlement falls dead simultaneously (displaying marks of the same wound found on the animal) (Foster 1944, 93). This philosophy is documented among the Tzotzil Maya, who believe that the ancestral gods may punish people by setting the *chulel* of their *nagual* free (Pearce 1984, 161).

There is ethnographic documentation for the *nagual* among Maya pentecostal communities in Yucatán. *Uay chivos* (were-goats) are said to enter community territory (in goat form) and cause harm; these Beings are humans who become animals (Rodríguez Balam 2005, 165); "it seems that a shared belief by a large part of Maya towns is that, by sharing one Being – or heart, a person and that person's double, will have the same destiny, character and personality" (Martínez González 2007, 159-160). More recent research has shown that these animals are usually wild, and create a link between a human and nature; "it can be an owl, a jaguar, a wild cat, a hummingbird or a deer and you are obliged to protect their wayjel, because your own life depends on the soul of this animal" (own transl of Rosales Mendoza 2008, 116). Here the duality of this split person is not practically the emphasis, but the concept of the *wayjel* is a linking factor, an active character that prompts a dialectic between a person and nature.

Uay animals/people were mentioned substantially in interviews with a man in Santa Elena (F) who is famous for healing physical ailments with indigenous plants, most famously, rattlesnake bites. It should be noted that he does not provide healing from unexplained sources. Although it is evident that he believes that at times this is necessary, and demonstrated a plant that can help with *mal de ojo* in babies, it is not his field of expertise. Regarding humans who have animal counterparts, no mention was made. However, the existence of people who can transform into animals was confirmed. His grandfather, a *h-men*, who fought in the Caste War of Yucatán (1847-1901), was forced to spend long periods of time away from his family. According to this interviewee (F), his grandfather would return home every eight days, disguised as a large dog. There are also cases of female *uay*-animals. The wife of another interviewee (G)'s great uncle was abandoned on the basis that she was discovered changing into an animal to steal and kill chickens while his uncle was at work.

Within a certain theoretical framework, it is arguable that the belief that animals and humans share a joint personhood further illustrates the possibility that persons exist with multiple and divisible aspects of their Being/self. People can be divided between two physical entities and are thus not bound by concrete bodily individuality. The belief in the way can also be used to demonstrate the close affinity that the Maya share with the natural (in this case faunal) world. This belief can also be associated with ideas of natural

cyclicality: of birth, death, decay and rebirth, in which all Beings are linked in fundamental substance. Although a specific link is thus made between human and animal Being, it has been asserted that the personhood of humans and objects, among Mesoamerican indigenous groups, are not necessarily attributed the same characteristics; “While all beings and objects, animate and inanimate, possess a soul, a vulnerable quality that can be lost or stolen, humans and animals alone possess a unique vital force, a spiritual quality that grows and develops during the lifetime of a human or animal, which can never be stolen from its possessor” (Pearce 1984, 162). Needless to say, this is a subject that should be further deconstructed in view of a treatment of material culture (to follow).

The particularly alternative relationship between the human and faunal world that the examples of narratives explaining *uay-chivos/perros/gatos*, and so on, touch on, rely on another understanding of personhood altogether. Significantly, this belief does not apply to all people, only to a few. It may be the case that there is an underlying symbolism in these narratives, or parables, that reveals the speakers' attitude towards pre-Colombian Maya culture. In the case of G, his asserted allegiance to the Christian faith and disparagement towards men such as E or F may have moved the bias of the story away from sympathy with the *uay*. In contrast, F’s narrative applauds the use by his grandfather of these powers, which is offset by his involvement in the Caste War (and defence of Maya culture). Personhood, from this angle, is not passive entity that is solely formed through transmitted cultural conceptions. It is actively created by the community members in Santa Elena. The ideas surrounding the *uay* in the narratives are put forward in either a positive or a negative light, which is based on a desire to affiliate, or not, with “non-Western” cultural concepts. Just as agency (in the form of ritual action) is performed in order to control personhood, people in Santa Elena manipulate the oral tradition to direct personhood both on a personal and on a social level.

On another level of interpretation, it is interesting to try to understand the psychological and philosophical implications of the existence of the *uay* characters in Mayan narrative. The interviews did not yield any descriptions of two Beings sharing one personhood; moreover, they indicate the shift from one corporeal state to another. We might be able to apply the permeability model here, in that two corporeal states are connected or transferable. Substances are not delineated and are part of one fluid network. Although the body, or appearance, changes, the underlying personhood does not. There is no allusion, in the stories, to the division of the self, in the sense of split personality traits or splintered identity. The focus is on the corporeal element. This is in contrast to the assertion of, for example, Rosales Mendoza (2008), who writes that the

connection between human and animal is a connection between society and nature. Through the permeability model, the connection remains, but through shared substances in one entity rather than shared personhood through two entities.

This could be viewed from another angle, that of metaphor and symbolism, in the same way in which we see creative expression in portraiture. In this sense, aspects of personhood are being divided and placed in contrast to one another, as an analogy for the divisible nature of Being, through a permeable world of materials. The stories may symbolise the complex relationship, seemingly ever present in religion and philosophical theory, between reality and illusion. We could recall impersonation in art, the construction of an ephemeral illusion through image, and even the self-conscious position imposed on the viewer (participant) by creative material. By shifting forms and altering the stability of an image, the spectator (in reaction to both a material form and an imagined one) is more likely to engage on a personal level with the subject.

The *uay* narratives are emotive because they raise concepts that are at the heart of a Mesoamerican mentality. The characters and the thrust of the stories can vary, and are as interchangeable as the personhood of the subjects themselves. The concepts are reinforced, and played with, and in this way they attract the imagination and critical opinion of the listener. This is, perhaps, the existential and didactic power of the *uay* narrative. Cultural identity and heritage perspectives shine through the descriptions of *uay*, as we have seen. It is perhaps unsurprising that the aspects of *uay* are so divergent, since they are actively being shifted and changed, in a way that corresponds to more fluid conceptions of personhood and identity. This research shows that in Santa Elena, the animal image of a person is not a connection with nature (Rosales Mendoza 2008), or a way of preserving balance (Kray 2005). It is a narrative that arises in the context of discussions pertaining to the engagement with a cultural identity separate from Mexican nationality. As such, it is involved in the deconstruction/reconstruction of identity.

2.4 External Animated Forces and Action in Response.

Briefly touched upon have been the philosophies that relate to the life-force attributed, by the people with whom I conducted interviews, to inanimate (non-human and non-faunal) entities. The present discussion attempts to deconstruct the implications of these ideas for the negotiation of personhood through materials. It is likely that creative

and religious stories, as well as ritual performances, can elucidate some of the deeper aspects of a specific cultural response to Being, and its relationship to worked matter. I will touch on various interviews that deal with religious and metaphysical themes.

The Structure of Forces.

Interviews concerning religious or metaphysical philosophy were particularly fruitful (perhaps predictably) with people who are an authority on spiritual and physical well-being in the community (although these sources have not been used exclusively). The first example is that of interviewee D, from Kantunil, a botanist and healer, whose views on the energy imbued in historical sites, have already been mentioned. The main thrust of the arguments that substantiate his worldview centre around the imbalance of energy. The increase in the frequency and impact of natural disasters in the lead-up to the period ending 2012, for example, has been attributed to the world (metaphorically described as a dog) shaking off fleas due to the increase in toxic waste, rubbish and so on, associated with the development of modern technology. He was asked to respond to whether he would describe the world, the natural environment, and the materials that constitute it, as having animate energy further than from a metaphorical perspective. He framed his response in another way, using stones as the example in his explanation. Stones were divided into two broad types: in the first instance, there are those that have energy because they have absorbed it from a person who has transferred it to them. This could happen, as might be logical following the earlier discussion, if that person's life-force was displaced or heightened due to various possible factors of intensity. He gave an example of how it might be possible to detect a stone with energy; when a dog circles a stone as if to sit on it but decides not to, it can be plausibly inferred that the stone has its own energy that repels the dog. The other type of stone that may have energy is one that has been under impact. As an example, he used an agate, which was precious to him. This stone contains energy, according to D, because of the impact (pressure) that is necessary to create an agate. The levels of energy in certain objects or places, therefore, are not necessarily a negative influence based on dramatic human occurrences (as described by A/B/C). However, it is evident that he believed a balance to be desirable. In response to a question relating to his relationship with the Catholic religion (he owned numerous catholic shrines), he asserted that God, and the Virgin Mary, could restore a balance of energy, if prayed to.

A similar interview with F, the elderly, and respected, doctor in Santa Elena, yielded alternative explanations of the role of energy and the impact of external forces. One such explanation, which touches on the issue, concerns a subject which is much talked about, in general, among the people in Santa Elena, and that is *mal de ojo*. It is stated in some ethnographic literature that *mal de ojo* is associated with a change in temperature (Adams 1952, 34, Marshall 1986, 162, Villa-Rojas 1987, 381, Rodríguez Balam 2005, 167, Martínez González 2007, 162). A basic description of the narratives surrounding *mal de ojo* is given in the previous sub-chapter, with regard to the effect of hungry or pregnant people looking at a baby. However, it is perhaps interesting to add the dimension explained during F's interview, because the causes and mechanism were unpacked. F stated that *mal de ojo* can be cured using the leaves of a small bush (dark green, soft and shaped like pine or fern). However, it is supposedly not the ideal remedy because the spirit of *mal de ojo* remains in the child and makes that person (unconsciously) more capable of transmitting it to another person in the future. A concrete example of this was given in the form of interviewee H, who is a friend of interviewee F and who was cured of *mal de ojo* as a child, with this leaf. He maintained that he had to be very careful in adulthood not to pass on the effects of *mal de ojo*. He said that he had once, inadvertently, killed a horse (by not being mindful enough of his power to cause harm). This style of thought, in Santa Elena, runs throughout a number of the interviews, and implies the possibility that energy is very fluid and extends beyond an individual, and even beyond a closed group of people or a community. Not only is energy capable of moving through material (corporeal or otherwise), but the repercussions of this type of energy can persist through time. There are not always either spatial or temporal boundaries.

As a result of the previous communication with D, more questions were prompted to F in the hope of a further explanation regarding how this seemingly impersonal energy could interact with material culture. An emphasis was placed on belief as part of an ability to comprehend the deeper elements of Maya meta-theory. F also provided evidence that such an energy exists in raw materials: if you hit a stone, it gives off a burnt smell, "If you can smell it, it's alive". There was no mention of this life having been transferred from a person, and so, in this case, the interview indicates that "inanimate" objects could possess force intrinsically. Again, there is an implication here that certain stones are alive and certain others are not, although the reason for this is unclear.

There are two interesting sides to this philosophy that run through both stories. In the first place, there are shifts in energy through people and through certain objects, and the force (energy) itself cannot be harnessed or controlled – action must be taken by the

persons involved in a narrative, to avoid negative consequences. This could be a metaphor for an agricultural lifestyle, in which nature provides a certain environment that cannot be manipulated, but where tools and agency on the part of the community can prevent too much irregularity. The metaphor can also be seen in a religious or ephemeral sense. Ritual action can counteract the aspects of the world that can be harmful. Here, cultural conceptions, through the oral narrative, tap into the representation of both the banal and the more spiritual. This mediation between the knowable and the unknowable promotes an existential exercise that links creative feeling to daily life. Ideas of fluid materials, and so fluid persons, are reinforced, but the more banal aspect would probably give the people in Santa Elena an opportunity to be creative in their response to their cultural philosophies.

This leads to the second point, which is the appropriation of cultural identity through response to these ideas of transferable energies (negative or otherwise). Interviewee F stated that, in order to engage with these forces at all, one had to believe in the existence of unknown and inexplicable occurrences. This sentiment is comparable to the association of negative or positive attributes to the *uay/wayjel*. By choosing to believe in the external forces, pre-Colombian or inherited cultural values are lent weight, and, in this way, are supported. It is clear that F divides community members into those who engage with the narratives and those who do not. The community thus has practical and creative power over its cultural heritage.

Ethnographic and archaeological literature regarding the association of life-force to material "objects" is plentiful. These materials are usually related to people, however. For example, some ethnographic research shows that objects associated with a deceased person are broken before being buried with him/her; "…clothes and objects associated with the dead person are placed in the grave, each somehow cut, burned or broken" (Vogt 1983, 23). This ritual termination takes place in various communities; among the Tzotzil of Zinacantán, the Huastec of San Luis Potosí and the Nahua communities of Veracruz (where the plates and *machetes* of the deceased are broken to release the *yolotl*, soul) (Stross 1998, 37). Ritual termination (and animation) are mirrored in the archaeological record, which presents innumerable examples of smashed architectural constructions and stelae, and buried valuables, such as jade or pots, with buildings and stelae (Freidel, Schueler and Cobos Palma 1998, Freidel et al 1993, McKillop 2004, 221-223). This suggests that material objects can contain a life-force that engages with the personhood of the owner, and that the personhood of the "object" is not displaced naturally at death. As mentioned, following the internal logic displayed in the interview with F in Santa Elena and

D in Kantunil, it could be hypothesised that objects can have a life force or agency, independent of interaction with humans or animals. They may also become agents as a result of large energy forces. Rituals are performed in order to maintain an energy balance between objects and the persons surrounding them. Thus, there would be two systems functioning in tandem: the energy and personhood shared between people, nature and objects is in constant negotiation on the basis of powerful forces that happen at random and are unavoidable. In contrast to this system is that of socially and religiously prescribed rituals that help to restore this balance or to avoid adverse consequences. The repetition and consolidation of these narratives is another aspect of social ritual, which reinforces the concepts of flexible personhood and force through the material environment. It has been identified as a way of endorsing historic cultural identity, even though this identity has no stable meaning (Castañeda 2004 and Sullivan 2000). As such, agency is employed in the transmission of concepts that we associate with pre-Colombian Maya thought.

External Forces and Their Effects.

Discussed in the ethnographic literature, and equally apparent in interviews conducted in Santa Elena, is the role and nature of *viento malo/aire malo* (for example, Barrera-Bassols and Toledo 2005, 30). These forces in the air have also been linked, in ethnographic literature, to personhood; “the air ik’ is a person’s ch’uylel spirit. The spirit of men is pure wind” (Whittaker and Warkentin 1965, 88-89). *Aires* or *vientos* are said to exist in areas that have a connection with the past and outside the confines of a community; “There is a cenote there that you shouldn’t go into. If you go in, you won’t come out. There are harmful winds there. They are hot and cold. Once you go in, they pull you and don’t let you out" (own transl of Rodríguez Balam 2005, 158). Soil/*lu’um* (Canul-Pech 1967) has been shown to have spiritual, as well as material, value (Quintal et al 2003 and Iroshe 2002); “The semantic and epistemological richness of the lu’um domain is also reflected by this holistic perception, in which land is inextricably linked to the material and spiritual worlds” (Barrera-Bassols and Toledo 2008, 28). As such, land, for the Maya, needs to be looked after and nourished; “Land never dies as we do; and plants, and animals are also condemned to die... Land is a spirit” (Iroshe 2002, 4). There are many examples of the rituals that take place in order to ensure that, for example, the Ch’a’ Chaak ceremony, which has been reported in at least fifteen towns (for example, Villa-Rojas 1987, Freidel et al 1993, Flores and Balam 1997, Rosales Mendoza 2008). This ceremony evokes Chaak, the water god. The *jmeno'ob* are in control of this ceremony, and

so have the charge of fomenting a connection and relationship between spiritual forces and town members; “we are made of soil, and we will return as soil after we die, and our body has been eaten by worms” (Iroshe 2002, 65-70). Also attributed in the ethnographic literature is *yuumdzil/yuumdzilo'ob*, which is a wind that transforms itself into a human who wanders in the *monte*. Its function is to lose people who are far from their village. The *yumbalam* is an animal, also like an *aire*, that sings and whistles and causes people to get lost (Rodríguez Balam 2005, 166). It is notable here that there is an association between the *vientos*, and their effect, and the distance from the town, the *monte*. A deep and interested knowledge of landscape management is also recorded among Maya communities, and so there is an amalgamated effort to deal with farming and the land; “The first offers information about nature through empirical knowledge; and the second deals will problems not covered by the first (the unknown, uncontrollable and unpredictable), through the dialogue with the supra-natural entities (gods, deities, spirits). In brief: nature, deities and humans work together in the eternal production and reproduction of life” (Barrera-Bassols and Toledo 2008, 28).

Vientos Malos.

These airs or winds have already arisen in the context of their effects on personhood. They are very much present in the minds of people of Santa Elena, dictating certain practical, spiritual and health (as has been shown) choices. It is perhaps useful to collate some of the instances of their mention, in an attempt to understand their role in the construction of religious rationality and personhood. As discussed, the harmful winds are principally said to exist in places that are far away from the community, and in particular around ancient sites (sites that are charged with the energy of ancestors from many generations, X'coh and Uxmal, for example. A woman (C) whose family of young boys (brothers) brave the abandoned archaeological sites in the area, claimed in an interview that people fear these spaces due to the fact that to go there is a decided engagement with the past, which should remain buried.

These winds can also exist where a violent act has happened (see Chapter 2a) and this energy can travel around at random, and sometime affect vulnerable people. For example, two other women who were interviewed scolded some small children who, while dancing in the main square in the wind, were cavalier about its consequences. They seemed to imply that adults were more adept at avoiding a problem with these winds. Four boys (I, J, K and L), all fifteen years old and who spend time at the abandoned

archaeological sites in defiance of the directions of their carers, described the wind as moving in spirals close to the ground, and often raising leaves. There seemed to be a small disagreement as to whether this visible spiral wind is a warning that the actual bad wind is coming, or whether it is the bad wind itself. What was certain was that it caused a severe sickness, starting with a fever and culminating in a frozen back: one of the boys stated that he had become sick in this way when he was younger. He had a fever and could not walk, and was taken by his family to be ritually cleansed and then warned to be careful of these winds in the future. F, in light of his evident knowledge of cultural theory, provided a useful explanation in this regard. He asserted that most of the winds that people feared were from the north and that they caused fevers because they upset the temperature balance in children. He agreed that it was the wind that circles close to the ground that can be mischievous, so that, in this case, the wind is animated. He gave the example of a young boy, watching a swirling wind next to a freestanding gourd. If the child is aware that the gourd might fall and is watching it, the wind will knock it over. Likewise, if you tell a child not to fall, he/she will. He touches, here, on the power of suggestion and its role in the energy imbalance caused by winds.

These various accounts of the role of winds in Santa Elena present what seems to be a slightly confused rationality. However, although it is impossible to get a consolidated idea of the nature of this phenomenon, there are common elements throughout. In line with the accounts relating to intrinsic energy in natural materials, there are winds that can affect people as passive agents, as in the case of winds that cause illness through low temperatures or association with ancient sites. Those that are produced at archaeological sites might be classified distinctly, since the energy comes from people and from worked material culture. There are also winds that have a humanised or dialectic agency, such as those that respond to the suggestion of an expectant or nervous child. There are varying types of external force, therefore, between natural energy, the presence of history, and shifting negotiable and non-negotiable agencies.

Aluxes.

Another entity that provides external force to people in Santa Elena, and is also accounted for in ethnographic literature, is that of the *alux*. *Aluxes* have been described heterogeneously in this literature, but are usually associated with ritual spaces such as archaeological sites, the *monte* or caves. One example of literature on the subject states that "… aluxes can be found in caves or underground" (own transl of Rodríguez Balam

2005, 162). Described as naked or dressed as ancient Mayan people, all men or a mix of men and women, with or without genitals, mischievous or protectors of the *milpa* and *monte* (Rodriguez Balam 2005, 163) The *aluxes* have also been described as “owners or saints that administer natural phenomena” (Barrera-Bassols and Toldeo 2008, 29). It is clear that they have never had a concrete profile, but they are another connection (like the *wajyel* or the *h-men*) between people and their actions, and nature. It is perhaps irrelevant to attempt an understanding of the historical longevity of this belief, or to analyse how significant the symbolism and narrative details are to pre-Colombian Maya thought. It is, however, interesting to try to interpret what the diverging stories about *aluxes* say about the specific creative engagement that people in Santa Elena make with the phenomena surrounding intangible forces.

Thus, rather than record the entire repertory of discussions regarding the *aluxes*, since, as mentioned, it seems impossible to reach a precise description, certain lengthier descriptions from Santa Elena will be given, as an overview of how they fit into the larger scheme of external forces. A couple who live in Ticul, but teach in the school at Santa Elena, and also work in a local restaurant and investigate the nearby sites (M and N), were the most fervent advocates for the existence of *aluxes*, claiming to have seen them many times. There is a very small and unnamed pre-Colombian Maya site near Santa Elena, which is also on the top of a hill, where M goes alone at night and sets up a tent. The area, according to his account, is one of high energy and power, which can make visitors lose their way when coming down the hill. In order to prevent this, he carries a red ribbon, which he attaches to the trees. *Aluxes* run around the camp at night. M states that they are all men, all naked and very small. He added that they could take your life if they wanted, but they do not harm him, in particular, because they know him. They are used to him, and so they watch from behind the trees.

A man (interviewee H), now living on the coast but originally from Santa Elena and the son of a man famous for being able to cure severe cases of *mal de ojo*, related his interactions with *aluxes*. Unlike M’s account, H's account of *aluxes* includes female *aluxes*. In corroboration, his account relates that *aluxes* live around ancient sites, both pre-Colombian and Spanish (one of the stories speaks of men who worked at an old hacienda and whose work was hindered for that reason). His experience with *aluxes* comes principally from time spent as a child living with his family in a pre-Colombian stone structure, a little way from the village of Santa Elena, isolated and insignificant, in his opinion, as an archaeological site. According to H, the *aluxes* are unrelated to the *viento malo*. The teenaged boys interviewed, and mentioned earlier with regard to the *viento*

malo, claimed that *aluxes* were guardians of that wind and that their actions were always a warning to a person, so that they may dodge it. H described them as creatures that represent the past and the random force (and effects) of nature. He stated that they could hurt you, by accident, because of their irrationality. An example given by H is a memory from infancy, when some *aluxes* knocked his hammock so that he fell out and nearly hit his head on the stone floor. He asserted that it was for this reason that they deserve attention, and gifts of food or tobacco, where possible. If these steps are taken, H is sure that the *aluxes* need not be feared. He gave an example of the sort of gifts given to *aluxes*: recounting the story of a man of his father's generation, from Santa Elena, who used to be the guard at Uxmal. Since this man was aware that the *aluxes* were numerous in that area, he would leave the butt of his marijuana cigarette in the evening when he left the site; sadly, this behaviour led to his dismissal. F was in agreement with H's theory, adding that the *aluxes* were guardians of houses and temples.

Although there are diverging accounts of both the role and the character of the *aluxes*, it is evident, both in existing ethnographic literature and from the research conducted, that the narratives surrounding this phenomenon form a significant force in the Maya community of Santa Elena, and, presumably, do so in surrounding areas. The differing accounts imply that the underlying cultural value of these narratives lies outside of the concrete aspects defined within them. The significance of the *aluxes* is related to the externalisation of agency, the choice to animate those external forces and humanise them, and finally the act of engaging with them in an attempt to negotiate negative experiences. Evidently, there is little discussion regarding the association of *aluxes* with historical sites and the world outside the security of home, the wild *monte*. This may reflect certain long-term values relating to the role of ancestors and the natural world. Furthermore, in line with an alternative appreciation of personhood, the easy discrepancy relating to the role and identity of these figures is a significant factor in itself.

The *X'Tabay*.

A subject much discussed in popular story-telling, used to underline several moral points, and, again, shrouded in varying particular detail, is the existence of the *X'Tabay*. She is described substantially in ethnographic literature; "a woman in indigenous Maya clothing who goes along the paths and clearings of the *monte* at dawn. According to tradition, she is the goddess of ties, cords and hunting, the X'tab of the pre-Hispanic Maya, she is generally associated with suicide by hanging" (own transl of Rodríguez Balam

2005, 164). She has various appearances (she is sometimes described as being without a head, or with only three fingers, or without complete fingers or toes (Rosales Mendoza 2008, 114), as well as associated roles, one of which is to punish intoxicated men on their way back home; the *X'Tabay* legend "reinforces determined roles, like that of the seductress…she who is neither girlfriend nor wife, but who punishes bad behaviour in terms of male adultery" (own transl of Rosales Mendoza 2008, 114). An earlier legend separated the *X'Tabay* from *Utz colel*; while the *X'Tabay* offered her good heart and body to travellers, *Utz Colel* is selfish and careless, and has green serpent-like skin (Rosales Mendoza 2008, 114). When the *X'Tabay* is buried, flowers called *Xtabentun* grow from her grave, while a foul stench emanates from the grave of *Utz Colel* (Martínez 2003). In more modern Yucatec narrative, these negative traits are associated to the *X'Tabay*; she is found near ceibas and attracts men by taking the guise of women they love, and, with her perfumes, she kills men who are found in her arms, or they escape with scratch marks on their skin or with their chests torn open by her sharp claws (Rosales 2006, 250).

The descriptions of the *X'Tabay* are as heterogenous in the accounts from Santa Elena as they are here. In the two accounts that will be presented for discussion, as well as in other accounts from the inhabitants of Santa Elena, it is unanimously asserted that the *X'Tabay* is encountered, for the most part, near (old) trees, caves, or water holes (*cenotes* or wells). The lengthiest account of the *X'Tabay* was given by F and related to one of his close friends, when he was a youth. He stated that at this time the village was as yet unpaved and was without electricity. The story corroborates the general consensus concerning the locations associated with *X-Tabay*, although F commented that, since he neither fought against her nor searched for her, she did not know him, and could therefore do him no harm. The man in question lived at the end of Street 20, where F still lives and went to the *cantina* to get drunk in the evening. Since, as mentioned, the road was as yet unpaved, there were trees on Street 20, leading to the outskirts of the village and the surrounding forest. According to the man's story, he saw the *X'Tabay* at the tree and leant on her shoulder and followed her down the road, out of the village. At some point, however, he realised that she was the *X'Tabay* and stabbed her in the back with a double-bladed knife that he kept in his pocket. She then disappeared and he made his way home, sobered by this chilling encounter. The man, on arriving home, told his wife what had happened and they both waited nervously until the morning, fearful that news would come of a murdered woman. However, neither husband nor wife was convinced that this was a case of a hallucination brought on by alcohol. When no news had arrived by 10am the next morning, the man went out to retrace his steps from the previous night. In the place

where he had stabbed the woman there were drops of blood, and this blood left a trail all the way into the forest, where a new cactus stood. The cactus had his double-bladed knife stuck into its back, and so had become a host for the *X'Tabay*.

An account by another man (G), who works on the roads outside of Santa Elena, related this story to his brother. This brother, having listened to many stories involving the brutality, and charm, of the *X'Tabay*, longed to see her. G asserted that the most frequent encounters with the *X'Tabay* have been with virgin boys. He waited every night consecutively, for a few weeks, in a hammock hanging from a ceiba tree near an old well. This brother did eventually see the *X'Tabay*. He was horrified and traumatized, and spent a long time recovering from the shock. As mentioned, G is a fervent Catholic who chooses to focus his thought relating to the unknown on biblical stories. He claimed that if one were to open himself up to these forces through curiosity (as his brother did), one would let in the devil. In this case, the devil takes the form of the *X'Tabay*.

One common factor in the two descriptions of the encounter with *X'Tabay* is the idea of looking for trouble by engagement, whether through hubris or fear. It is unclear what the implication of this is, but fundamentally it is arguable that supernatural or spiritual encounters with these dubious forces are sparked by human action and will. Here again, we can identify the theme of belief in these community philosophies as an indicator of possible vulnerability in their regard. It is by engaging with these forces that they become real. Otherwise, the general aspect of external forces seems to be that they can be prevented through extreme care, fear and ritual action.

Discussion.

These narrative elements evidence the depth of existential and religious thought surrounding the relationship between nature and society. These narratives are also interesting on a number of other levels, some of which are particularly striking for the purposes of the present research. The first is the personification of an external force. The influence exerted by the *X'Tabay* is felt as a human presence, and provides subjective engagement. Secondly, the *X'Tabay* is connected to the environment and to places of natural and historical significance. It could be argued that this external force, therefore, is related to the roles of time and the natural environment. While there is no control over this force, certain actions, for example not entering certain areas at night, or not becoming excessively intoxicated, can prevent harm. Finally, in denying the very existence of these forces, they cease to be a threat. Those community members who do not wish to

associate their identity with traditional story-telling or philosophy are not part of the dialectic that exists between the various agents that are attributed life-force in Santa Elena. In this way, the creativity surrounding the histories reflects the philosophical structure of the person and their place within the natural and historical context. Context is dealt with on a personal level, and demands subjective treatment. A code of social rituals and prescriptions mediates the interaction, as well as individual wisdom, balance and restraint. It has been posited that this enduring behavioural trait is outlined in the Popol Vuh; "... the adventures of the twin gods who mediate relations between gods of the upper and lower worlds provide a model of confrontation and opposition to forces that are part of a cosmic unity" (Nash 2004, 167). There is some continuity from colonial Maya culture and there is evidently plenty of pre-Colombian conceptual thought integrated into the Popol Vuh.

It seems plausible to assume that the meta-theories provided by the people of knowledge in Santa Elena, and the narratives provided by many other members of the community, constitute a shared Maya worldview regarding the way personhood is determined, individually and socially. The natural world and the power of both historical and present day society (community members) constitute forces that have an effect on personhood. This effect is dealt with through ritual action, knowledge of historical phenomena and geography, and a personal engagement with religious philosophy. The constant negotiation forms a tension that organises social, moral and religious structure, to an extent. The narratives, while displaying a broad conceptual character, provide scope for creativity through disagreement and fluidity. There is another pervasive and significant theme, in that the narratives function as a way of reinforcing interest in the specific cultural identity of Santa Elena, one that can be linked to pre-Colombian Maya culture. Of course, as always, this is not to say that there are not more nuanced and heterogenous cultural markers underlying identity and the safeguarding of "intangible heritage"[2].

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[2] "Intangible heritage" is the term used by UNESCO for their 2003 Convention.

2.5 Statues and Personalised Material Culture.

The previous two sub-chapters have discussed alternative aspects of Being and external forces that can pass through, and exist within, various entities. The following text relates these theories to ethnographic research concerning statues and animated material culture and correlative practices in Santa Elena. Ethnographic research has put a large focus on "personalised" or alternative interactions with religious statues in the Maya area, as well as in other Mesoamerican communities. Evidence from post-conquest sources indicates that statues from the pre-Colombian tradition were still being "worshipped" and used despite the efforts of Catholic missionaries (such as Durán, Sahagún and Mendieta in what is now Central Mexico, and Landa, Lizana and Sánchez de Aguilar in Yucatán). Statues were discovered on altars in caves that were said to have been painted blue and sometimes covered in the blood of sacrificial victims (Landa, Relación de las cosas de Yucatán). Tozzer (1941) suggests that these representations were the icons of ancestors and were "…displayed to establish the genealogical depth of a lineage" (McAnany 1995, 27). These wooden images have been described as "the most important part of the inherited property" (Tozzer 1941, 111). Modern ethnographers record information relating to, for the most part, Catholic "icons", although these statues appear to be conceptualised and contextualised in a distinct manner from that promoted by European standards of Catholic thought and practice. The room dedicated to the *santos* (saints) at Chichicastenango is adorned with constantly burning candles and incense; the ancestors are placed alongside the saints, which has been identified as a demonstration of the conflation of indigenous and Catholic traditions (Bunzel 1959). The saints are an equally significant presence in the church at San Juan Chamula, Chiapas; "all along the outer walls, the lesser santos stretch out pleading arms" (Pearce 1984, 188). It has also been postulated that the Maya tradition of "icon worship" was a result of the intrusion of Central Mexican religious influences, with the introduction of Kukulcán into Yucatán (Pearce 1984, 29). There is, for example, ethnographic evidence for the continuance of materialised spirit worship in contemporary Central Mexican indigenous populations; the paper seed spirits that are dressed and adorned with jewellery and placed among their personal items of furniture in beautifully decorated chests (Sandstrom 1991, 244). Arguably, the type of relationship that exists between people and statues in Mesoamerican indigenous tradition may be the product of a multiplicity of religious influences. It is logical to consider that these practices may have been easily assimilated into existing tradition on the basis of an existing framework of Maya thought.

Equally, it is likely that the “idol worship” recorded in the ethnohistoric literature was a product of the fears and projections of the Spanish chroniclers “…within the context of the religious climate of the time, and the almost paranoid witch hunt on “idolatry”” (own transl of Gubler 2007, 119). The various ethnohistoric sources and circumstances have indicated how the system fostered these accounts; “First the circumstances of the confessions of 1562-1564 – Spanish assumptions of Maya guilt, the framing of questions in a way that proposes the answers, the continual threat or application of pain until confession was extracted and detailed, the correlation between Maya confessions and 15th century tales of Jewish ritual murders in Spain – all of these suggest that such a testimony may tell us more about Spanish fears than about Maya deeds” (Restall 1997, 149).

Restall also argues that the intrusion of household images in colonial Mexico represented, not only the divinity of the Catholic deity, but moreover the role of the household head, whose name the image was given (Restall 1997, 154). This assertion steers the debate away from icon worship, and opens avenues of investigation into other, more secular, aspects of pre-Colombian Mesoamerican culture. Wills found in Yucatán’s notarial archives also point towards the economic role of icons, in that they are often treated as important forms of property (along with houses and land) (Rugeley 2010, 197). One such example is that of Gregorio May (the *batab* of Uman), who was condemned to death for complicity in the Caste War, and whose icons of Christ and San Antonio were then inherited by his daughters. That the icons had this objective, as well as their spiritual power, meant that they accrued an authority independent of that of the priests. Furthermore, although the priests controlled literature, songs and some other ritual/religious objects, it was the people of Yucatán who carved the icons (Rugeley 2010, 197). This may explain the circumspection of the priests towards these icons but, more importantly, flags the importance of the role of icons for the people of Yucatán. In this way, the icons had the potential to become a symbol of a religious identity outside of the church and of economic autonomy.

Partible “Icons”.

The possibility of divisibility and partibility of personhood within Classic Maya thought has been discussed at length (a phenomenon that exists in other cases in the ethnographic record (specifically discussed, for example, in Melanesia)). The ways in which these conceptions may be manifest in engagements with ancestors can also be

illustrated from the ethnographic record in the Maya area. One example of the veneration of prominent members of society is witnessed in the interment of their bodies in places of attributed spiritual power (for example, in underground caverns and particular sites in the sacred mountains).

The burial of specific parts of the body (for example, a burial without a head or a femur), as shown by Guiteras-Holmes (1965, 298), is attested also in the archaeological record of the ancient Maya, and may demonstrate that certain parts of the body constituted separate personified entities. It has been suggested that among the modern-day Tzotzil Maya, parts of the body that have been removed (such as hair or fingernails) contain an independent Being (Guiteras-Holmes 1965, 298). It is within this context that the incorporation of the cremated remains of ancestors within the images is particularly remarkable; "The rest of the people made for their (deceased) fathers wooden statues of which the back of the head was left hollow, and they then burned a part of the body and placed its ashes there, and plugged it up; afterwards they stripped off the dead body the skin of the back of the head and stuck it over this place and they buried the rest as they were wont to do. They preserved these statues with a great deal of veneration among their idols" (Tozzer 1941, 129-31). These practices may indicate that material representations could take on specific elements of the person whom they imitated, or at least that they could assume part of that person's soul from their cremated remains. This appears almost like an extension of portraiture, in which reality and reflection, or illusion, can share personhood. The personhood shift here, between reality and illusion, recalls the manipulation of cultural identity through belief in invisible or magical forces.

It is necessary to take into account that post-medieval Catholicism was also deeply shrouded in the culture of partible objects with supernatural significance; "in effect, in the countries of the Old World conquered and colonised by the remains of the Roman Empire, the cult of martyrs and saints had made the the first matrix of local identity" (own transl of Alberro 1999; 17), and alongside the introduction of these two cults were also the relics of the martyrs, in 1578 (Alberro 1999, 21). Arguably, the spiritual power attributable to parts of the body of a saint or martyr could demonstrate similarly alternative post-medieval catholic conceptions of the partibility of personhood. This tradition would have been received by Mesoamerican communities in colonial times within a certain lens, and the resulting philosophies are syncretistic.

Personalised Statues and Animated Material Culture.

It has been shown that the religious and political scenes depicted in Classic Maya public art are attributed certain naturalistic features (for example, Miller and Martin 2004 and Laughton 2012, 20). Furthermore, perhaps, that through alternative methods and conceptions, they were personalised. The personalisation of images appears (from the ethnographic record) to continue in modern Maya tradition, both in concept and in form. The saints that line the church at San Juan Chamula, which stretch out pleading arms, have been described as having staring eyes that have a "... startling, lifelike quality from faces distorted in agony" (Pearce 1984, 188). It is plainly implied here that the people build images that invoke a certain amount of pathos, in order, perhaps, to add credibility or emphasis to their power and personality. It may also be the case that the images appear to be more lifelike due to their conceptual context, that is, within a community that considers their existence a forceful part of the community. It has also been shown that certain Maya communities personalise their saints; that is, narratives surrounding the saints treat these figures as living members of the community. For example, at Zinacantán, San Lorenzo, the patron saint is said to have been found wandering in the forest, hungry and tired, with his clothing ripped. San Lorenzo proceeded to ask the villager who found him whether he would request, on his behalf, residency in Zinacantán. This request was subsequently taken to the *municipio* (town council) and granted; a church was built for him and he became patron saint (Pearce 1985, 176). This is an example of the humanisation of a saint; San Lorenzo and the villager interacted and negotiated directly. The story of San Antonio is similarly indicative of this aspect of relationships with the saints. It is said that a man named Mateo Pérez Trejo asked San Antonio to help his *milpa* prosper. After burning several candles and incense in his honour, he removed the saint to his *milpa*, concerned that he would not be able to watch it properly. The missing statue was reported and sought by the town's people, who promptly arrested Mateo Pérez. His anger at the saint, for not fulfilling his wish, in spite of having accepted the votaries, led him to seek revenge when he was let out of jail; he cut off the saint's hands (Pearce 1984, 174). This narrative is said to "...attest to the degree of personification that the santos possess in the minds and lives of the Highland Maya" (Pearce 1985, 174). It may also illustrate the argument that, within a Maya worldview, a concrete exchange can take place between supernaturals and humans (Pearce 1984, 175). Bunzel (1959, 269-74) also shows, in her investigations of the Maya belief system in Chichicastenango, that the ancestors experience all the emotions that are experienced by the living; for example, jealousy,

greed, ambition, envy and vengefulness. It can be shown that this pervades other Mesoamerican belief systems; for example, there is a manifestation of the Nahua fire spirit, Juan Flojo, who is forced to abandon Amatlán after he was criticised by his brother for his laziness (Sandstrom 1995, 249). This outlook is substantially different from the catholic belief, in which saints are blameless and contain metaphors for abstract theological concepts.

The decision, in the 17th century, to promote local saints in Mexico, may, to some extent, have been a reaction to a culturally specific desire, on the part of the indigenous population of Mexico; "…unlike the saints and martyrs of the universal Church and its administration established during the viceroyalty, who were distanced in time and space, the faithful sought to worship concrete personalities, who were well rooted in their immediate reality, and who were entirely familiar and local" (Alberro 1999, 22). The reasons for this choice were presumably multifaceted, however. For example, it is plausible that a society consisting of splintered communities with small-scale political cohesion, such as existed in Southern Mexico at the time of the conquest, might also have welcomed a more personal and balanced approach to religious figures. It has also been argued that the tendency towards this type of engagement with saints and statues did have pre-Colombian roots, but that it was a Post-classic influence from Central Mexico (Solís Robleda 2005, 75). Logically, this implies that Classic Maya conceptions of image, religious image or otherwise, were distinct from those of Central Mexico. Having said that, there is plenty of evidence to support the theory that increased subjective engagement with worked matter, in the religious context, provides relevant information not only about the impact of the Central Mexican culture and the conquest but also Maya specificities.

Statues and Saints in Santa Elena.

To be elaborated upon in a later chapter, the question of “idolatry” and “statue worship” in Santa Elena has been further complicated in recent years by the substantial conversion by residents to the Jehovah's Witness sect, among other (admittedly less popular) variants of Christianity. An interview with a young catholic woman, C, who sings in the church choir and works at the village shop, demonstrated her opinion concerning the difference between Catholics and Jehovah's Witnesses and the other Evangelical sects (specifically in relation to the veneration of images). She said that the Protestant and Jehovah's Witness opinion of Catholics was that they adored saints, whereas the Jehovah's Witness and Evangelical religious and home spaces are free of any images. C

defended the Catholic faith by saying that the images of the saints were not worshipped, but were merely venerated. This is an interesting divide, with regard to material culture. The inclusion, or not, of visual and image prompts would certainly create very different responses to religious feeling. The decision to separate the styles, on a material level, shows a sensitivity, on the part of the people of Santa Elena, to its importance. The decision to include material culture into the religious process might correlate with the decision to develop a sensitivity to the power of an "object".

Perhaps the most prominent and popular saint image in the village is that of San Mateo, who is the patron saint of the Catholic community there. In support of a similar attribution of personalised, and supernatural, elements of religious statues to that of previously described ethnographic inquiries, there are some popular narratives concerning San Mateo. Again, according to C, the still existent statue of San Mateo, was found centuries ago, below a well that is central to the village. It is, therefore, believed that the image is either not man-made or is an archaeological artefact. The well that is referred to is in front of the village's church in the main plaza. The well is said to have been originally associated with the pre-Colombian temple structure underneath the church. This well is no longer in use. As we have seen, wells are also associated with the *X'Tabay* in many Santa Elena narratives. It was later corroborated, by interviewee H, that the image is very much loved by the older villagers because it has been known to provide aid in times that have been hard for the village. The example given was that, in times of famine, such as during the Caste War when many of the men that worked in agriculture were away, the saint would go and work the *milpas* at night, and so provide maize for the village inhabitants. Clearly, even the eldest of the inhabitants in Santa Elena has no direct memory of the Caste War, but presumably the information was passed down by previous generations. The saint, purportedly, continues to work the land efficiently, in order to feed the people of the village. In this way, he is much appreciated by the inhabitants, even today.

One of the most interesting festivities related to this patron saint in Santa Elena is the K'o che, which is specific to the village and is used in displays of Santa Elena's cultural heritage. During visits by prominent political figures, for example, the village organises a K'o che, even though it is unrelated to a religious ceremony. It is clear that this piece of intangible cultural heritage is very much considered a community activity, and although it relates to the Catholic saint, people of all religious groups are involved in the celebration. The occasion that was witnessed took place at the beginning of February. The ritual takes place at this time every year and is related to the list of houses that will house the saint's

image. This responsibility shifts every year. A group of men run, carrying a wooden litter around the village. The goal is ultimately to take the image from the house within which it has resided for a year, to the next house on the list. The wooden litter not only contains the statue but also three girls dressed in the traditional *terna* (a white dress embroidered with coloured flowers, with garlands of flowers around their necks and gold jewellery, see Figure 12). The litter is followed by a group of men who play brass instruments alongside or behind the litter (Figure 13 shows the building of the litter). This group provides the men carrying the litter with beer while they take breaks. In Yucatec Maya, Ko means "head" and Che means "wood"; the litter is thus metaphorically the wooden head of the men carrying it. Several people, when asked why the girls accompany the image, said that the girls were a living representation of the image, although the saint is male. They add some life and sense of personal journey to the transition from one place of residence to another.

The fact that the patron saint's image was found in a place of pre-Colombian cultural importance indicates that there may be alternative rationalities both for the role of material culture, and the nature of religious figures. The statue, unlike others with less importance, is not a representation of the saint but the saint himself. At least, it imbues the religious power of the saint, and actively takes steps to ameliorate negative situations in the village (as evidenced by the narrative involving the famine aversion in the 19th century). This corresponds to the theories explicated by interviewee D, which hold that influential energy can exist within a traditionally non-animated object, or not (see previous text). This statue is particular in its ability to have agency in the village. It could sensibly be argued that there is a tendency to treat religious power as a subjective force, one that is close, culturally specific and that can be directly negotiated with. In relation to the origin of the statue, I would posit that this external and governing force comes, fundamentally, from an environmental sphere, and that it is linked to the influence of ancestors through an engagement with historical monuments and the past. The K'o che festivity reinforces some of these elements; for example, that the girls are dressed in a *terna* and are (according to interviewees) living representations of the saint who is being transported (San Mateo). In the former example, it is feasible to postulate that the people of Santa Elena relate the importance of the patron saint to a culturally specific identity within their community. In the case of the K'o che, the representatives for the saint are living people who are transported in a litter, which certainly promotes the idea of subjectivity and implies directed agency in the form of the figure of San Mateo.

The reinforcement and belief in the narratives surrounding San Mateo can also be seen as an active attempt to maintain a sense of Maya identity, specific to Santa Elena. As a Catholic saint, San Mateo is part of a more “traditional” religious affiliation in the community. There are parallels that can be drawn between the role of San Mateo and treatment of religious images in ethnographic and archaeological accounts of other Maya communities. The reception of Catholicism in Southern Mexico after the conquest has, necessarily, created a very unique relationship between communities and their religious images and statues. It is also clear that some of the new religious groups in Southern Mexico try to set themselves apart from these types of practices. An interview with a woman running the local café proved interesting in this respect. She claimed that one of her husband’s lovers had used bad magic against her, and so given her the *mal de ojo*. There is more that we can say about this interview but, for the present purposes, it is interesting to note that she suffered for a long time with this illness, until she left the Catholic Church and joined the Evangelical community. She mentioned that it was through prayers that the curse was lifted but, broadly speaking, it was in embracing a new and unrelated faith that the attachment to these forces was broken. An Elder of the Jehovah’s Witnesses and his wife (T and U) were asked about traditional medicine and healing, and they stated, unequivocally, that they knew nothing of this. They were very uncommunicative and claimed that nothing of the sort even existed in Santa Elena. It could be suggested that the move away from Catholicism is symbolic of, or goes alongside, a shift away from ideas and concepts that come from pre-Colombian culture and post-conquest identity in Santa Elena. Furthermore, this is evidence for very strong and objective agency within the community with regard to identity management.

Permeability in the Use of Statues.

Already discussed, to a certain extent, are the ethnohistoric records of “icon worship” that were purportedly conducted in secret by the Maya of Yucatán (Landa 1996). An example of such a discovery was made by Pedro Che, a porter at the convent of Maní in 1561; he found caves full of altars and statues covered in the blood of sacrificial deer; “…I enter the cave, to more altars and very ornate tables, and there were many idols that had recently been sprinkled with fresh deer’s blood” (own transl of Lizana Book 2 Part 5 Chap 6, 180). A further example of the direct relationship between blood sacrifice and religious idols can be witnessed in the testimony of the schoolteacher Juan Conoh of Yaxcabá. He claimed that he was forced to witness the sacrifice of young boys, a sacrifice

that was intended to appease the gods and cure the illness of the Maya governor Juan Cocom (Pearce 1984, 17). Ten pre-Colombian “idols” had supposedly been placed in front of an altar, upon the leaves of a castor oil plant. A mat was placed on the floor near the statues and a large flint knife was also placed there. The heart of a sacrificed boy was eventually placed in the mouth of the largest image, that of Itzam-Na (Tozzer 1941, 118). The Lacandón also place offerings of annatto seed paint (symbolic of blood) and *tamales* (symbolic of flesh) into the mouths of animated incense burners (god pots who have faces modelled on the front) (McGee 1998, 42). Likewise, the ceremonies carried out by the Tzetzal of Tenejapa involve the smearing of symbolic blood onto rubber images, in order to animate them (Stross 1998, 33). Ostensibly, these rituals demonstrate the well-known beliefs of feeding blood and the lives of sacrificial victims to the gods, who in exchange would promote and continue the life cycle. These rituals were perhaps used for personal bargains with the otherwise ungovernable external forces. They would, perhaps, have existed alongside the public ceremonies which were conducted in pursuit of agricultural fertility, and which are attributed to many Mesoamerican communities. This evidence supports the theory that permeability can also be seen in Maya culture; substances, in this case blood, are thought be negotiated physically through ritual (at times metaphorical) juxtaposition. Not only are intangible elements of Being, and such abstract entities, thought to be transferable between concrete places (bodies) but also tangible substances, such as blood, might potentially be assimilated.

Aside from minor allusions to agricultural cyclicality, and thus permeability to a certain extent, such as the profuse use of flowers in the K’o che and in the *terna* and traditional dress, a relevant cultural aspect to discuss in this context is that of the *primicias*/*okobatan*. Much discussed in Mexico in the media, as well as in ethnographic literature (for example, Ramírez 2003, Rodríguez Balam 2005, Valverde 2000), offerings during certain agricultural phases, in times of good harvest, as much as in times of drought, are conducted throughout Yucatán. Interviews with a prominent man in Santa Elena, interviewee O, clarified the basic procedure. A spiritual leader, *h-men* (in this case interviewee E), conducts a ceremony with the *milpa* workers involving the burial of certain ritually prepared foods, which will nourish the *monte*. The women who are invited remain in the kitchen, to prepare this food. During the recitations conducted by the *h-men*, small boys are tied by the ankle to table legs and imitate the noise of frogs (Cha’ Chac of Rosales Mendoza 2008). This will induce the forces associated with the land, agriculture and rain to perpetuate the cycle and thereby provide for the community.

From interviews conducted with O, it is clear that these meetings are held in private. They are not publicly announced and not all of the agricultural workers participate. This is in stark contrast to political meetings regarding agriculture. An event was organised for a politician from Mérida, for example, in which the styles, uses and direction of agriculture and the economy surrounding it were to be discussed. Needless to say, agriculture plays a very large role in the community of Santa Elena. The fact that the *primicias* are so guarded might show that they demonstrate an engagement with the private safeguarding of cultural identity. The *primicias* are not participated in by the majority of the community, but are safeguarded by the participants (to use language from the 2003 UNESCO Convention). There is also a very strong division between men and women in these rituals, and women are prohibited from participating in direct action in the *monte*. There is scope for further research here.

Discussion.

A large portion of the ethnographic literature concerning Mesoamerican communities, particularly in the Maya area, concentrates on the role and conception of religious statues or images. There is, from this literature, substantial evidence to support the existence of distinct conceptions of materiality and personhood within this cultural framework. The evidence gleaned from Santa Elena, Yucatán does not strictly support a consolidated or structured adherence to these conceptions. However, it is clear that certain narratives and rituals raise similar or related themes. It would not be implausible to deduce that past beliefs have been dissolved through a prolonged period of distinct religious and cultural influence, or by widespread cultural and religious pluralism and modernity. Conversely, it might be argued that statues and images were never concretely considered to contain inherent agency. Inscrutable forces relating to, for example, community members from the past or natural phenomena exist and are influential. These forces are not, however, attributable to worked matter in itself. They can, moreover, inhabit material culture and this agency can move or be transferred. It is possible that it is the object of certain rituals in Santa Elena to attempt a manipulation of these forces. The latter suggestion is more probable and more relevant, since there are contemporary testimonies to its effect. The dialogue concerning the animation of statues and images is divided, in the minds of various interviewees, into adherence to Catholicism or to newer religious groups. The work of healers such as E and F is associated with Catholicism, where safety from the negative forces that are treated by these practitioners is couched in the shift to

other religious groups. Religious belief is related to choice and action, providing two superimposed tiers of action in Santa Elena: ritual action against, for example, drought by making *primicias* and, above that, engagement with the belief that *primicias*, and other more “traditionally” held practices, can be of use.

2.6 Time and Space.

As the previous three sub-chapters show, there are links between the flow and effect of eternal forces and places where violent actions took place in the past. The present discussion will centre on the role of space/time in community conceptions of Being. The ethnographic discussion in the Maya area, concerning community rationality, has developed the concept of "existential sovereignties" (Watanabe 1992, 12 after Redfield). Watanabe’s research was among the Chimalteco community, in Guatemala. This phrase has been defined as “…the conjunction of place, as an ongoing here and now, with individuals committed to the emergent possibilities and conditions of that place. Together, place and people precipitate commonly held conventional premises about how to get along in that place with those people” (Watanabe 1992, 12) This theory is intended to go alongside historical and cultural considerations, but these conventions are argued to be relative to experiences and intentions, and so determine thought and action. In sum, it is argued that these sovereignties are "…rooted essentially but never exclusively in the immediacies of local sustenance and sociality" (Watanabe 1992, 12). Naturally, Watanabe’s analysis is thus extended to specific community conceptions of space, and therefore time. Space/time is the subject of much of the ethnographic work conducted in the Maya area (Tedlock 1982, Watanabe 1992, Rodriguez Balam 2005, to give a few examples). These themes certainly warrant sustained focus, which is not the aim of the present work. However, as has been shown, the analysis of artistic material culture can be framed, to some extent, within elements of this philosophical context and this constitutes a reason to examine the theme in the narratives from Santa Elena. As will be shown, the narratives do, in fact, show a heavy focus on ideas of space/time. Alternative conceptions of space and time play a fundamental role in the construction of "social" personhood, and so an understanding can elucidate the role of the meta-theories that produce the individual. Equally interesting to explore would be links between these conceptions and

corporeality, and with the appreciation of artistic and religious material culture within its environmental context.

In the case of the Chimalteco, "experientially, their community constitutes the center of the world" (Watanabe 1992, 58). Life contracts and expands throughout the day, as the sun rises and sets; during the day the normal activity of the people who work in the fields stretched to the *monte* and, as the afternoon sun lowers, life contracts back into the village, and at night the people retreat into their home to sleep (Watanabe 1992, 63). While the *monte* is generally viewed as a place where danger, or at least the unknown, may lurk, the night, as life has retreated into the beds of the people, also falls into the realm of the unknown; "the local landscape fades into a world where the strange and uncanny can prowl even the familiar streets of the town...Chimaltecos appear to associate socially empty or unfamiliar space with distance in quotidien time – that is, with the dormant period of night – regardless of actual location or relative distance from the pueblo" (Watanabe 1992, 64).

Literature regarding the maintenance of balance and the constant negotiation with external, subjective forces, both in the personal and agricultural context (for example, Terán and Rasmussen 1994 and Cervera and Méndez 2006, 328), is also applicable to this discussion. As described, certain undesirable forces are kept at bay through prescribed rituals, such as the *primicias*. Another example is the case of the *yumbalam* of the *monte*. This animal, which sings, whistles and leads astray those who are in the *monte*, is placated by the Yucatec Maya; "it is fed with the food eaten by the owners of the *monte*, the gentry" (own transl of Rodríguez Balam 2005, 166). There is an emphasis placed on the struggle between the wild, unknown and dangerous, and the ordered procedures that are implemented to combat the effects of these phenomena. These procedures are ordered temporally. Conceptually, therefore, there is a three-dimensional opposition; it is territorial/spatial, temporal and symbolic (Rodríguez Balam 2005, 167). Another distinction discussed in the ethnographic literature is the perception of cemetery spaces. There are many manifestations of social behaviour. It is said, for example, that pregnant women should not visit graveyards because their children will be born "without the strength to hold up their heads" (Rodríguez Balam 2005, 160).

As has been mentioned in earlier chapters, the people of Santa Elena appear to lend importance to conceptual distinctions between the *monte* and the village, particularly in the context of archaeological sites. The site of X'koh, according to interviewee C, is not frequented by the people of the village principally because of its distance, because it is in the *monte* and, as quoted earlier, owing to its relationship to the past. Various teenaged

boys who were interviewed asserted the regularity with which they visited the site on the basis that they were rebelling against the established local knowledge that provided cause for fear and reticence. It is evident, from this dialogue, that the conviction on the part of the community members not to visit the site is strong and widespread. Likewise, the interview with O presented further perspectives on the *monte* and the relationship of the villagers to it. Traditional hunting practices, which have almost ceased to exist in the area, but which are substantially treated in ethnographic literature, involve going into the surrounding forest at night and quietly watching and waiting for deer. This isolated activity can last for hours. There is room for further investigation where this activity is concerned, perhaps within a broader approach to conceptions of time in Yucatán; this style of hunting may determine and/or reflect culturally specific manipulations of the experience of time. Interviewee O's father, who was a regular hunter, recounted his impression of those isolated nights in the *monte*. He commented that he occasionally felt his skin crawl and the hair on the back of his neck would stand up. Sometimes he would see bright and, at that time, unnatural lights (at that point there were no main roads in the area, nor did the village have electric lighting). He also commented that this phenomenon was more common/intense on approaching the nearby archaeological sites. Interviewee O, as perhaps was the case in his father's stories, gave no possible explanation for the sensations, or the visions. His implication was clear, however, that the spatial and temporal effect of hunting in the *monte* was powerful. The *monte*, at night, is thought to be able to distort an otherwise manageable (perhaps rational) experience of time.

There are similarities here with some of the comments recorded from the ethnographic literature, that the *monte* at night provokes an unusual experience. Watanabe (1989) suggests, in line with theories proposed by Vogt (1983), that the souls of the community members in Zinacantán, are split between two forms (within the person and an animal that is protected by community ancestors. Thus, "…souls conceptually balance the categories of "culture" and "nature" in Zinacantan thought" (Vogt (1965, 1150-1160). Zinacantecos are naturalised by sharing souls with animals but these "wild" animals remain corralled (paraphrasing Watanabe 1989, 264). The Tzotzil *chulel* and *chanul* and the *Mam aanma* and *naabl* are also attested to relate to ancestry, since both communities "...consistently relate ideas of "immaterial essences" to blood and ancestry, to ancestral places, and to proper behavior" (Watanabe in Bricker and Gossen 1989, 269 - 270). These ideas recall theories of permeability in personhood and the body. However, it is significant here that the ancestors are watchful elements of the community that protect space that would otherwise be wild, since in Santa Elena the places for ancestors, the

cemetery (and the archaeological sites to some extent), are added places of tension in terms of the negotiation with space/time. It might also be too neat to assume a restricted dichotomous cultural perspective within which culture and nature, wild and domesticated and so on are opposed (as interpretations in structural anthropological theory, for example, Levi Strauss suggest). It is perhaps more plausible that the worldview is built around broader symbolic links. Sacred (agricultural) space is linked to larger intangible (unknowable) phenomena that link necessarily to religious and existential thought. Likewise, the philosophical effect of solitude at night-time is also symbolic of an individual engagement with the natural world, as perceived intellectually and by the body. Through theories of permeability, the body and its relationship to the natural world are linked to time (cyclical/agricultural time).

The inclusion, in both narratives from Santa Elena, of the role of archaeological sites demonstrates that historic architecture, as a place of large-scale human interaction over a long period of time, can affect spatio-temporal reality in Santa Elena. These monuments provide a further allusion to time; archaeological sites lie outside the village space, they are in the *monte*, and it seems that this is the field in which concepts of time and space conflate. It may also be reasonable to add that, since there is an emphasis placed on ritual action and performative religious practice and experience, the lack of movement and dialogue in the *monte*, and around these sites, at times of the day which are traditionally silent, creates a shift in balance. It is this balance and prescribed ritual action that would normally support the community. This community, as outlined by Watanabe, is constantly in the process of constructing its existential identity. In the case of Santa Elena, the space within the town correlates with Sartre's dialectical reason, a sense that worked matter, community relationships and prescribed ritual move identity forward. The unknowable, an understanding of the past to make sense of the present and future, for example, lies outside of this functional knowable dialectic. The inhabitants of Santa Elena thus have their specific existential sovereignty, and direct cultural heritage and identity, while at the same time reinforcing their specific worldview regarding central philosophical concepts.

Distinct, and perhaps more powerful, personal experiences of the *monte* were also recorded in Santa Elena. As previously mentioned, interviewee M, who makes journeys in the night to a small archaeological site in the *monte*, remarked that it was necessary to tie red ribbon to the trees along the way from the main path to the site. The site is not only outside the village but is also on a hill, overlooking the neighbouring villages. On his return to the main path, it is necessary for him to use the ribbon to find his way. The implication made by interviewee M, in his description, is that as one gets closer to the archaeological

site, the spatial dimensions of the *monte* are distorted, as is one's experience of time. Similarly, interviewee D, from Kantunil, described the effect on material objects of places where time was lost. As mentioned, when questioned on the ability of unworked material culture to have energy, he answered that there were certain environmental factors that could affect its energy levels. His first example was of the impact that an asteroid might have made on earth and the energy that would remain around the area after that. He also, however, mentioned certain spaces where the energy is concentrated, which can be for various reasons, and where the material objects are thus affected. An agate that he found in some arid land, for example, contained a large amount of energy. He added that the place where he found the stone is a place in which time, as shown on a watch, is confused. There is not only this material (magnetic) effect on the clock, but time is generally experienced in a very abstract way there. It is unclear, from his narrative, what D believes to be the explanation, religious, scientific or otherwise (although it may not be necessary to classify the knowledge), for this phenomenon. It is very clear, however, that there is a close relationship between the experiential and "material" manifestations of space and time. Both are affected by material, whether in the case of worked matter (architecture) or natural material. It might again be posited that the arid open space that D describes is perhaps, even symbolically, a place where movement and action are lacking. Without these elements, as has been elaborated upon above, the complex of dialectical influences that stimulates the social conception of the world, in which people negotiate with the environment, worked matter, and so on, cannot develop.

In the case of M's interview, the theme of the influence of ancient building and material culture is again raised. As mentioned, this implies a specific relationship between history, materiality and time. In the case of historical worked matter, there is evidently a widespread reticence to actively engage with it. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it is ill-advised to engage, without the facilitation of the community or society at large. There seems, for example, to be no reticence to visit the larger public archaeological sites during the day. Interestingly, in the case of M and his engagement with historical space and material culture, there are two layers of agency involved in the expeditions he conducts. The place and time have inherent agency, which characterises the experience. M then adds another layer of agency, by ritually securing the safety of the route (his reference to *aluxes* is presented in a previous sub-chapter). In the case of interviewee D, he makes no action in response to the impact of altered spatio-temporal experience. He uses the stones found in this zone, however, to restore balance in his home or for people who are seeking medical attention for related causes (energy imbalances).

Interviews with children corroborated the conditioned fear of the *monte*, in contrast to the safety of the village. One child, interviewee P, described her experiences at home, which was on the outskirts of the village, and therefore considered the *monte*. Her story, although rather confused, related to a death that had occurred in her family house. The spirit, or force of the dead relative's presence, continued to be felt. She commented that this experience, although manageable by the people of her household, was negative for her and was related to the fact that the house was situated in the *monte*.

The story need not be believed; it was recounted with added drama and mystery. The interview does show, however, that it may be part of popular thought that ancestors are experienced more strongly in the *monte* than they may be in the village. This sentiment is corroborated, to a certain extent, by several interviews with people concerning the village cemetery. It is located on the road that leads out of the village towards Uxmal and Mérida, and there is very little activity in the area. The cemetery itself is untidy and largely unattended; some of the sarcophagi are open, for example. During an interview with the wife of a prominent member of the community, interviewee Q, the subject of the graveyard was raised. She made a comparison with the Day of the Dead celebrations in Central Mexico, which she considered foreign and unfamiliar. The ancestors of the people in Santa Elena seem not to be a living presence in the community, invited into the household on All Souls day. Q seemed to regard visits to the cemetery as necessary obligations to the dead, who are pitied because their surroundings/position within the community are unpleasant and uncertain. The dead, in this context, inhabit a place where the past, the environment and the unknown are restricted from the living positive forces of the community members. These forces are conducted through rituals and prescribed practices. This can be interestingly compared to certain ethnographic evidence concerning the graveyar; for example, “one of the public spaces that acquires great importance at the community level is the town’s graveyard…the cemetery is always present in the minds of the living. It fulfils a social and communal function and inspires the living with a collective imagination about the dead” (own transl of Rodriguez Balam 2005, 159). There was no evidence of this in terms of the active role of people recently deceased. The cemetery is not a place of focus and is very little frequented by the village people. It does not follow, however, that there is no underlying importance of people and occurrences in the past. It is clear that the many types of external forces discussed in Santa Elena (for example, the *viento malo*, the *aluxes*, the X*’Tabay* and so on) are allusions to the past. The narratives are couched in places and ideas that relate to pre-Colombian culture in Santa Elena.

So, it is clear that there are elements of popular thought in terms of concepts of space/time in Santa Elena, that exist also among the few people from nearby communities, which are culturally specific and derive from historical events and places. To take, to some extent, Watanabe's stance regarding the "existential sovereignty" (1992) of the community, however, it may be useful to view these ideas within the context of their daily application and with the concrete necessities of social life. It is evident that the external forces discussed in the previous sub-chapters are related through the narratives within a framework that is dictated by concepts of space/time. On a very basic level, it could be argued that distances both in space and time are untrusted within the community. The areas where external forces are most powerful, where there can be no action or prevention on the part of the community, temporality and the experience of space are distorted. The fact that time is influenced by these spaces indicates that the philosophies surrounding space and time have quite a complex conceptual role in community thought. If it can be assumed that forces can be precipitated by temporal factors, such as the long-term energy fields surrounding historical sites, there are two-sided effects: space can affect the experience of time, and heightened temporality can affect the experience of space. It would seem that the inscrutable aspect of space/time as phenomena lends itself to being quantified through cultural devices, for example time-keeping and the construction of community. It also lends itself to heightened conceptualisation through community philosophy and creative thinking. It may be the case that the temporal distance of archaeological sites recalls the importance of Maya or Santa Elena heritage. Access to this cultural heritage is not straightforward, because of the disjunctures post-conquest. The warp of space and time around these zones is a metaphor for the strain of a conflict of scientific and cultural knowledge. This conflict gives rise to a certain amount of choice and flexibility. This flexibility in thought can be compared to other concepts inherent in community thought in Santa Elena.

2.7 Religious Pluralism and the Popularity of Para-Protestants.

We have seen that engagement with practices and ancestral knowledge in Santa Elena relates to choices that direct community and personal identity. One of the ways in which the people in Santa Elena (and in many politically and economically disenfranchised communities in Latin America) direct choice of culture and practice is through engagement

with insurgent, non-Catholic religious sects. Broadly speaking, although Mexico remains predominantly Catholic, there has been an insurgence of various other Christian sects: Protestant and para-Protestant; "a veritable flood of religious sects, which by definition are conflictive and anti-ecumenical, which in Mexico are principally moving into indigenous and rural areas" (own transl of Giménez 1988, 689). The success of these sects has been considerable in the south of Mexico, particularly in areas that have the most substantial indigenous communities (Serrano, Embriz y Fernández 2002, Joseph 2010, 254). From 1970 to 2002, there was a seventy percent increase in the adherence to these religions in the Maya area, with censuses showing that the greatest numbers were found in the following states, in decreasing order: Chiapas, Tabasco, Campeche, Quintana Roo and Yucatán (Ruz 2005, 8).

There are various theories regarding the factors relevant to this social phenomenon, and they have resulted in discussions pertaining to indigenous identity and identity shifts. Ruz states that academics are agreed that the popularity of these sects is directly related to the marginalisation of indigenous communities; "such movements have shown themselves to be rather more able than the Catholic Church to respond to the new demands and needs (individual and social) of the most marginalised sectors" (own transl, 2005, 8). The popularity and conversion of these sects in certain communities has had a positive impact in some sense. For example, in areas where domestic abuse related to alcoholism is prevalent, a conversion to stricter (and perhaps, moreover, newer and more attentive) religions, has led to a decrease in complaints from women previously affected (Eber 1995, Emery 1970, 4 and 45, Goldin and Metz, 1991, Nash 1960, Redfield 1950, 95, Reina and Schwartz 1974); "The Protestant emphasis on sobriety attracts many because it stabilises households, eases the burden on household finances, and enables a sense of moral improvement" (Kray 2004, 113). It has been, conversely, argued that the social dynamism associated with these religious movements is insidious, and does not indicate individual or collective relevant transformations or doctrinal inspiration, and only has the effect of contributing, "…refreshing the religious panorama in order to not deal with the basics of an unjust or discriminatory social structure that tends to keep power in the same hands" (own transl of Gálvez Borrell 2002, 71).

The expulsion of certain Protestant sects by local caciques has been attributed to the fear of their losing power through religious manipulation (Ruz 2005, 9). Furthermore, it has been suggested that there have been clear strategies, on the part of evangelical sects, to stigmatise the Maya population who are not associated with these new doctrines (Ruz 2005, 14). More culturally specific approaches, such as that taken by Rodríguez

Balam in his documentation of the cosmovision of a Pentecostal Maya community in Yucatán, focus on how Protestantism has merely provided a new framework through which people re-affirm their identity; an identity that endures religious transformations (2005, 156). He claims to "…demonstrate the range of possibilities that individuals are exposed to in order to recreate and construe their identity and that of others, which remains in spite of their transformation" (own transl of Ruz 2005, 156). This is supported by Watanabe who, in focusing on Maya souls in both Mexico and Guatemala, hopes to reveal the tenacity of Maya ethnic identity: "I would suggest that greater appreciation of these emergent qualities of Maya souls might well clarify the tenacity of Maya ethnic identity in the face of rapid and in Guatemala, increasingly violent, social change" (1988 and here Watanabe 1989, 273-274). Various other reasons for the popularity of emergent religions in the Maya area have been put forth. For example, it has been suggested that opting out of the sponsorship of Catholic saints' *fiestas* may have been attractive to the landless or those suffering from poverty (Annis 1987, Goldin and Metz 1991, Nash 1960, Reina and Schwartz 1974, Scotchmer 1991, 394, Santana Rivas 1984, Sexton 1978, Stoll 1982, 30-36). The Protestant Church has, also, offered opportunities for leadership and participation, and so it has been argued that this would appear attractive to certain members of the community, particularly women (Nash 1960, Sexton 1978). However, it is clear that the reasons for the acceptance and popularity of new religious sects and traditions are multifaceted and specific to each community and individual, "As diverse as Maya people and Protestant traditions are, so have been the motivations for seeking out new forms of worship" (Kray 2004, 114).

Sects in Santa Elena, Yucatán

Apart from the adherents to the Catholic faith, who still constitute the majority in Santa Elena, there are two other main religious groups: Evangelical and Jehovah's Witnesses. The latter constitutes the largest alternative to Catholicism and the number of adherents continues to augment. The Jehovah's Witnesses are, therefore, the main topic of enquiry in this investigation. The sect has been associated, in many contexts, with indigenous or working (agricultural) class anti-colonialist movements. In South and Central Africa, for example, the Jehovah's Witness ideology was imported in opposition to European power in the Kitawala movement, and thus has been reinterpreted as anti-colonialist action (Greschat 1967, Hodges 1985, Hernández Castillo 2005). The forthcoming Armageddon, in which there would be a division of the worthy from the

damned, a pressing eventuality signalled by the Jehovah's Witness community worldwide, became symbolic of the end of European control (Hernández Castillo 2005).

It has, therefore, been suggested that the experience of the violent acculturation campaigns among inhabitants of the certain regions or communities in Mexico, alongside the exclusion of these groups in the modernisation of Mexico, might have had an influence on how Jehovah's Witness ideologies were accepted (Hernández Castillo 2005). The ideology may have been accepted on the basis that it was seen as a rejection of 20th century modernist philosophy and the widening process of industrialisation (Beckord 1975, 3), since many agricultural workers in Mexico have found themselves dispossessed (Hernández Castillo 2005, 110); "There will be no rich or poor and there we won't need machines, nor creditors, nor fertilisers, the land will give us everything… (taken from a testimony at Las Ceibas in Chiapas)" (own transl of Hernández Castillo 2005, 111-112).

The Jehovah's Witness faith provides, not only a new doctrine and alternative vision of the bible, but also a new community in its rejection of all other institutions worldwide, including nations and government (Hernández Castillo 2005, 110): the Witnesses consider themselves to be a new nation comprised of people from all over the world who have rejected their own nationality. "While they live within different forms of government worldwide, they consider themselves as temporary residents, foreigners, because they belong to this new nation that is supranational and they are subjects of the kingdom of God, whose laws, contained by the Bible, they must follow" (own transl of Stevenson 1967, 160). Arguably, this has a very substantial effect on the construction of both individual and community identity. In Chiapas, where these studies were conducted, the construction of the Jehovah's Witness community has provided an alternative to the political action associated with the pro-indigenous movement (the Zapatistas). As a result, it has contributed to political demobilisation (Hernández Castillo 2005, 112).

A more localised effect on community identity has been the aforementioned association of inhabitants who are still Catholic, with pejoratives surrounding an association with pre-Hispanic culture and lifestyle. This is evident in the dialogues conducted at Las Ceibas, regarding their opinion of the nearby community at San Juan Chamula: "The Chamulas live differently to us. You should see their houses! Even if they have money from the sale of coffee, you wouldn't notice because they live the same as before. The women hardly understand Spanish…they're not very civilised, that's why it's hard for them to accept the word of Jehovah" (own transl of Hernández Castillo 2005, 118). This is an interesting statement, considering that the widespread popularity of the Jehovah's Witness sect has been attributed to the worldwide application of magazines in

the language of their converts. *The Watchtower* is published in 194 languages and sermons are given in the language of the congregation (this is the case in the Maya area), which is in notable contrast to the Catholic Church, which until the 1980s would continue to give Mass in Latin. The ultimate effect of this doctrine on the sense of community identity in Las Ceibas is that the majority of people will define themselves first as Jehovah's Witnesses, then as agricultural workers, and only within certain contexts will they describe themselves as indigenous Mames (Hernández Castillo 2005, 116). The alienation from thought that is stereotypically attributed to indigenous communities can be taken a step further. Some of the social and cultural phenomena that are attributed to pre-Colombian religious beliefs are acknowledged to exist by the Jehovah's Witness Mames, but are reputed not to be able to harm them, owing to their faith; "You cannot use witchcraft against us because Jehovah protects us. Over in Comalapa, a woman began to study the Bible with us but she didn't want to continue and she became a spiritualist. One day, while talking to the spirits of x, with the naguales, they told her that they couldn't enter her house because she had Jehovah's Witness books in her room" (own transl of Hernández Castillo 2005, 115). There are various narratives such as this documented from Las Ceibas. These stories may not be entirely reliable, but this demonstrates that people in Las Ceibas consider alliance with the Jehovah's Witness sect to be an action against forces that are not mentioned in the Bible, and yet do exist.

A study carried out by Kray in Dzitnup, Yucatán, investigates how ethnic identity "emerges daily in relations to bodily experiences" (2005, 337). Kray argues that Yucatec Mayans from Dzitnup are interested in maintaining community tranquility and balance, in a variety of ways that will not be elaborated upon in this text. The ideas surrounding the maintenance of tranquility extend, naturally, to class and so ethnicity (Kray 2005, 349-350). As the Maya have become absorbed in the global economy, not only is it apparent that they are employed by, and therefore vulnerable to, Spanish speakers, but that they occupy the lowest position in the global class hierarchy (Kray 2005, 349). Kray states, therefore, that the tranquility logic is used to critique class and monetary inequalities and appropriate moral superiority; "While poverty evokes disdain in the city, in the village it is reclaimed and reinterpreted by a particular morality of wealth. Tranquility connotes composure and control of desire. Possessing wealth, in contrast, is an indication of one's inability to control one's desires within the limits of what is reasonable and fair" (Kray 2005, 349). Furthermore, Kray comments that followers of the Protestant sects are also apt not to be respected within this framework: a woman explained that "…Protestant doctrine is very critical of catholic lifestyles (especially fiestas, drinking, and dancing), and

added, “Before you know it, you’re hating your fellow man just because of your religion”; better, it seems, to get along with people than to disagree over points of doctrine” (Kray 2005, 341). This evidence could indicate that certain cultural phenomena are at the backbone of the reassertion of community identity. The cultural outlook of the people of Dzitnup interacts with factors that are imposed on a national/global level whether economic or social.

There is some, perhaps predictable, divergence then between people, even with Protestant tendencies, from Dzitnup, and the case of the Jehovah’s Witness Mames. In the case of the Jehovah’s Witness Mames in Chiapas, religious conviction appears to be the primary foundation of their identity. Contrariwise, there is reticence on the part of community members of Dzitnup, Yucatán, to be divided on points of religion, which indicates a stronger culturally embedded attitude that restrains forceful religiosity. It is arguable that the success of the Jehovah’s Witness sect in Chiapas is due, in part, to political factors. In light of the cultural, geographical and political diversity in the Maya area, it is unnecessary to make broad or over-arching assumptions of the role of Protestantism and other new religious sects. It is, however, interesting to take these investigations into account.

Jehovah’s Witnesses provide leaflets, Bibles and other literature in the language of their converts. Furthermore, they give sermons in that language and, in cases where people are largely illiterate in their mother tongue, recruit language teachers (this is reported for many non-Catholic missions in Smalley 1991, 30, Kray 2004, 98-100). This is the case in Santa Elena. A daughter of one of the main speakers at the Jehovah’s Witness ceremonies in Santa Elena was interviewed (R), and is a Maya language teacher in the village and also travels to other states on the same mission. She offers to teach anyone in the village who is interested how to read and write in Yucatec Maya, using Jehovah’s Witness literature. She and her family are actively against any of the alternative religious or healing practices that exist in the village, to the point of denying their existence. The Jehovah’s Witness community holds sermons in a well-lit new building with a concrete floor that is painted white. Apart from flowers, a podium for the speakers and chairs for the congregation, the room is empty. The congregation assembles at a specific time in the evening. They have been asked at the previous meeting to read an excerpt from the bible that is printed into leaflets with questions underneath, and to prepare answers. After the sermon and singing (all of which is conducted in Maya) take place, the question and answer session is initiated. People raise their hands and the leader of the sermon picks respondents. The congregation is very well dressed, the majority of the women in

traditional *terna*. People remain seated, quiet and attentive throughout the ceremony. This is in notable difference to the congregation in the main (Catholic) church. The priest is a man from Ticul and so is not a very well-known community figure. The congregation is scattered, people bring very young children and babies, who are allowed to run and play among the pews, and dogs are also welcome in the church. There seems to be no preoccupation with regards to dress code for a regular Sunday mass.

An interview with a young Catholic woman (C), who sings in the church choir, raised issues regarding the economic implications of an affiliation with the Jehovah's Witnesses. She commented that the reason for the care and attention paid to appearance in the Jehovah's Witness Church was related to a concern with status. She said that the Jehovah's Witness community is made up, predominantly, of the wealthier people in Santa Elena. The family of interviewee R is comparatively affluent. Interviewee C further remarked that the Jehovah's Witnesses look down on Catholics for their lower economic status, their ignorance and, lastly, because of their idolatry. C claimed that the Jehovah's Witnesses were misguided as to the nature of the relationship between the Catholics of Santa Elena and the objects in their church.

A woman who runs a ready-made food business in the village (S) gave her opinion with regard to the Jehovah's Witnesses. She said that her husband was chronically unfaithful, which had led to a number of women becoming displeased. S claimed that, out of jealousy and anger, one of these women had sought the intervention of a witch, who had, in turn, made her very ill. She said she went to every doctor in Santa Elena and even outside the village, but her health was not improving. She says she finally solved the problem with prayer at the Jehovah's Witness temple, although she is a Catholic. Broadly, this story could indicate that this woman views all the religions and their rituals to be of use, and that some are more effective in certain circumstances. Alternatively, it could be the case that choosing a new sect and ignoring Catholicism (a hybrid religious atmosphere that has been developing since the introduction of European practice into the Maya area) is an escape from forces that relate to precolonial philosophies. Syncretism has been the subject of extensive research in the Maya area, one such example being that of the Maya in Chiapas; "Celebrations for Christian saints and pre-conquest spirits and divinities are important venues for cultivating the flowery language, nichinal'kop of their ancestors...The imagery and metaphors abounding in Maya languages survive in their Spanish renditions" (Nash 2004, 167). This is in line with Hernández Castillo's account of the Mames. (The *nagual* could not enter the house because of Jehovah's Witness literature.) The geographical distance between the account from Santa Elena and that from Chiapas

shows that this piece of Jehovah's Witness propaganda may be spread by the missionaries. In this sense, attribution to the new sect falls into a desire to take an active stance in the direction of cultural identity (to create distance between Maya cultural conceptions).

Although there are attitudes by Jehovah's Witnesses and regarding Jehovah's Witnesses in Santa Elena that show some similarities to the cases described above, it is clear, for example, that the Jehovah's Witnesses alienate themselves from the other religious practices in the community, particularly those that would imply any ethnic continuity (R). This would be in contrast to certain ethnographic texts that focus on the quest for autonomy in Maya communities: (Autonomy) "…is revealed in the culturally distinct ways Maya exhibit shared Mesoamerican predispositions to think and act in relation to one another and the cosmos" (Gossen 1974 and Nash 2004, 167). Other community members, however, accept the intrusion of the sect, and value its contribution, while not becoming full participants (S and C).

The interviews conducted in Santa Elena show that, even in the case of these interstitial participants, the power of the Jehovah's Witness Church is considered to be able to counter the influence of intangible negative forces. It is accepted, among these people, (S and the interviewee at Las Ceibas) that there are people who can command certain forces, such as shifting into animal form. In spite of the distance between this discussion and the actuality of ancient Mesoamerican cultural practice, the two are associated. Conversely, as shown in the interview with R and her family, those unequivocal participants in the Jehovah's Witness congregation dissociate themselves from any spiritual creativity and its cultural background that lies outside of the Bible. The culture surrounding the Jehovah's Witness community is devoid of, for example, statues or any superfluous material culture, as explained by interviewee C. The focus on religious practice is theoretical and conceptual, relying on intellectual response to texts from the Bible. The tendency on the part of many oral narratives that relate to inscrutable forces, such as those described, is to discuss ideas and stories but not to provide concrete answers. In the case of the Jehovah's Witness gatherings, the study of the Bible, question and answer session and guidance from the person holding the sermon all offer at least a sense of the contrary.

As has been shown by Ammerman (2010) in the theoretical framework, the diversity of religious manifestations and the plurality of any engagement with inscrutable or creative concepts ultimately invalidate any attempt to define a particular community's religious identity. The popularity of the Jehovah's Witness sect in Santa Elena demonstrates a

forceful contrast with traditional thought in the village community. This traditional thought is based around shifting inscrutable forces that are at times personalised and relate strongly to material culture. The variations in the thoughts surrounding this are explicated in the previous sub-chapters. It is plausible to assume that the Jehovah's Witness religion embodies an approach that seeks to distance itself from the afore-mentioned practices and thought. In its contrast, it highlights the conceptual framework that relates to globalised Yucatán.