

The Place of Supernatural Entities in Yucatec Maya Daily Life and Socialization

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Abstract

In this article, I analyze how supernatural entities play a significant role in Maya daily life. I argue for a sociality approach that considers supernatural entities as social agents with whom relationships are not defined by ritual only, but are regarded as similar to other types of social relationships only ruled by specific communicative constraints. I propose three templates for social relations that allow an analysis of the Maya interactions with all the supernatural entities of their pantheon. In discussing one template relationship, I examine a socialization practice that encourages children to interact in similar way with humans and with supernatural entities.

Resumen

En este artículo, analizo cómo las entidades sobrenaturales tienen un papel importante en la vida cotidiana maya. Usando el marco teórico de la socialidad, se considera las entidades sobrenaturales como agentes sociales con quienes se tiene que definir relaciones sociales que no son siempre definidas únicamente mediante un ritual ya que estas relaciones son también consideradas como un tipo de relaciones sociales, restringidas por limitaciones de comunicación. Propongo tres patrones de relaciones sociales que permiten un análisis de las interacciones de los mayas con todas las entidades sobrenaturales de su panteón. Al discutir un patrón en específico, examinaré una práctica de socialización que alienta a los niños a actuar de manera similar tanto con los humanos como con las entidades sobrenaturales.

Early ethnographers such as Frazer and Lévy-Bruhl noted how pervasive the impact of supernatural entities as agents seemed to be in people's everyday life in distant cultures. Somewhat later, anthropologists, such as Evans-Pritchard (1937) developed in detail a view of how the relation with the supernatural world is culturally elaborated. Taking a more cognitive approach, others have tried to understand the cognitive basis that allows such form of interaction. For instance, Goody sees supernatural entities as receivers of humans' demands. She argues that prayers are intrinsically dialogues based on dyadic premises where the supernatural entity fills the 'social Other slot' (Goody 1995: 208). Hanks (2006), in analyzing very precisely how a Yucatec Maya ritual specialist engages in a joint interaction with his patient during a curing session, also emphasized the shaman's direct relationship with supernatural entities and showed how this triadic interaction is basic to any curing practice among the Yucatec Maya. However, no global model has yet been proposed to explain: 1) the precise nature of the relationships between humans and their supernatural partners, and 2) to provide an account of the various possible relationships

with all the types of supernatural entities recognized in a local pantheon. My aim is to propose such a framework that would account for the Yucatec Maya relationships with all the supernatural entities of their pantheon and that would also include non-ritual relationships, generally not considered in the frame of religious analysis.

This paper focuses on Yucatec Maya lay people's interactions with the supernatural world in the course of their everyday lives. The ritual specialists' relationship with supernatural entities is not here considered in detail and would require a separate analysis (Hanks 1984; 1996). In order to offer a sense of what kind of supernatural partners the Maya interact with, I will first briefly describe the local supernatural pantheon in Kopchen and then propose the analytic concept of 'planes of reality' as an attempt to single out some distinctive properties of supernatural entities. Next, I turn to the analysis of some examples of everyday relationships with the supernatural entities. Finally, I present three templates of interaction that aim to account for the Maya relationships with all the local supernatural entities. In discussing one template relationship (the 'agentive' one), I will analyze a

specific socialization practice used by Maya parents. This practice is especially important to understand how parents help to make children aware of the existence of supernatural entities. I suggest how this particular relationship has a crucial impact on a larger set of social relations with supernatural entities but also humans.

The Maya Life Style and Religion

The fieldwork on which this paper is based was conducted in Kopchen, a little village of approximately 300 inhabitants. In Kopchen, most villagers are still subsistence farmers, cultivating corn, beans and squashes and exploiting the resources of the forest, although younger ones tend to go out of the village looking for paid jobs on the coast. The village of Kopchen (or *x-K'opch'e'en* in its Maya pronunciation) is situated in the state of the Quintana Roo, in the so-called "Zona Maya." This area has many Maya villages founded during the Caste War (1847-1901) and is considered to be still linguistically and culturally conservative.

Ritual obligations are significantly important in Maya daily life. In Kopchen, where the majority of inhabitants are Maya-Catholic, ritual life is very intense, very comparable to what was described in the 1950s by Villa Rojas (1987) in Tusik, a village also situated in the Zona Maya region.¹ Ritual activity can be seen as lying on a continuum from individual rituals to inter-village collective rituals, integrating familial and village groups in between (see Le Guen 2003; 2009). Of particular importance is the agricultural ritual cycle (determined by the corn annual cycle) that begins with individual rituals before culminating in the Saint Patron holy days that regroup all the inhabitants of the village and visitors from surrounding villages. However, interactions with supernatural entities can also occur in dreams, informally in the forest or even in the house. Crucially, ritual is not involved in many of these events.

The Maya and the Supernatural World

Although supernatural entities play a significant role in Yucatec Maya's lives, few extensive descriptions of supernatural entities are available in the research literature on Yucatec Maya. One can find brief descriptions in various ethnographic works (Pacheco Cruz 1934; 1947; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934; Sosa 1985; 1989; Terán and Rasmussen 1994; Villa Rojas 1987; 1995; Woodrick 1989) and some more detailed studies related to particular entities, such as the souls of the dead (Ruz 2002; 2003; Woodrick 1995) or certain evil entities (Tec Chí *et al.* 1993; Vapnarsky 1995). But the focus has generally been on ritual (Hanks 1984; 1993a; 1993b; 1996; 2006; Vapnarsky 2000; 2001; 2003) and very rarely dedicated to the examination of the relations with all the recognized supernatural entity.

During interviews but also often during informal discussions, while discussing matters regarding the supernatural world with Yucatec speakers, I realized that it is sometimes hard to put a straight line between what they consider natural and supernatural. Supernatural entities belong to the environment and are part of this world as humans are. Does this mean that the word 'supernatural' is inappropriate then? No quite. This concept is indeed useful from an etic analytical point of view and refers also to an emic category. In English, the term 'supernatural' (from the latin *super*, "above", and *natura*, "nature") etymologically designates a distinct or somehow different aspect of the natural world. On the emic side, Yucatec Maya informants recognize some specific characteristics to supernatural entities that set them as entities of a special kind. These properties, discussed below, are the following: being invisible, changing form or reading minds. 'Supernatural' appears then as a good working definition for the analysis and reflects to some extent a Maya view on these entities.

Among the most important properties recognized in supernatural entities, is the fact that they can be **invisible**. In fact, the prominence of this quality probably led Redfield and Villa Rojas to consider the supernatural world in their ethnographies of the Yucatec Maya as "the invisible world" (Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934: Chapter VII, 'The invisible world'; Villa Rojas 1987: 296: '*la amenaza del mundo invisible*'). In Maya words, there is no term for 'invisible' but several informants paraphrase this term in saying that supernatural entities

¹ The folk Catholicism practiced by the Maya is based on a complex syncretism from various influences, Maya pre-Hispanic religion and colonial Spanish Catholicism (Hanks 2009a; 2009b).

“do not let people see them” (*munch’a uyila’al*). But more generally, people refer to supernatural entities as being or being able to be (like) “wind” (*ik’*). It should be stressed that the term *ik’* has several distinct meanings: actual wind as meteorological phenomena, “evil winds” (*k’ak’as ik’o’ob*), and the property of being invisible (to be like *ik’*). This latter meaning of *ik’* is actually used to refer to the concept of “invisibility” but also to the idea of “celerity” (i.e., the ability to move incredibly rapidly). When I asked my informants about supernatural entities occupying several places at the same time, in their answer rapid movement is usually preferred to ubiquity. For instance, celerity is the explanation I was given to explain how the souls of the dead can be ritually called at several distant places during the same night. Although invisibility is evidently a crucial feature of the supernatural, it cannot be the only defining property of supernatural entities. Firstly, because probably most of the supernatural entities of the Maya pantheon are visible at one time or another and people can generally attribute physical description to them. For instance, the *x Táabay* is known to be a beautiful woman with owl feet (see Fig. 1). Secondly, some entities, such as the Saint Patrons, are typically represented by a statue, a visible and tangible artifact.



Fig. 1. A wall painting representing the *x Táabay* (Casa de la Cultura, Felipe Carrillo Puerto).

One other important feature of supernatural entities is their ability to **change form**. To take the example of the *x Táabay* again, she is known in Kopchen to be able to transform into a particular snake, namely the *ya’ax kàan* (*Oxybelis fulgidus*)², also visible on Fig. 1. But this changing form process is not limited to human form into animal. Some informants from Kopchen report that they have dreamed of the Saint Patron of the village advising them against a potential danger. During such a dreamlike interaction, JCC explains to me that the saint of the village took the appearance of an ordinary person. He adds that the saint would indeed very rarely appear as himself. Another supernatural entity called *chìichi’*, which will be described in more detail below, can take almost any form (animal, human, artifact, etc.).

Finally, supernatural entities are also known for their **capacity to read minds**. Basically, this means that a person cannot cheat or deceive a supernatural entity. Promises to the Saint Patron for instance, can be performed verbally and publicly but also only by thought. In either case, informants consider that not complying with public or thought promises would inevitably trigger the Saint’s punishment (see also Woodrick 1989: 99-100).

The Planes of Reality

The concept of ‘planes of reality’ is intended to capture the local understanding of the place of the supernatural entities in the Maya environment in synthesizing several kinds of data collected through extensive interviews and discussions with my informants completed by the analysis of narrations. The concept of plane of reality proposed in this paper is not completely new and other authors have already raised similar ideas. For instance, Keifenheim (2002) talks about the existence of ‘levels of reality’ to account for Kashinawa’s ideas of distinction between the visible and the invisible, the material and the immaterial, etc.

One night, as we were seating on the ground outside the church during the period of All Souls’ day, DC, my main informant, and the patron of the church explain to me that, although the souls of the dead are back on earth, “we cannot see them and they cannot see us. The souls are like in a dream. They do not recognize people”. In other words, super-

² Redfield and Villa Rojas mention the *chayi’ kàan* (1934: 122).

natural entities exist in the world but cannot be perceived by humans (at least under normal conditions). This limitation seems to exist both ways and supernatural entities (the soul of dead in this case) do not to perceive the reality the way human do. During another informal discussion, DC explains to me that *Ki'ichpan Màmama* (“Holy Mother”) is considered the guardian and protector of the souls of children (*uyúumil mehen pixan*) when they are returning on earth during a period that, in Kopchen, extend from October 31st to December 24th. Although the *Ki'ichpan Màmama* is said to look after the souls of children, this period is dangerous DC says. Because of her condition (i.e., being a supernatural entity) the *Ki'ichpan Màmama* does not to make the difference between the souls of dead and those of the living children. She sees them all as “souls” (*pixano'ob*). So, in order to help her distinguishing the living from the dead, parents attach a little cotton bracelet to their children’s wrists (see Fig. 2).



Fig. 2. A young child with prophylactic bracelets and a little wood cross.

This bracelet, with no particular properties for humans, is considered to be a ‘signal’ (*hump’e sènyal*) that can be perceived by the *Ki'ichpan Màmama* in the plane of reality where she operates. DC, along with Don T., the ritual specialist of the neighboring village and

several mother interviewed, explains that a soul of a living child with such a signal will not be taken away with the souls of the deceased.

What can be taken from these elicitations is that experiences of reality are distinct according to the ontological specificity of each entity. In analytical terms, each kind of entity belongs to a different plane of reality.

However, reality seems to be considered as unique and all the planes belong to the same reality. A clear example to illustrate this idea is the *múul*, pre-Hispanic constructions or small hills, sometimes regarded as *unàayl nukuch Bálmo'obo'*, the “houses of the guardian spirits.” The uniqueness of reality shows through the fact that the houses of the guardian spirits, according to several other male informants, do not exist in random places: they occupy recognizable places in the physical world, usually natural or pre-Hispanic mounts. In several occasions, while we were walking in the forest, some of my companions could even point to specific places considered to be the houses of the guardian spirits. In a well-known story among Yucatec Maya, a child gets stolen by the guardian spirits.³ The young child encounters a spirit that has taken the appearance of a familiar person (the child’s father for instance) and he brings the child to his house. When people from the village start looking for the child in the forest and pass the place where the child is confined, they do not see anything but a hill. The child is out of human perceptual range: sight (the house is not visible as such), olfaction (the dogs people brought with them do not perceive any odor), auditory and tactile (see also Hanks 1993b: 325). One way to interpret this narrative is to consider that the perceptual access of the child has been modified and the child now finds himself on a different plane of reality: he does not see a guardian spirit but a familiar person, not a hill but a house. Interestingly, narratives of this type do not belong solely to the oral literature repertory, but appear also in numerous narrations of personal experiences (see Tec Chí *et al.* 1993).

In numerous Yucatec Maya narratives (also found among the Itza’ or the Lacandon Maya), the supernatural world is ruled by a different temporality than the human world. In various stories, humans who have accessed a

³ For transcription of such narrations see Le Guen (2006), and Vapnarsky (1999).

supernatural plane had a different perception of time. For instance, the hunter that visited *kisin* (the Maya figure of the devil) in the underworld thought he was absent only three days, but for his family he has disappeared for three years (see for instance Hofling 1991; Boremansé 1986).

Although I have suggested that the different planes coexist in the same reality and imply different perceptual access according to the ontology of the entities, it seems that planes are not completely hermetic and that different planes can be accessed under certain circumstances. During dreamlike experiences the *pixan* 'soul' (considered by Yucatec Maya as the immortal feature of the person), is said to leave the corporal body. During such experience, one can transcend one's physiological or ontological limitations, in other words, accesses another plane of reality. These disembodied experiences allow particular form of knowledge, such as knowing places without physically visiting them, or having direct interaction with supernatural entities and temporally or spatially distant persons (an example of such interaction is presented below). The period of the day, the day of the week or the period of the year or the ritual context can facilitate communication with other planes. For instance, Tuesday and Friday are considered more favorable to communication with supernatural entities (these are days favored by ritual specialists to read people's fortune).

To sum up, I have claimed that the entities Maya consider as supernatural have 'special properties,' such as being able to be invisible, being able to change form and being able to read minds. According to the proposed concept of 'planes of reality', reality is unique but different entities have different perceptual access to it and perceptual access is limited by the entity's ontology. In other words, different kinds of entity operate at different planes of reality. Communication between various entities is allowed or prevented according to contextual factors (presence of particular entities, time of the day or temporal factors, etc.).

The Supernatural Pantheon of Kopchen

In order to understand the Maya relationship with the supernatural world, we should first

have an idea of who are the actors considered.

Table 1 presents the most important supernatural entities recognized by the people of Kopchen.⁴ Although this paper is not the place for a detailed analysis of these supernatural entities, a minimal definition of the main entities is provided as well as a justification for the proposed classification.⁵ Most of the entities mentioned in Table 1 are acknowledged in other parts of the Yucatec Peninsula (Academia de la Lengua Maya de Yucatán 2003; Pacheco Cruz 1934; 1947; Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934; Villa Rojas 1987; 1995; Sosa 1985; 1989; Terán and Rasmussen 1994). Other ethnographic studies conducted in Maya villages elsewhere in the Peninsula have mentioned a great variety of sorcerers (*h wáay póop*, *h wáay chibo*, *x ts'éek*, etc.) and some other supernatural entities that are not recognized by the majority of the Kopchen informants consulted. Even if some of these entities are known by older informants (especially through oral narrations), they are said not to live in the area of the village. Moreover, some supernatural entities names can vary from place to place (nevertheless, their function and attributes clearly identify them as similar).⁶

Table 1 presents the supernatural entities, considering their type, subtype, category (i.e., the function Maya attribute to them) and related space (i.e., the space they are recognized to occupy and/or protect). For the sake of readers not familiar with the Maya supernatural world, each group of entities will be examined in more detail.

⁴ Note that *Yùun K'ìin* ("Lord Sun") and *k Màama Lùuna* ("Our Mother Moon") are not considered here although they could be considered as some kinds of supernatural beings, along with the rain. No informants acknowledged having any specific interactions with them, although some have told me to witness the eyes and the mouth of the sun once (but this does not imply any agency).

⁵ More detailed analysis of these supernatural entities in Kopchen is available in Le Guen (2003; 2005; 2006).

⁶ For instance, Redfield and Villa Rojas (1967: 206-207) refer to the *Nukuch Báalamo'ob* as *uk'u'il k'áax* ("the Gods of the forest") to designate the guardian spirits of the forest.

Entity type	Sub-type	English gloss	Category of supernatural entities	Related space
<i>Pixan</i> 'Souls'	<i>Nukuch</i>	Adults' souls	Souls/Ancestors	Tomb/House
	<i>Mehen</i>	Children's souls		
<i>Yùun Kíimil</i>		Lord of Death	Guardians of souls	Underworld(?)
<i>Ki'ichpam Màama</i>		Beautiful Mother (Virgen Mary)		Celestial level(?)
<i>Yùuntsilo'ob</i> 'Guardian spirits'	<i>Nukuch Báalamo'ob</i>	Great Jaguars	Guardian spirits ' <i>ah kanan</i> '	Forest/Field
	<i>Arux</i>	Goblin		
	<i>Cháako'ob</i>	Rain masters		
	<i>Mosòon iik'</i>	Whirlwind		Body/ Domestic space
	<i>Báalam kàah</i>	Village's (great) Jaguars		
	<i>Ah kanul</i>	The Guardians/ The Bodyguards		
<i>Sàanto</i> 'Saints'	<i>Sàanto'il kàah</i>	Village's Saint		
	<i>Sàanto'il nah</i>	House's Saint		
<i>Ki'ichkelem</i> <i>Yùun/Dyòos</i>		Beautiful Lord/God		Celestial level
<i>K'ak'as ba'alo'ob</i> 'Evil things'	<i>x Táabay</i>		Evil things	Forest
	<i>Bòob</i>			
	<i>Sip tóolok</i>	The Lizard of mistake		Underworld/Forest
	<i>Kisin</i>	Devil		
	<i>Chüichi'</i>			
<i>K'ak'as iik'o'ob</i> 'Evil winds'	<i>Tuhùun</i>	Evil winds moving on their own	Evil winds	Path
	<i>Tupàach</i>	Evil winds brought by entities		Body
	<i>Tuxta'abih</i>	Evil winds sent as punishment		-
<i>h Wáay</i>		Sorcerer	Human transformed into animal	Village

Table 1. Supernatural entities recognized in Kopchen.

Souls are divided into souls of adults (*nukuch pixan*) and souls of children (*mehen pixan*). This distinction is based on several criteria, but the most important is the differentiation between persons who have been married (adults) or not (children). Rituals for the dead also emphasize this distinction: the souls of children are celebrated when they are said to come to Earth on October 31st, while adults' souls only come the following day (November 1st). The souls are always accompanied by their guardians/protectors: the

Ki'ichpan Màama ("the Beautiful Lady") protects children's souls while *Yùun kíimil* ("the Lord of Death") is in charge of the adults' souls. The location of the souls and their guardians during the year is not clear, but informants agree that, when they return to Earth, they wander around to their tomb or to their former house.

Yùuntsilo'ob or 'guardian spirits' is the generic term used in Yucatec Maya to refer to all the supernatural entities related to the forest and the agricultural spaces they are meant to

protect. The *Nukuch Báalamo'ob* are thought of as a collectivity of spirits anchored in specific spaces they protect as well as protecting their inhabitants (humans, animals, plants) (Vapnarsky and Le Guen, in press). The *Arux* can be considered as a kind of *Nukuch Báalam* with the difference that he is a manmade guardian with specific properties, viewed as having extreme exigencies and being mortal. The *Cháako'ob* are the 'masters of the rain,' thought to operate at a celestial level, although they are directly related to the cornfield (*milpa*). They are said to be celestial sprinklers who allow the corn to grow. The *mosòon ìik'* is a particular kind of wind considered very dangerous, but which can also help the peasant to burn his field if the latter makes the proper rituals. All these entities are related to the forest or to agricultural space, and rituals are performed for all of them.

The *Báalam kàaho'ob*, literally the 'Jaguars of the village' have basically the same role as the *Nukuch Báalamo'ob* but they are related to socialized space, namely the village. The *ah kanulo'ob* or 'bodyguards' are the protectors of persons (body space) and/or domestic spaces. Maya sometimes refer to them as *àanhel de la gwàardya* ("guardian angels").⁷ The Saint of the village (i.e., the Saint Patron) or the Saint of house are, along with God (the creator and protector of the Earth, *yóok'ol kàab*), considered protectors of socialized space. In contrast to the *Nukuch Báalamo'ob*, *Báalam kàaho'ob*, *Arux* and *Ah Kanul* that are said to protect the borders or frontiers of socialized spaces, the Saints are in charge of the protection of the internal spaces and the people. All of the supernatural entities ranged under the category 'guardian spirits' in Table 1 have a protective function. Rituals are performed for all of them in order to literally 'pay' (*bo'otik*) them. They are all protectors but anchored to specific spaces, and they are complementary, some protecting the borders and others, the internal spaces. God, called *Ki'ichkelem Yùum* ('our beautiful Lord'), *Hahal Dyòos* ('True God') or simply *Dyòos* (from the Spanish *Dios*) is considered as the creator and the protector of the earth. Although God is a central supernatural entity, especially in ritual contexts, my informants in Kopchen

report very limited direct interactions with him.

The entities grouped under the section called 'Evil things' in Table 1 belong together because they all fall under the Maya designation of *k'ak'as ba'alo'ob*, 'dangerous entities,' a generic name used by Yucatec Maya speakers to avoid the direct naming of these entities (see Vapnarsky and Le Guen, in press). In this category enters the *x Táabay*, a beautiful lady who tries to seduce drunk men at night at the forest border in order to kill them. As already mentioned, she can also transform into a snake. The *bòob* is considered to be a dangerous big animal living in the forest that tries to eat humans, while the *sip tóolok* is a lizard that loses men in the forest. *Kisin* is the Maya figure of the devil and is usually encountered trying to make a contractual relation with humans in exchange for their soul that he will bring back to the underworld. Finally the *chiichi'* is mainly bound to infancy and could be defined as "a supernatural entity that is hidden in the materiality of the world." A deeper analysis of the *chiichi'* will be proposed below.

All evil entities are mainly related to the forest space (although the *chiichi'* can also appear in the domestic space). The Evil winds are particular types of wind that are different from atmospheric winds. They are considered vectors of illnesses and can be divided into three types: 1) the ones that move by themselves along paths and 'between hills' (*tukáalap bu'tun*); 2) the ones that are brought by entities (human, animal or supernatural); and 3) the ones that are sent, usually by supernatural entities, as 'punishment', *kàastigo* in Maya (for a deeper analysis see Le Guen 2005). As for evil entities, no rituals are carried out for their benefit. Only curing rituals are performed by ritual specialists in order to take them out of the patient's body. Finally the *h Wáay* is a human being who can transform himself into an animal (usually a domestic animal, such as a pig or a big dog) through particular rituals. He is said to act in his own self-interest, but can as well be contracted to act on behalf of a client. In Kopchen, the last person publicly recognized as a 'witch' or *x Wáay* was killed (hanged) probably around the 1940s.⁸

⁷ According to Roys (in Barrera Vásquez 1980: 299), before the Spanish conquest the *Ah Kanulo'ob* were the guardian mercenaries of the *Kokom* in Mayapan and founders of the province of *Ah Kanul*.

⁸ Her daughter, now 80 years old, who assisted when villagers came to take her mother to be killed, narrated the story to Lorena Pool Balam and the author. Currently,

Everyday Relationships with Supernatural Entities

In this section, I would like to present some examples of typical everyday relationships with the supernatural entities. Emphasis is put on how, from a Yucatec Maya perspective, supernatural entities are regarded as social and interactional partners. The interactive nature of the relation with the supernatural entities is visible in the Maya terminology recruited to talk about the supernatural.

The Interactional Quality of Space

According to William Hanks, in Oxkutzkab (Yucatán), and more generally in the Maya world, “there is a cultural premise that all animates, including spirits, occupy stable places from which they occasionally move” (Hanks 1990: 344). This means that all entities are (or should be) spatially anchored that is, according to the Yucatec Maya expression, have *tukúuchil*, “its place” (in the world). According to the premise of spatial anchorage, places inhabited by particular supernatural entities are, as a consequence, provided with some “quality” (e.g., in being safe or dangerous) according to the nature of the entity. But, is this enough to say that there are dangerous places within the Maya world? The answer cannot be straightforward and the dangerousness of a particular space seems to vary according to contextual factors. In order to sort out these factors, let’s consider the example of the forest space.

The forest is inhabited by the *Nukuch Báalamo’ob*, ‘the guardian spirits of the forest’. Adult men go in the forest to work in their field almost on an everyday basis (note that the ‘field’ *kòol* is considered part of the ‘forest’ *k’áax*) and regularly perform rituals to the *Nukuch Báalamo’ob*. Men’s frequency of use of forest space on a daily basis and the quality of the forest space is for them considered safe. In contrast, women and children usually do not participate in rituals performed for the guardian spirits. Children are also considered by Yucatec Maya as weak and therefore fragile creature and are very sensitive to the ontological nature of the *Nukuch Báalamo’ob* (usually coming as ‘winds’) and to the Evil winds they themselves carry (Le Guen 2005; 2006). Women’s energy also

appears to be somewhat incompatible with the male energy that characterizes the forest space.⁹ As a consequence, forest space is dangerous for women and children and their use of it is therefore infrequent.

The analysis of several kinds of collected data (discourses and behavior) give evidence that the dangerousness of space depends on several features: the type of space (forest vs. village for instance), the type of entity (or a set of entities), the status of an individual (mainly determined by age and gender) and various contextual factors such as the activity being conducted in the space or the time (e.g., the night is always considered to be more dangerous than the day, with the exception of the sun’s zenith).

But if the quality of the forest space (safe or dangerous) was only determined by these strict factors, women and children would never frequent the forest space. But they do. In fact, women and children regularly enter the forest to collect firewood (*si’*) or medicinal plants (*ts’àak*) and more specifically in Kopchen, go to collect liana (*àak’*) used in the local handcraft production. However, when going in the forest, women and children try never to venture too far from the limits of the village and along familiar paths. Women and children occasionally also go to help their father or husband in the field. The forest space is not strictly dangerous and prohibited to women and children because the relationship with supernatural entities (attributed with intentionality and emotions), is for Yucatec Maya considered to a certain extent negotiable. The interactive nature of the relationship human and supernatural entities is examined in the following section.

The Linguistic of Interaction

To get a sense of how Maya themselves talk about their relationships with the supernatural entities, a woman and a man explain how women and men relationships with the spirits of the forest differ. I asked W, a 47 year old woman, to tell me the story of the time she got

some persons are suspected of witchcraft but no accusations are seriously made.

⁹ For my male informants, women cannot go hunt for instance because, as they justify it: “they have breasts”, a metonymical way of expressing gender, and probably energy, incompatibility. To support this claim, I would like to mention a narration involving the *Arux* and a woman who, at some point, get naked. The *Arux*, curious about the woman intimate part and exploding when he touches the woman’s sex. A transcription of this narration is available in Le Guen (2006)

lost in the forest with her mother several years ago. In the following example, she is justifying her misadventure not because she was not used to going into the forest but because of the action of the guardian spirits that made her get lost.

OLG *Pero ba'axten kusa'ata'a' máak?*

W *Pòos kuya'ako'obe' komo ke' ch'up bin máak beyo', (...) kunáaka' tun bin uyòol uyùumil le' k'áaxo', inwa'ik tèene' le te' Nukuch Báalmo'obo'. Kunáakal uyòol uyi(li)ko'ob umáan ch'up yáanal k'áaxo' beyo', kuk'askuntko'ob máak. Tèene', bey inwu'ik kuya'ako'obo'.*

OLG But why do people get lost [in the forest]?

W Well, they say that with women like that, so they say, the masters of the forest, they say, get aggravated, I think that they are the *Nukuch Báalmo'ob* ('Great Jaguars'). They get aggravated from seeing women passing under the forest like that, [so] they hurt people. As for me, this is what I heard from what they say.

In W's discourse, she is not saying that she entered a prohibited space (the forest) and therefore got punished. What she is expressing is the tension that existed at this particular time with the spirits of the forest who, getting aggravated of seeing the women (too much), decided to punish them. This is not putting emphasis on the quality of space in itself but more on the fact that forest is dangerous because of the nature of the relationships between women and the guardian spirits. Similarly, the following extract from an interview, DT, experienced man (age 48) is explaining why the forest is dangerous for women and why it is not (or less) for men.

DT *xch'ùupe' múu beeyt umáan de áak'a' ich k'áax, he' bin uhàantko'obe', h uk'ínsko'ob e xch'ùupo'.*

OLG *ba'axten?*

DT *tuméen tun leeti'o'be' ... k'àas bin uyiko'ob ch'ùup, k'àas. En kàambyo ... xii' beyo' ... pus ... 'u, 'u, uyéet xibil. (...) ku ... ku'áamigotko'o' beyo' (...), kukanantkóo' máak.*

DT Women cannot pass by night in the forest, they [the guardian spirits] would eat women, so they say, they would kill women.

OLG why?

DT because they, they don't like women, so they say, they don't like them. On the other hand, men like that ... well ... they are their male companions. (...) they ... they make friends

[with men] like that (...) they protect people [= men].

In these two examples, the nature of the relationship between humans (men and women) and supernatural entities is expressed linguistically by informants with the use of social and emotional relational terms. W and DT justify the guardian spirits' relations with women saying that the spirits "get aggravated by women" (*kunáakl uyóol*) or that the guardian spirits "don't like women" (*k'àas uyilik*). In this process, supernatural entities are attributed with intentionality and agency: Spirits would "hurt people" (in this case, women), and would even "eat" or "kill" them.

What seems to determine the dangerousness of the forest space for Yucatec Maya is the type of relationship people maintain with the guardian spirits. Men, in exploiting the space regularly and in doing ritual are said to have a good relationship with the guardian spirits. DT says that they are men's 'male companions' and that they 'make friends' with them.¹⁰ In contrast, young boys or girls like adult women are considered to be only tolerated by the *Nukuch Báalmo'ob*. But crucially, if it means that forest space is dangerous, it also implies that this dangerousness is, to some extent, negotiable. Interestingly, supernatural entities appear to be treated as social partners, not very different from humans.

In fact, the very name of the guardian spirits of the forest referred as *Yùuntilso'ob* is also explicitly reflecting the interactional nature of their status. The root *yùun* (or *yum*) is not a proper name but refers to a social/interactional role. *Yùun* has indeed different but related meanings, depending on the context of use and the possessive suffix it receives. A more discussion about the root *yùun* is available in Le Guen (2006) and Vapnarsky and Le Guen (in press). The range of meaning goes from kinship relation to mastership in passing by property, usufruct, recipient or even competence. But what is involved in every case is an interaction between two entities: a child and his father, a space and its owner/guardian/user, an object and the person acting on it, etc.

For a Social Interactional Approach:

¹⁰ For most of the informants consulted, frequency of use and quality of space are interrelated. Several men told me that the more the guardians of space get used to the presence of men the more they become 'tamed' (*sìuka'an*) (especially through ritual offerings), and the less they are tempted to harm men.

Three Templates of Relationships with the Supernatural Entities

In developing the framework of analysis, I have drawn from cognitive science literature on supernatural entities (e.g., Barrett and Keil 1996; Boyer 1994; 1996). Such studies have made several claims central to my argument: 1) Most, if not, all cultures acknowledge the existence of particular animated entities that are not (or not strictly) human, animal or vegetal. They are supernatural entities (god, souls, spirits, ghosts, etc.). 2) In all these societies, supernatural entities are always attributed intentionality and desire and sometimes agency. 3) Underlying the acknowledgement of the existence of these special kinds of entities with mental states lies the assumption that communication with the supernatural might be possible. I argue that 4) even if such communicational processes can be variable (they usually are not straightforward) and might depend on the cultural context; relationships with the supernatural are extracted from the set of existing social relations considered in the society. In other words, even if communication processes might differ with supernatural entities than with other humans, the types of relationships people have with supernatural entities should not be in essence different. This latter claim is also echoed by another kind of literature, namely the ‘sociality approach’. According to this framework of analysis, humans are intrinsically social beings and cognitive processes involved in communication are so pervasive that humans tend to generally understand the world in social terms (e.g., Enfield and Levinson 2006; Goody 1995). According to this view, humans tend to consider random or accidental events as intentional (Garfinkel 1967: 74) and have a propensity to consider that someone, an agent, must be responsible for it. For instance, among the Maya as well as in many other societies, supernatural entities are often held responsible for illness or accidents.

From this perspective, supernatural entities are considered relationally as analogous to humans. In Maya discourse, supernatural entities just happen to have particular properties and live on different plane of reality, limiting communication with them. Nonetheless, supernatural entities are treated by Yucatec Maya as social and emotional partners. As for other types of social relation, interactions with supernatural entities and the

attribution of intentionality provide explanatory models built on ‘templates’ for meaningful (social) relationships. I argue that the relations Maya have with supernatural entities are based on three templates of interaction: reciprocal, intimate and relational.

1. *The Reciprocal Relationship*

The reciprocal relationship involves a contractual relationship with “rights and duties” from both the human and the supernatural entity. This reciprocal relationship is considered by the Maya as being of mutual benefit. It is also considered as being costly, in terms of time or goods, since it involves “sacrifice” (in the sense of Atran 2002).¹¹ A woman from Kopchen, while discussing her relation with her family saints used contractual terms saying that she tries never to *p’ax* the saints. This term, *p’ax* in everyday contexts means ‘borrowing money’. In the woman discourse, this term implies that her relation with the saints is contractual by nature: the protection for her family provided by the Saint is not free and ritual offerings are obligatory in order to ‘pay’ (*bo’otik*) the guardian spirits.

When it comes to the exploitation of space, the reciprocal relationship is typically the relation Maya have with supernatural entities. As previously mentioned, all spaces are attributed with a *yùum-il*, a ‘guardian spirit’ (or a community of guardian spirits). In the case of the agro-forest space, the guardian spirits would be the *Yùuntsilo’ob* while for a socialized space, it would be a Saint (*Sàanto*): the saint of the house for a household or the Saint Patron for the whole village. The human-*Yùuntsilo’ob*/Saint(s) relation is considered to be reciprocal: humans have the right to ask for protection (for the space and for themselves) and to exploit the space, as long as they do it properly. In counterpart, humans have the duty to pay the supernatural entities, in this case, through ritual offerings of food. For their part, the guardian spirits (*Yùuntsilo’ob* or Saints) have the right to ask for compensation for their duty, that is the protection of the space and the

people who exploit it. As we can see, the right

¹¹ For Atran (2002) religious offerings are ‘sacrifices’, always non-recuperable costs, regardless of how much they look flexible economically.

of the human is directly related to the duty of the supernatural entities and vice-versa (see

Table 2).

	Rights	Duties
Human	- Ask for protection - Exploit a space properly	- Pay the supernatural entities (through ritual offerings)
<i>Yùuntsilo'ob</i> or Saints	- Ask for compensation (ritual offerings)	- Provide protection of the space and the people who exploit it

Table 2. The reciprocal relationship for the exploitation of space.

This reciprocal relationship with the supernatural entities echoes social relations in everyday life between humans, and seems indeed to be mapped from them. Consider for instance the following examples of a reciprocal relationship between humans or groups of humans. The first example is anecdotal but typical of the relation described above. One day, during the author's second fieldwork period, Ram and Ep', two child neighbors, came to his house in Kopchen, asking to collect some fruits in the garden behind. They first entered the garden and then asked for permission to collect some fruits, permission that was immediately given to them. When the two children were done, they spontaneously came to the author and handed to him a bag of fruit, a generous part of their harvest. When asked why they did that, they explained: the author is considered as the *yùumil* of the place (meaning that he is living in the place, but also, by extension, taking care of it), therefore it is 'natural' to give to him a part of his own fruits. Note that this procedure is exactly what a peasant does with the guardian spirits of the field he is exploiting.

Another example of the reciprocal relationship (one that does not involve space), is the ritual obligation of sharing the product of the hunt or of any ritual food prepared for a family ritual with the (recognized) kin. When a person has killed a deer or when a family has just finished performing a ritual, usually a child is sent to the houses of related kin with a little bucket full of food, a part of the offering. This obligation leads in due time to reciprocity from the kin. Note that in these examples, either between humans or with the supernatural entities, the reciprocity is not supposed to be immediate.

The examples of the exploitation of space illustrate the human – supernatural entities' reciprocal relationship when everything goes

as anticipated. However, reciprocity is not always carried out as one party would have expected. In this case, communication between humans and supernatural entities has to be made more explicit, and provides the researcher with insight on how Maya conceive the reciprocal relationship and also the communicational process. As mentioned earlier, *Yùuntsilo'ob* and Saints are attributed with intentionality and desire. As the protectors of space, *Yùuntsilo'ob* and Saints want to be paid for the protection they provide. When they are not, because *Yùuntsilo'ob* and Saints, like all other supernatural entities, have communication constraints, they cannot communicate as humans do. Contrary to the case of the author with his young neighbors in the example above, supernatural entities cannot verbally ask or scold the human who exploits a space to give a part of the harvest if the person has forgotten or does not want to. In other words, supernatural entities cannot engage in a verbal form of communication as humans would do. Instead, *Yùuntsilo'ob* and Saints are said to communicate by means of "punishment" (or *kàastigo* in Maya). In Maya life sudden or non-obvious illnesses are commonly interpreted as *kàastigo* sent by the supernatural entities to address a particular message to humans, mainly discontent. The following example is a type of common everyday event typically interpreted as caused by the action of supernatural entities. This example is extract from another conversation with W talking this time about her family saint, a wood figure of San Antonio. Six years ago, because her daughter was ill, she started to perform ritual offerings to San Antonio. These rituals were performed in another house in the village where this Saint is also honored. But this year, she explains:

Te' àanyo máanak tuno' (...) kinwa'ik beya' "hàa, làah si'is xan uyòok

*inwáala' h kàaxo' behle', minbisik!
Aasta hun'àanyo wáa yàanchah ten"
ken. Chan xii'! Hach óolak kimik ten
e'le tuka'atéena'! (...) áawat kubèetik!
Hach máan p'uha'anen ka' tinwa'ik
ti'e': "Pàal tèeche' ba'ax yàan
techáa? Hach máan ts'a naksik
inwóol!" ken ti'. Pero chen ka'
tinwileh ts'u pa'ata ts'o'oya'ano' p'at
uxikne' ma' chika'ani', wóolistak!
Hach wóolislahih (...) Trèes diyas le
chan áangelo' ma' hach uhana' ten.
Ook'o', mix hanal, hach mix ba'al.*

Last year (...) I said like this: “Hum, now my hen are all brooding, I won’t take (any offering). Not until next year if I had some (chicken)”, I said. Little man! This one [pointing to her daughter] almost died on me again! (...) She was crying! I was very angry and I said to her: “Child, what is it with you? You really aggravated me!” I said to her. But I realized she was skinny and her ears were not visible anymore, they were round! (Her head) got round [= inflated]. For three days the little angel [= child] did not eat. She was crying, but not eating, nothing.

W takes the child to the doctor but nothing happens, until the moment the child says to her mother:

*“Màami tèeche' behla' kinwa'ik
tèeche' yan abisk innobèena (...), wáa
ma' tabis innobèena, tèene' hach ma'
tinwutstal”*

“Mummy, I am saying to you that you should take my *novena* [= offering] (...) if you do not take my *novena*, I won’t get better”

So W finally went to perform the offering. Coming back to her house...

*K'uchene' ka' tint'ab ukiib kink'áat
wáa kuka'a'utsta, inmach'm uk'a.
Olíbyo'! lete' tinbèetah he'ex behlae'
tinbèetah tutàardea', le ka' sáachahe'
le pàala' tèemprano ka' líi' uk'áat
uyo'och ha'. Hach mixba'a' yàan ti',
nòormal beyo'. Hach tuhàahil!*

I came back and I light a candle to ask for my daughter to get well again, I had grasped her hand. Olivier! The moment I did it, let’s say I did it today in the afternoon, the next day, the child got up in the morning and asked to drink some water. She had nothing, she was normal like that. This is the truth!

W interpreted the illness of her daughter as caused by the Saint who did not receive the offerings he was supposed to get at this time of the year. Once the ritual performed the Saint is satisfied and cures the child. In this sense, the *kàastigo* punishment is seen as a form of communication with the supernatural entities.

Nevertheless, the ‘*kàastigo* message’ is not always unambiguous and often needs to be interpreted by a ritual specialist. The ritual specialist, seen as a privileged intermediary between humans and the supernatural world, has basically two main tasks: the first is to identify which supernatural entity is the sender of the illness (or any *kàastigo* message), and the second is to determine the supernatural entity’s exigencies (usually it means performing a ritual with food offerings). As a ritual specialist, (s)he will in addition provide a cure for the illness. When *Yùuntsilo’ob* and Saints have been correctly compensated, they provide protection again.

The reciprocal relationship is not restricted to the exploitation of space. It is for instance the ordinary form of interaction of Yucatec Maya with their ancestors. Ritual exchange for protection is an obligation on the part of humans (Woodrick 1995; Le Guen 2003; 2005; 2009).

2. *The Intimate Relationship*

Among the Yucatec Maya, the intimate relationship is the typical kind of relationship when supernatural entities interfere in people’s lives. By definition this relationship is not public, involving the person and the supernatural entity only. In contrast to the reciprocal relationship, no ritual performance is required. The intimate relationship is usually, but not only, the relation Maya have with *k’ak’as ba’alo’ob* (“evil things”). Falling into this category are all the encounters with a supernatural entity that give rise to personal narrations (see Tec Chí *et al.* 1993).

In human interactions, an intimate relationship resembles relation with friends. But since,

the intimate relationship is not public, imagine that it would be like having a distant friend that other people would never have meet. Sexual interactions (especially adultery ones) are of this nature. They can be talk about but rarely ever seen.

A common example of the intimate relationships with a supernatural entity is for instance an encounter with the *xTáabay*. A man happens to encounter the supernatural entity at night, and can even have sexual intercourse with her (Tec Chí *et al.* 1993: 52-53), but there are no further expectations based on this relationship. The supernatural entity is linked only to the person's experience, which can be made public afterwards through narratives. Another example is when someone dreams of a soul of a dead person, usually a relative. In contrast to the reciprocal relationship involving the souls of the dead as ancestors, in the intimate relationship there is no demand from the supernatural entity and no ritual performance is required. The intimate relationship is simply about having an interaction with the soul, like a conversation. For Yucatec Maya, among the several types of dream experiences, one is regarded as an actual interaction with the soul (*pixan*) of a person who is not physically alive. During one conversation, DC report such an experience with the souls of his grandfather. He particularly expresses his frustration of not having forgotten to ask his grandfather why he died (when he was ill). Interaction of Yucatec Maya ritual specialists or midwives with some supernatural entities (the guardian spirits of the Virgin respectively) from whom they receive esoteric teaching are also partly of this nature (Hanks 1984; 1993a; 1993b; Jordan 1989).

Experiencing the intimate relationship is apparently quite infrequent in Kopchen because people engaged primarily in reciprocal relationships with supernatural entities. In contrast, the Itza' and Mopan Maya of Guatemala, who face great generational cultural and linguistic changes, report numerous interactions of the intimate relationship type, especially with the spirits of the forest, no longer objects of ritual for the young generations (Le Guen *et al.*, in press).

3. The Agentive Relationship

The agentive relationship differs from the two previous types of relations insofar as it implies a direct social interaction where the supernatural entity is used as a relational intermediary. The agentive relationship is designated as 'agentive' because it always implies the use of a supernatural entity as an intermediary between a human 'agent' onto another human, the 'patient.' The agentive relationship is a public three-term (or a triadic) relationship, and no ritual obligation is incurred. Typically, the agentive relationship applies to a restricted number of supernatural entities, but its public nature and its use in socialization practices means that it has a have strong impact on all social relations with the supernatural world as well as on those between humans. Two main entities are typically used as relational intermediaries among the Maya: the *chiichi* and the *h wáay*. The *chiichi* is used by a mother to influence her child's behavior, whereas the intervention of a *h wáay* is used to change a relation (such as resolving a conflict) between two persons or two groups (see Table 3).

Agent	Supernatural entity (target)	Patient	Purpose
Mother	<i>Chiichi'</i>	Child	Behavior/emotional control
Person 1	<i>H wáay</i>	Person 2	Conflict resolution

Table 3. The relational relationship exemplified.

In this paper, I focus on the *chiichi'* for its interest in socialization. A study of domestic 'dramas' that occur in the family house where the *chiichi'* intervenes is presented with the goal of better understanding the agentive

relationship and its consequences for relationships with the supernatural world.

The dramas: The *chiichi'* appears mainly in daily dramas located in domestic space. According to Briggs, a drama can be defined as an interactional sequence where a problem

is evoked (usually involving affect and/or social relationship) and where the child is directly involved (Briggs 1970; 1992; 1998). A drama is always limited in time and considered by adults to be non-serious. However, one main condition of the drama is that the child is not aware of this non-serious character; to a certain extent, the drama resembles and usually shares several characteristics of a tease. In the construction of a drama, caregivers (parents, siblings and sometimes other elders) take the role of agents and use the supernatural entity *chüichi'* (physically incarnated or not), as an intermediary to direct the emotional response of a patient, the child. Studies on dramas in the Maya world are available in De León (2003; 2005) and Brown (2002) among others.

The *chüichi'*: The word *chüichi'* is constructed via reduplication of the root *chi'* meaning 'mouth' or 'to bite', and can be translated as "the thing that bites." For adults, *chüichi'* typically refers to dangerous animals that bites (e.g., snake, scorpions, etc.) but also to 'evil creatures'.¹² However, when related to childhood, the *chüichi'* has a border meaning and is considered a supernatural entity that can take the form of anything strange, even strangers (i.e., a person not familiar to the household). In a modern Maya dictionary *chüichi'* is defined as "a ghost with whom one scares children" (*fantasma con que se asusta a los niños*) (Academia de la Lengua Maya de Yucatán 2003: 56). In this specific meaning, the *chüichi'* appears as a supernatural entity that is essentially linked to infancy.

Although the *chüichi'* is a very important supernatural entity in the Maya world it is quite poorly described in the ethnographic literature. One attempt to define the *chüichi'* could be the following: "a supernatural entity that is hidden in the materiality of the world". Consequently, almost anything can be interactionally treated as *chüichi'*. In caregivers' discourses directed at children, the word *chüichi'* designates a large category of dangerous things that take many different forms: an animal form (it is usually a dangerous animal such as a snake, a worm or a scorpion), an artifact of any kind or even a person

(usually an evil creature that took a human form as in Fig. 3). In one ethnographic video recorded by the author, a 1;5 year old boy recognizes the *chüichi'* as a natural element, namely fire smoke. In sum, the *chüichi'* appears to be construable as anything 'strange.'



Fig. 3. The *chüichi'* in different human form (drawing by a 6-year-old girl from Kopchen).

How does the *chüichi'* come to life? In the drama, the intrinsic characteristics of the *chüichi'* are not at stake since it can be, by definition, almost anything. In order to discriminate one artifact or an animal as *chüichi'* caregivers proceed in two steps: first, they point to a particular artifact or animal to the child saying something like "here is/comes the *chüichi'*". Second, they attribute it with intentionality, saying things such as: "the *chüichi'* will bite/eat you." This construction is especially important and sets the drama apart from other interactional situations involving supernatural entities. In the drama, because it is a socialization practice and because it is considered as non-serious by the parent, there is an asymmetry in beliefs towards the *chüichi'*. As pointed out by SCC, parents do not believe in the reality of the *chüichi'* as a supernatural entity during the unfolding of the drama. It is a supernatural for the child only. This asymmetry is clearly illustrated in the following example.

During an evening at SCC's, little C (1;6) is playing on the bed with his mother. Suddenly, a scorpion appears from the wall and is instantly killed by a familiar person visiting the house. C has not seen the scorpion, now dead on the ground. When he finally emerges at the

¹² Note that *chüichi'* in its adult definition (i.e., referring to snakes, scorpions or *kisin*) is interchangeable with the term *chi'bal*, also constructed on the root *chi'*, 'mouth with the suffix *-bal*. *Chi'bal* is translated in Barrera Vásquez (1980: 92) as "something that bites or stings" (*cosa que muerde o pica*).

border of the bed, his mother points out to him the scorpion on the ground and says: *Il e chiichi'o'! Ilawileh!* "Look at the *chiichi'*, look!" This remark sets up the beginning of the drama. In contrast to a dangerous situation with a living scorpion that could have bitten the child, in this drama the scorpion is already dead and therefore harmless. Furthermore, the mother is holding the child (see Fig. 4). There is no real danger. The aim of the drama for the parents is to create a pretended dangerous situation for the child to learn to react emotionally in a proper way.



Fig. 4. C held by his mother looking at the dead scorpion-*chiichi'*.

A socio-emotional relationship: In three of the four different video-recorded dramas I have examined involving two children (M, a little girl [1;6] and C, a little boy [1;6-1;7]), the 'agentive relationship' directly involves the *chiichi'* as an intermediary that is used to direct the child's behavior. The construction of the relation with the *chiichi'* is first based on dangerous animals. Nevertheless, what is important is not "what" the *chiichi'* is but what social and emotional relation the child is supposed to have with it: "be afraid". In parents discourse, the *chiichi'* is usually said wanting to bite or even eat the child. If this kind of discourse can appear quite cruel at first glance, it should be underlined that the everyday environment of Maya children is not armless. On the contrary, Maya children live in a dangerous setting and get regularly bitten by scorpions or snakes, especially at night when animals hide in dark places in the house. Parents are of course very concerned by these potential dangers present in the house and dramas involving the supernatural entity *chiichi'* is done primarily for the safety of the child. Very commonly, parents refer to the

chiichi' at night in order for their child to stop wandering around and go to sleep (see Academia de la Lengua Maya de Yucatán 2003: 60).

But the *chiichi'*, as mentioned earlier, is not restricted to artifacts or animals. It can be extended to human or humanlike entities, especially strangers. For instance, every time an unfamiliar person comes into the household, parents try (if they think it is appropriate) to scare the child in the exact the same way they used to scare him/her with the *chiichi'*. 'Strangers' should be understood here in a broader sense than in English. Among the Yucatec Maya, this category (not formally expressed linguistically) apparently does not only encompasses unknown persons in a familiar environment, but also familiars but in a non-habitual environment (e.g., the forest for the child). This is, for instance, the case in the story of the child stolen by the guardian spirits who appear to the child in the form of the child's father. Parents treat this menace as serious and, as for dangerous animals, the drama is considered an efficient way to make the child aware of the potential danger involved with 'strangers'.

The *chiichi'* disappears but the relationship stays. If the *chiichi'* is meant to disappear and, in a way, be discredited as a supernatural entity, how is it that the other supernatural entities are not? In other words, how is it that the *chiichi'* alone becomes a 'false supernatural entity' for the child, who nevertheless sustains the belief in all the other kinds of supernatural entities? There are several answers to this question. First, the *chiichi'* appears essentially in dramas, non-serious situations, so it is treated by the adults as non-serious. Nevertheless, as Briggs points out in her discussion of Inuit socialization, dramas are "enacted in 'play' mode because they violate the rules of moderation and control that govern 'serious' behavior" (Briggs 1992: 28). In other words, as previously mentioned, the main message of the drama is not the focus on the pretended role of the participants (including the supernatural entity) during this "play session" that the drama is. Instead, the main purpose of the drama is focusing on the emotional relation stressed between participants (mother/caregiver-target-child) during the interaction. When the child understands the importance and the nature of the social and emotional relationship between entities in the world, the drama, and hence the *chiichi'*, have

no more *raison d'être*. The social and emotional relation will survive and continue to be applied to humans, especially strangers, but also to other supernatural entities.

Even if not explicit in parents' discourse, one lesson of the drama involving the *ch'ich'i'* is probably the idea that one can modify or direct the behavior of others using supernatural entities as intermediaries. In fact, in adulthood, recourse to the *h wáay* is exactly of this nature. It is the public character of the agentive relationship but probably also its controlling character that makes it restrained to particular set of entities.

Finally, the agentive relationship where the *ch'ich'i'* is involved, far from damaging the belief in supernatural entities (with the disappearance of the *ad hoc ch'ich'i'*) appears to sustain it. During the drama, Maya parents present children with the existence of particular social and emotional relationships that one should respect with any social partner. Interestingly, and if my analysis is correct, it seems that Maya parents do not consider the nature of the relationship different if the partner is human or supernatural. In the agentive relationships, what is foregrounded is the relationship and the ontology of the social partners (i.e., humans and supernatural entities) is put somewhat backgrounded. This emphasis on the social relationship during socialization is also probably the reason why it is impossible, from a Maya point of view, to draw a clear line between humans and supernatural entities as social partners.

Conclusion

I have argued in this article for a sociality approach to understand how supernatural entities are perceived as social partners and how they play different role in Yucatec Maya everyday life and in socialization.

Supernatural entities are, for Yucatec Maya, attributed with special characteristics: they have the capacity of being invisible, changing forms and read mind. In using the analytical concept of planes of reality as a way to formalize ethnographic materials, I showed how communication is constrained between humans and supernatural entities. Different entities operate at different planes of reality and therefore communication cannot be straightforward (i.e., like among humans) between planes. Even if planes of reality are

not completely hermetic and can be accessed under specific conditions (such as dreamlike experience for instance), supernatural entities make use of specific ways to convey their communicative intentions. I have pointed out how the *kàastigo*, usually an accident or an illness, is interpreted by Yucatec Maya as a message sent by some supernatural entities to express their discontentment.

The interactional model I have proposed in this article aimed first at showing the precise nature of the relationships between humans and their supernatural partners. Although supernatural entities are considered of particular ontology, they are treated in Maya discourse as social partners. In the Yucatec Maya discourses analyzed, the relationship with the supernatural entities is expressed by the mean of social and emotional relations. Second, I provided an account for the various possible relationships with all the types of supernatural entities recognized in the local pantheon of Kopchen in proposing three interactional templates. These three templates have all different social implications and do not have the same importance in the Yucatec Maya everyday life.

The reciprocal relationship, the only one that implies some ritual action, has probably been the most extensively studied in the literature. The reciprocal relationship is probably the most common in adults' everyday life and is also the most formalized. The intimate relationship in contrast is not as frequent in Kopchen. In the intimate relationship, only individual communication is involved with some supernatural entities, usually 'evil things'. However, the type of entities does not obligatory determine the type of relationship and Yucatec Maya can engage in reciprocal relationship and intimate relationship with the same entities. For instance, rituals are performed for the souls of the dead who, in exchange, have to provide some protection for the livings. This form of interaction is based on the reciprocal relationship template. However, it is also the case that one can have an interaction with the soul of a dead relative, which does not imply any reciprocity (in terms of ritual action at least), like a conversation for instance. Such an interaction is based on the intimate relationship template. Interestingly, those templates, reciprocal and intimate, are also in use among humans in their everyday interactions. If the intimate relationship can be defined quite straightforwardly (like the

friendship relation), the reciprocal relationship applies to kin and resembles very much some contractual relations (e.g., commercial exchange).

The last template of interaction proposed is the agentive relationship. This type of interaction is privileged during socialization processes with the use of a particular entity called *chiichi'* used as an intermediary. I have argued that this socialization practice, although it leads progressively to the disbelief in the *chiichi'* as a supernatural entity (in its broader sense), points out to a particular social and emotional relationship ("be afraid") that should be applied to human as well as to supernatural entities.

Finally, I would like to point out the double benefit of a sociality approach. First, from an emic point of view it allows to capture the way Yucatec Maya express their relations with the supernatural entities of their pantheon. From an etic approach, it proposes a framework that examines how a universal phenomenon, such as the attribution of intention, in constant use in any human everyday interactions, is culturally constructed through the recognition of local specific supernatural entities that fulfill social functions and social roles and affect everyday people's behavior. It allows to understand and to examine how everyday relationships are extrapolated from human interactions and applied to the supernatural entities. In the course, communication is modified according to the characteristics locally attributed to the supernatural entities, but the relationships are of the same nature. This allows understanding how relationships with the supernatural entities are accepted, constructed and sustained from infancy. Indeed, Maya children, as early as 1;5 year old, engage in similar way with their social partners if they are humans or supernatural.

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