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FAMILIAL ORGANIZATION AMONG THE OXCHUC TZELTALS

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The Tzeltal tribe, linguistically a member of the Maya family, comprises approximately forty thousand Indians living in both the highlands and lowlands of Mexico's southernmost state, Chiapas. Within the tribe there exist subdivisions which may be termed sub-tribes, based on the following criteria: occupation of continuous territory, similarities in dress, similarities in dialect, allegiance to a common 'patron saint'. On the basis of the above-mentioned criteria, the five thousand Tzeltal Indians of the general region of the town of Oxchuc may be said to compose a sub-tribe, in which a well-developed system of familial organization persists to this day.

The basic unit in the familial organization of the Oxchuc Tzeltals consists of the clan, or extension of the consanguineous family group, composed of those with the same Spanish surname. There are the following six clans: Gómez, Santos, López, Méndez, Rodríguez and Benítez. These exogamous, patrilineal name groups are further divided into subsidiary groups within the clan, according to the family-name, which is sometimes of Spanish, more often of Tzeltal, derivation. The use of consanguineous kinship terms is extended beyond the immediate family group to include all others of the same clan-name, with corresponding attenuation of actual family patterns, and multiplication of mutual rights and duties. Also, certain official kinship terms are extended in use to include others of the same clan-name as the one related by marriage to the speaker.

In addition to the clan-name, and family-name, each individual has also a given name, which is always Spanish but usually with Indian adaptations. Girls' names are preceded by an s/s prefix indicating femininity, so María, Beatriz, Dominga, etc., Regina, Sofía, Lucía, etc., etc. Children are usually given a nickname, as well, which they bear until adolescence; for example: was "wild-cat", oil "cricket", suam "dove", mas "monkey", tus "cotton-seed". The function of the child's nickname is to deceive the evil spirit of the witch-doctor so that he cannot cast a curse on the child because of not knowing its given name. Most individuals are exceedingly reluctant to tell their given names, although they will always tell their Spanish surname, and, if pressed for information, will further admit their family-name. A complete list of the family name-groups within each clan, with translation of the Indian term where possible, follows:

The social functions of clans are principally the following: regulation of marriage, control of property, and social control, based upon the practice of witchcraft.

The clan is an exogamous unit, practising local endogamy. Infraction of the rule of exogamy is extremely rare, and socially taboo. In ten years of living among the Ovahim Basotho, the author knew of only one case of open union between members of the same clan, and in that case the couple had no children, which was considered a curse cast upon them for breaking the tribal rule of exogamy. Then illegitimate unions occur between members of the same clan, in case of offspring the practice of infanticide is usual. Fear of reprisal in the form of a curse of witchcraft cast upon offenders is inhibiting to clan incest. Marriage with a member of any sub-group, e.g. with a mate or with an Indian of another dialect, is very rare.

Monogamy is the rule, but polygyny is quite common and does not carry any social stigma. The practice of polygyny ~~is not allowed by law, but it is permitted by custom~~ should be lawful, but the social prestige according to a man who is able to support several wives. It is not uncommon for the first wife to urge her husband to acquire a second wife to help her in the household duties, while she retains the prestige of being the rightful spouse. One witch-doctor had acquired three wives: one his own age with whom he entered into tribal affairs, a younger one who did most of the work, and a very young girl who was given to him in marriage by her parents because of fear of witchcraft if they refused.

The ordinary procedure in obtaining a wife is for the boy's parents, or older brother or uncle (since the parents are deceased), to make negotiations (*l'cem*) with the girl's parents. The marriage-negotiators (*l'comtawen*) visit the girl's home very early in the morning, usually on a Friday, and, knocking before the girl's parents, kiss their hands and repeat a set formula in asking for the girl in marriage. Usually the first negotiation is indignantly rebuffed by the girl's parents, but, undismayed, the negotiators note the time at which they will return, usually a week or two later to the day. Meanwhile, the members of the immediate family consult with the other members (tatibili) of the same family-name group. Failure to consult with the tatibili, and especially with the head witch-doctor of the clan, may have dire consequences, such as sickness or death.

If the family and tatibili of the girl decide to give her in marriage (usually the girl is just a child, and is not consulted in the matter), they accept six or seven bottles of

Liquor from the marriage negotiators, called siamibti'il "mouth-opener", and the contract is considered binding upon both parties. At a later date stipulated by the girl's relatives, the boy's relatives make the first payment for the girl: a large jug containing ten liters of liquor, called beibalja', and a quantity of food, called wajinac. They make a second and a third payment to the girl's relatives at stated intervals, consisting of wajinac, which must be distributed among all the members of the tatabil in addition to the immediate family of the girl. At the time of the actual marriage, the boy's relatives make the fourth and final payment for the girl, consisting of one of two large jugs of liquor, a large quantity of eggs, and more wajinac, and all the relatives of the girl gather to partake of it. The actual ceremony consists of admonitions (sigel) to the boy and girl, and to the boy's parents, as they kneel before the oldest or most respected member of the girl's tatabil. Tribal custom requires the boy to pay for his wife (boj-yinem) for the period of one year, by living with and working for his in-laws for two or three weeks at a time, alternating with several weeks at his own home. At the end of a year, the boy takes his wife to his parents' home permanently. Usually these unions are very binding, because of fear of witchcraft in the event of any irregularity, since the marriage contract is with a whole clan.

A second important function of the clan is the control of property. Those of the same family-name are usually found living in the same general area, and own property in common. An incidence of patrilineal residence of the family-name group is that of six heads of Gómez Milok families who live within a small area of the paraje of Yoshib, Oxchuc. Within the limits of the land jointly owned by members of a subsidiary clan-group, certain property rights accrue to the individual by tacit understanding: the house-site of father or grandfather is considered inviolable; any piece of land which has ever been tilled by the individual or his father is his inalienable possession; and the land immediately adjoining his house-site is considered his personal property. In order to use any of the jointly-owned property (kemock'inall) or loan it to others to use, the individual must FIRST obtain the consent of all the other members of his family-name group. In case land is loaned to another individual, the price for temporary use of it is a large jug of liquor, and a large quantity of food which is distributed among the joint-owners of the property at a gathering for that purpose.

The scarcity of good land is one of the main problems of the Oxchuc region, and gives rise to constant disputes and even violence. Individual land deeds are owned

by some of the Indians, dating back several generations, but even more respected are the time-honored landmarks of a rock, tree, cave or water-hole, which verbal transmission from generation to generation has constituted as boundaries. A man's property becomes the joint-property of all his male issue at his death, which makes it highly desirable to have sons and disastrous not to. If a man leaves no sons, his widow is ejected from his property, and the land reverts to the other members of the same family-name group. Infringement of property rights results in reprisal in the form of witchcraft or murder.

A third deeply-rooted function of the clan is that of social control, that is, regulation of the behaviour of all members of the clan to conform to the tribal norms. In addition to the control of marriage, which devolves upon a group (*tatibil*) within the clan, the control of social behaviour in general resides in the hands of the witch-doctors who head up each clan. The witch-doctors (*jo'Alvanej*) are usually older men who have built up a reputation for possessing supernatural power by means of which they harm or help others in their clan, and who are considered to have a 'familiar spirit' (*Qab'il*) which enables them to cast or revoke curses. They command respect—and liquor—and mete out punishment to offenders. It is often fatal to cross the will, or in the case of the more fanatical, even to cross the path of one of the witch-doctors, for which reason they are greatly feared.

Any departure from tribal custom is considered sufficient cause for reprisal by the witch-doctors in the form of a curse cast upon the offender. Accordingly, fear of dying from witchcraft inhibits the inhabitants of the whole Ceará area to an insatiable extent in all phases of their existence. For example, one may invoke a curse of witchcraft for building a bigger or better hut or stove-bath than the ordinary, so the prevailing house-structure throughout the region is that of grass roof and pole walls that affords slight shelter from the elements. Knowing how to read and write may result in one's becoming the victim of witchcraft, as one literate young man explained to the author just before he died. Any departure from the ordinary hair-length, head-wear, embroidered Indian man's dress may have the dire result of a curse cast upon the wearer of Indian-type pants and shirt. An evidence of this is the practice of the men who go to work on the coffee ranches each year of taking an Indian-style dress with them into which they change on the road home. Fear of witchcraft also keeps women from owning cattle, since any evidence of prosperity can result in a curse of witchcraft.

Every sickness or death is blamed upon a curse of witchcraft cast upon the individual or some member of his family for some actual or supposed infraction of tribal rules, rather than upon natural circumstances. An accidental mishap out is attributed to witchcraft; contagious diseases such as whooping cough and measles are considered a curse cast by a witchdoctor; a difficult childbirth is supposed to be the result of witchcraft. One man of the Gauk Mwall clan who lost eight of his children finally lost patience with the head witch-doctor of his clan, a certain "soc" (name meaning 'owl', considered to be an evil spirit) Gauk Mwall, and accused the witch-doctor before the authorities in the town of Ondoua of having 'eaten their souls'. Most of the cases of murder in the region are due to retribution for witchcraft, especially when epidemics occur and many die, with resultant increase in accusations against the witch-doctors and indignation which reaches the point of violence.

The actual rite practised by the witch-doctor in case of sickness is that of taking the sick person's pulse (*pili-kigwol*) and at the same time asking all kinds of leading questions: "have you fought with your parents, have you stolen anything from your neighbors, have you paid in full for your wife, have you failed to show respect to a witch-doctor?" etc.. The sick person then begins to explain where he has been ^{very} vicious in any way (*ya soul anal*), and in this way the witch-doctor is enabled to trace down the one who has been offended and lay the sickness at the door of the witch-doctor responsible for casting the curse. The person's pulse is believed to reveal to the listening witch-doctor the name of the witch-doctor casting the curse. If a witch-doctor refuses to come to the aid of an individual by taking his pulse, he is presumed to be the one casting the curse, since he obviously doesn't want to help counteract the curse. Often the witch-doctor obtains amazing results: the sick person may take a turn for the better as soon as the name of the one responsible for casting the curse is pronounced. But more often, after the sick one is swung up by the thumbs from the rafters to make him confess his sin, or beaten unmercifully in payment for his sin, he will take a turn for the worse. In any case, as payment for services rendered, whether officious or not, the witch-doctor will demand, and get, liquor.

The kinship terminology employed among the Central Taelts further emphasizes the importance of the extended consanguineous family group, or clan, as compared to the conjugal group. Kinship terms may be classified according to the following three groups: consanguineous relatives, affinal relatives, and the godparental relationship. The terminology used indicates sex of relative in most cases,

sex of speaker in most cases; conformity among speaker's siblings and extension of these terms to certain cousins of either the same family-name or same clan name of same generation as the speaker; extension of terms used of paternal relatives to include all those of same clan name; extension of terms used of maternal relatives to include all those of same clan name as speaker's mother.

Consanguineous kinship terms:

1. ~~mo'~~ mother
2. ~~tat~~ father
3. al son or daughter (term used by mother)
4. ~~nitjün~~ son or daughter (term used by father)
5. alnitjün offspring (general term)
6. amfilal daughter (term used by mother)
7. anglitjün daughter (term used by father)
8. barbil older brother (term used by younger brother; also applies to paternal cousins of same family-name, and, by extension, to anyone of same generation as speaker with the same clan name)
9. ~~Xitbil~~ older brother (term used by younger sister; also applies to paternal cousins of same family-name, and, by extension, to anyone of same generation as speaker with the same clan name)
10. tjin younger sibling (also applies to paternal cousins of same family-name as speaker, and, by extension, to anyone of same generation as speaker with the same clan name)
11. ~~wib~~ older sister (term used by younger siblings, also applies to paternal aunt or paternal cousin, and, by extension, to anyone of same generation as speaker with the same clan name)
12. ~~tafun~~ paternal uncle (also applies to anyone of same clan name of same generation as speaker's father)
13. ~~mo'~~ paternal uncle's wife
14. ~~tafun~~ maternal uncle and maternal cousins (also applies to anyone of same clan name as speaker's mother)
15. ~~wib~~ maternal uncle's wife
16. ~~al~~ tuun niece or nephew (term used by paternal aunt)
17. ~~nitjün~~ niece or nephew (term used by paternal uncle)
18. sun grandfather
19. ymwo' grandmother
20. ~~al~~ tuum grandchild (term used by grandfather)
21. ~~al~~ grandchild (term used by grandmother)
22. ~~nitjün~~ unparents in general
23. amano relative (general term used of anyone with same clan name as speaker)
24. tabul relative (general term used of relatives of either)
25. ~~tabul~~ firstborn (not WGP; see definition) term is not transferable)
26. ~~tabul~~ last-born (used of final issue; term is not transferable)

Affinal kinship terms:

1. inam wife (in direct address, asis)
2. nimal husband (in direct address, he)
3. imp spouse (not used in direct address)
4. nial son-in-law (in direct address, tat) This term is extended to include those of different generation from speaker, who are married to one of same clan-name as speaker.
5. alib daughter-in-law (in direct address, no'tik)
6. nialnmal father-in-law (term used by son-in-law; in direct address, tat) This term is also used between father-in-law and members of family of one related by marriage.
7. nialne'al mother-in-law (term used by son-in-law) in direct address, no' This term is extended in use between mother-in-law and members of family of one related by marriage.
8. nialnmal father-in-law (term used by daughter-in-law; in direct address, tat). This term is also used between father-in-law and members of family of one related by marriage.
9. sille'eal mother-in-law (term used by daughter-in-law; in direct address, no') This term is also used between father-in-law and members of family of one related by marriage.
10. jowan sister-in-law (term used between women) This term is also extended in use to others of same family-name as speaker's husband, if of same generation.
11. nu' brother- or sister-in-law (term used between men and women) not used in direct address
12. bal brother-in-law (term used between men) This term is extended in use to include all others of same family-name, and sometimes even of same clan-name, as speaker's wife, if of same generation.

- Godparental relationship terms: terms employed by the parties to baptism of a child by the priest.
1. kumpare (compadre) term used between either sex, with reference to the father and god-father of the child
 2. lamale (comadre) term used between either sex, of the mother and god-mother of the child
 3. jalatet god-father (term used by god-child)
 4. jale'e god-mother (term used by the god-child)
 5. jala'al god-child (term used by god-mother in reference to god-child of either sex)
 6. jalan'e'an god-child (term used by god-father in references to god-child of either sex)

Footnotes:

¹ The phonemes of the Oxolmec dialect of Tzeltal are as follows: a, e, i, o, u, ~~ɛ~~, ɛ̄, ɛ̄̄, ʃ, ʃ̄, ʃ̄̄, ʂ, ʂ̄, ʂ̄̄, ʐ, ʐ̄, ʐ̄̄, ʐ̄̄̄, p, t, t̄, k, k̄, w, y, ().

Etymology of Indian family-names:

Sib.: Gómez

Santis-Sánchez

Alux	Antis--(Apolob)Santis)
Alon	
Chabin	Bana, Balana
Chimbak--blunt-bone	
Chul	Barsin--
Ch'ilub	Bobil--
Expin--(Espinosa)	Chitam--pig
Ichilok--tomato	Chulit--
Jolchij--deerhead	Ch'ail--smoke
Konsal--(Gonzalez)	Ch'elab--
Kulel--	Dias--Díaz
K'ulub--locust	Ich'in--
Luna	Kituk--
Me'mut--ben	Ko jt'om--badger
Mena--	Konte--(Conde)
Molo	K'aal--sun, day
Molex	K'inich--
Mulex--(Morales)	K'ujul--hunch-backed
Nick--flower, bud	K'ux--pain
Niwall--squash-tip (?)	Lek'--
Owa'--	Murimu--(Moreno)
Pas--	Muxan--
Peres--(Pérez)	Nukni'--
Pelex--(Pérez)	Pale--priest ? Cancue spale < padre
Pui--sprout	Pe--
Sabin--weasel	Pokat--bowl
Sekjol--	Preno--(Freno ?)
Tentak'in--blacksmith	Solel--
Tonchan--snake-egg (?)	Sopa--
Tsimu--gourd	Soten--
Ts'ej--field-rat	Tenteman--
Wajch'--switch (of tree)	Ts'it--kind of bird:ts'itil ?
Waskis--(Vasquez)	Werkis--(Velasco)
Wakax--cow	Wax--
Wen--	Wok--
Yol--	Yemuk'--
	Yuba--
	Xulix--
	Xetna--

López

Balte'--
Baltol--
Ch'ijk--
Ch'iko--
Karkoma--(Carcoma)
Junak'
Kukay--cucayo, lightning-bug
Kulante--culantro, coriander
K'ana--
Mucha--
Munus--(Muñoz)
T'ib
Wakax--cow
Xampil--
Yewen--(Liévano)

Méndez

Akilan--
Chiehol--small tomato
Ch'ixna--
On--avocado
T'ul--rabbit
Tsemen--kind of animal (extinct ?)
Waketak'in--75 centavos
Xuchib--
Konkirtal--

Rodriguez

Pom--copal incense

Ensin, Encino

Sib: Gómez

Santis

López

Méndez

Akux ?
Alon ?
Chabin
Chimbak-chim-blunt
 bak-bone
Chul
Oh'ilub
Expin -(Espinosa)
Ithilok-tomato
Jelchij-deer-head
Konsal-
Kulel
K'ulub-locust
Luna
Me'mut-hen
Mena
Molo
Molox
Mulex (Morales)
Nich-flower, bud
Nimail-squash-tip
Owa'
Pas
Peres-(Pérez)
Pelex-(Perez ?)
Pul-sprout
Sabin-weasel
Sak'ol-whiteheaded animal
Tonchan-snake-egg (?)
Tsina-gourd
Ts'ej-field-rat
Wajch'-switch (of tree)
Waskis-(Vasquez)
Wakax-cow
Wen-
Yol-
Tentak'in-blacksmith