The Analysis of Domestic Organization in Mesoamerica: The Case of Postmarital Residence in Santiago Atitlán, Guatemala

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A single chapter in the original *Heritage of Conquest* volume was devoted to the topic of social organization. In it, Calixta Guiteras Holmes sought to uncover the articulation between kinship terminologies, marriage rules, postmarital residence, and lineages and clans as distributed in Mesoamerica. In part, this effort may have reflected some degree of acceptance among the organizers and participants of a common system of kinship categories and criteria for inclusion. At very least, they were familiar with the different kinship systems current. In contrast, the contemporary literature on Mesoamerican social organization does not reflect any such unity. Recent reviews of Mesoamerican social organization by Nutini (1967, 1976), Romney (1967), and Selby (1976) demonstrate the diversity of approaches, and the felt inadequacy of analyses.

Among the issues singled out by Nutini is that of postmarital residential arrangements. Nutini remarks that anthropologists in
Mesoamerica have failed to explore "the possibilities for redefining residence rules beyond the standard definitions provided by Murdock (1949) and others, in order to apply them to essentially cognatic societies or societies which are no longer tribal but which have a significant modicum of organizational similarities to tribal societies" (1976:8). His reference to tribal societies in this context perhaps contrasts the supposedly rigid kinship and jural-rule-bound tribal society with cognatic systems that present greater morphological diversity. And this assumption is supported by his next sentence: "Under these conditions, generalizations in terms of traditionally defined rules of residence, which are essentially mechanical (emic and normative) devices, cannot be applied at face value to situations in which a significantly statistical (etic) approach would be in order" (1976:8). In one sense this criticism is directed toward the structuralist and idealist commitments of the research program that Guiteras Holmes's report represented. Currently, inductivist and materialist commitments have come to play a larger role in anthropologists' work on Mesoamerican social organization (see Collier 1975; Nutini 1976; Selby 1976). These commitments are not new, though. They can be found, for example, in Tax's 'Penny Capitalism' (1953). But integrating statistical and normative orders of data as called for by Selby (1976:32), or, to put it differently, mixing quantitative and qualitative paradigms for research is difficult today as it was when the first Heritage volume was published.

In spite of the difficulty, postmarital residence is an ideal topic for attempting the integration of statistical and normative orders of data. On the one hand, residence is, for the most part, an easily verifiable event. On the other hand, residence is hedged up by normative rules. An integrative opportunity for theory exists since explanations in terms of residence rules that follow from considerations of kinship have generally failed. The exemplar that follows attempts to discover the relationship between the "logical configuration of kinship and behavior" (Selby 1976:33-34) in light of actual postmarital residence in Santiago Atitlán.

To begin with, the problem of describing residence choices is complicated by the need to operationalize these choices in a spatio-temporal frame. Terms proliferate to describe residential arrangements: household, houseful, premises, compound, and other terms.

As devices for censuses, these concepts are often useful, but they may not be valid entities to the natives described. Next, the questions of available alternatives, length of stay, coincident or necessary property transfers or property exclusions, and other factors may complicate the interpretation of apparently straightforward census results (see Godelier 1975). The difference between statistical descriptions of events and elicited normative rules concerning those same events leads some researchers to claim a "loose-structure" (see Gudeman 1976) for some societies, thus confounding inductivist and structuralist commitments. Worse yet, researchers depending on census or survey evidence may posit such structures as unilineal descent groups, lineages, patrilineal compounds, or other social structural features, when, in fact, the people described do not incorporate in their cultures the jural-political criteria that underlie the social theory of such corporate groups. This latter objection we will address in more detail.

The domestic environment becomes crucial to the examination of these issues because it is both a locale for the ongoing struggles of consumption and production, and a context in which reproduction and socialization take place. Precisely because of the absence of lineages and other kin-based units of jural status, the household becomes an important mediator of individual participation in the community at large.

In another sense the domestic activities of people are often the very stuff of fieldnotes: especially in Mesoamerica where the Catholic trinity, ritual kinship, and political and economic paternalism all so explicitly share the idiom of family. With all this interest it is indeed surprising, as Nutini notes, that domestic organization has been so diversely and incompletely treated.

An ideal experimental situation or case study which would elucidate the problems in Maya residence patterns would be one where the incidence of patrilocality or virilocality is high, similar "agnatic" sentiments and preferences are recorded, but the kinship system is bilateral. Santiago Atitlán, a Maya community located in the southwestern highlands of Guatemala, provides such a case. This town was intensively investigated by one of the authors (Gross) from June 1971 to November 1972 and the summer of 1973. At the time of the field study, Santiago boasted a population of approximately
13,000 persons, 95 percent of which were native Tzutujil speakers (to be referred to henceforth as "Atitecos"). Data collected on 266 residential alignments at marriage show that 67 percent were virilocal and the remaining 33 percent were uxorilocal. These frequencies are comparable to those communities argued to have patrilin- 
descent systems (see e.g., Villa 1945; Vogt and Ruiz 1965; and Collier 1975). The Atiteco kinship system is strictly bilateral, however, and together with the statistical pattern of postmarital residence it is consonant with social forms of other non-Tzutujil-speaking populations in the western Guatemalan highlands (see e.g., Tax 1953; Hinshaw 1975; Warren 1978).

Atitecos' recorded sentiments, in addition to their explicitly stated preferences, are very similar to those argued to be indicative of patrilinical kinship. Unmarried males often cite numerous cases and situations that are attempts to underscore their rationale for avoiding uxorilocal (pajay) residence even though the expenses of such a union are less than half the cost of virilocality. These episodes generally depict the difficult relations one would have with the parents-in-law, such as hostility of the father-in-law toward the son-in-law, stinginess, spitefulness, jealousy, unreasonable demands, and the like. The prospect of uxorilocal residence is looked upon by most single Atiteco males as undesirable, if not horrendous. In fact, they suggest that this form of marital residence is practiced by either the poor, the unfortunate, or the orphaned. Similar observations have been made for neighboring communities (Bunzel 1952; Hinshaw 1975). Therefore, the examination of Atiteco postmarital residence patterns should be valuable in elucidating the issues discussed above.

The critical problem for most studies, rule based or otherwise, of residential alignments is to demonstrate a link between the observed frequencies and the underlying configuration of constraints and incentives that are hypothesized to generate them. The strength of the presumed links are then assessed mainly through the examination of the numerical data and by resort to notions of consistency. On both these tests the notion that residence patterns in Maya communities are the outcome of a particular type of kinship system or that they arise from particular economic or environmental pressures fails. Although there is a definite "agnatic" bias and no single Maya community, where numerical information is available, exhibits a frequency of virilocality under 55 percent (for example, Redfield and Rojas 1934; Villa 1945; Miller 1964; Vogt 1969; Nash 1970; Thompson 1974; Collier 1975), it is nevertheless true that the frequency of uxorilocality rarely falls below 20 percent. (We have never found an exception based on the material available to us. There may be such a community but it makes little difference.) The essential problem is that the same observations have been recorded on preferences, sentiments, and frequencies of postmarital residence choices found in communities suggested to have patrilineal kinship ideology (Villa 1945; Collier 1968, 1975; Vogt 1969) as in those communities shown to have bilateral kinship systems (see Nash 1970; Gross 1974; Hinshaw 1975). This point is crucial to the argument on kinship and residence for it calls into question the consistent relationship between the observed patterns of residence found among the Maya and the presumed effects of kinship or ecology for the pattern.

The subsequent analysis has three parts: first, the structural frameworks within which postmarital residence choices are made will be described. It is necessary to outline a number of critical features of Atiteco domestic group structure, kinship relations, and world view that taken compositely directly affect residence choices; secondly, we show how these structural frameworks produce residence choices; finally, we demonstrate how this analysis permits one to give a more adequate account of residence choices, of the subordinate uxorilocal element as well as of the dominant patrilocal pattern.

Although uxorilocal (pajay) residence is looked on by most Atiteco males with a good deal of disaste, this does not imply that it is necessarily either a social aberration or a recent by-product of economic or ecological pressures. A critical feature to note at the onset is that the practice of uxorilocal residence in Santiago is an institutionalized alternative to virilocality and, hence, a cultural norm (for a similar, but not identical, argument see Collier 1975:79 and elsewhere). This argument is supported by the observation that the last-born child (ch'ip), male or female, remains in the natal household at marriage and, thus, brings into it a spouse. Important to note is that this pattern is followed by the last-born child and not necessarily by the last surviving or remaining child, who may select from different options. Genealogical data reveal that the the male-to-female ratio of last born is about the same. There is no selective
infanticide, nor do parents seem to have a sexual preference in their
offspring. The ideal family, according to numerous informants, con-
sists of two sons and two daughters, and the birth orders appear un-
important. Finally, uxorilocal residence is named and contrasted with
virilocality as in the anthropologist’s census question: “did you pet-
tion your wife or did you go into her house (hold)?” (ak‘uun auxqayil
o pjay at hnaqwal?”). In the context of marriage discussion, pjay in-
dicates uxorilocality. (In other contexts it can refer to the household
or to the community in general.) The evidence, then, is strong that
uxorilocal residence is an institutionalized practice among the Aztec-
cos, and there is much evidence to suggest that it is a widespread
Maya phenomenon (Hunt and Nash 1967) which appears to have a
good deal of antiquity at least among the Quiché (Miles 1957) and
the Yucatan Maya (Scholes and Roys 1948). There is additional evi-
dence for its existence among the Chortí (Wisdom 1940) and the
contiguous rural Ladinos of eastern Guatemala (Kendall 1974).

It should also be noted at this point that the immediate post-
 marital choice on residence is limited to one of at most two possibil-
ities: either the groom or the bride secedes from his or her household
and joins that of the other spouse. Depending on birth order, (e.g.,
last born) residence choice may be even more restricted. Because mar-
rriage is only the first of a series of steps to full marital adulthood, resi-
dence in one set of parents’ household does not end the couple’s marital
minority (for a greater elaboration of this point see Gross 1974).
Why is it, then, that uxorilocal residence is regarded as highly un-
desirable by Azteco males in light of the fact that it is permissible
for all and may be required for one member of every sibling set? The
subsequent analysis in attempting to explicate this question will show
the pertinence of both an emic and an etic approach.

Structural Frameworks

DOMESTIC GROUP STRUCTURE

The domestic group or household (-chob or -jay depending on
context, see Gross 1974) is the smallest political unit in Santiago.
Each person’s formal politicolegal position in the community is ini-
tially determined by reference to the household in which mem-
bership is held. A person can hold membership in only one household
at any one time. The principal jural authority in this social unit is
the male head (titxel) who, along with his wife, established it. Each
household is established by a conjugal pair following partition from
a parental household. The mean time for partition falls between two
and three years after marriage. Gross found that the vast majority of
couples separated from the parental household after the birth of the
first child. Through the act of formal partition, jural citizenship is
accorded the couple and they, then, become the legal representatives
of their own unit and its members (including themselves) in respect
to the community. Although no ritual or ceremony was observed to
indicate the change in status, it appears that parental consent to parti-
tion in the presence of their compadres is all that is publicly re-
quired. There is no succession to household headship and, hence,
the duration of a household is for the life of its founding conjugal
pair. Married or unmarried members are jural minors and subject to
the founding couple’s authority for as long as they remain in the
household.

Newly established households are viewed as economically inde-
pendent and politically autonomous. Viewed from the political
system, they are a new and independent source of personnel for
community offices, the census, or for various ritual or community
services. They are also economically independent in that they pro-
duce their own food and cook and eat it separately from that of the
natal household. Thus, the new household is an independent pro-
duction and consumption unit. There is a common labor force and a
common purse that are controlled by the male and female heads of
each household. All wages earned by members are put into the com-
mon fund for expenses such as marriage, baptisms, medical care,
and the like. Finally, all members share a common hearth.

A critical feature of domestic group structure in regard to post-
marital residence is that the parents in the household in which the
couple is resident after marriage have the obligation and, as we shall
see, the privilege, to help set up the independent household. A house
site and dwelling, housewares, and some arable land are usually fur-
nished the new household. This obligation is explicitly referred to
several times in the marriage ceremony (Gross 1974:105 and else-
where). A regular pattern observed is for a house to be built by the
son’s household before he becomes engaged or, at least, before
the bride comes to reside in her new household. In the case of the
uxorilocal pattern, nothing is quite so explicit or prepared so well in advance. Whatever the case may be, the dwelling, site, arable land, and furnishings are given the couple in usufruct (-stip) and not as inheritance (-tob). Although the general pattern is for these possessions to become part of the offspring’s inheritance at the parent’s death, they may also be taken back if filial duties are not fulfilled. At this juncture, it is important to note that after partition has taken place the couple is no longer subject to the obligations attendant on membership in the parental household; rather, the obligations owed are based upon kinship or a “dyadic” relation structured by other factors, for example, holder-heir relationship (see Gross 1974).

KINSHIP AND INHERITANCE

Even though household membership may change, kinship and its associated sentiments, obligations, and expectations remain intact. This point is reflected by the prestations of food and other goods that are sent to parents on particular days of celebration such as Holy Week, Corpus Christi, All Souls, and others. In the early years of marriage, the parents expect only token gestures from their children. That is, the food that is sent may be only enough for one meal, if that. Whatever the prestation, it is symbolic of the offspring’s continuing filial duties toward parents after household partition. Parents, in turn, are expected to offer counsel and provide some forms of assistance for children when required. As time progresses and the parents get older, however, more is expected from the children until the day is reached for pensamiento: ideally, the parents receive food from each of their children on a regular daily basis (each child should supply the food for one week on a rotating basis among the siblings). It is common for at least one or more children to neglect this duty, especially daughters living virilocally and sons uxorilocally. Parents, on the other hand, are extremely important for their children’s children, especially in the area of religious rituals and socialization. For example, it is the grandparents who organize and take the lead in the various “rites of passage” the grandchildren must observe; for example, they prepare for the occasion of the child’s baptism by soliciting a madrina and provide the food and drink for the fiesta.

The important point concerning kinship for this inquiry is that the transmission of scarce resources (land, cattle, chattel, etc.) is from parent to child irrespective of residential propinquity or household membership (see Nash 1971; Collier 1975). Thus, the kinship relation and not household membership determines eligibility for inheritance. It should be remarked here, which is usually not mentioned in most studies (see Collier 1975), that inheritance is only one way to acquire such possessions. In fact, a number of gifts and settlements, both tied and untied, are transmitted to offspring (see Davis 1977: 182-85 for an explication of property transfer terminology). Other forms of dispersal of resources are renting land, sharecropping, purchasing land. Such arrangements may also be made in the lowlands with either Ladinos or other Indians. All involve a number of different property transfers and settlements, and all are closely controlled through inheritance and other settlements by virtue of kinship ties. Receiving and using ancestral land are, as noted by others (Bunzel 1952), however, extremely important to the Atitlancos. As among other Maya, both males and females gain access to residential and arable land, chattel, and other heirlooms. Inheritance, then, is bilateral in Santiago, but property is not always evenly distributed among children or between the sexes. In fact, whether a child receives an inheritance at all depends to a large extent on whether the filial obligations have been fulfilled during the parents’ lifetime. In the course of this study it was observed that daughters who went to live virilocally at marriage are often, though not always, disinherited of land and cattle. But it is not simply the case that giving a dowry, however small, disinherits the daughters. The reasons generally given for disinheritance were that the daughters had “forgotten their parents” or that “their husbands were hostile” or “disrespectful.” Most studies have accepted these reasons and/or suggested spatial distance as the cause of daughters’ disinheritance. If our analysis is correct, the reason, as we will show later, lies not only in fulfilling obligations of filial responsibilities but knowing who, in fact, controls the household resources necessary to fulfill such obligations. This point will be examined later in the analysis.

A very important point for our inquiry concerning inheritance is that spouses do not inherit each other’s property. A spouse may hold, rent, farm, or exploit the possessions of a deceased spouse only until the legitimate offspring of the deceased holder are socially ma-
ture. There are cases where this does not obtain but they do not weaken the argument; they merely point out the complexity of property transfers in Santiago. Consequently, the estates of a husband and wife remain distinct for purposes of inheritance and legal control, although the land may be farmed jointly, and the products harvested are shared commonly.

WORLD VIEW

Male-Female Relation: A man without a wife, in Ariteco society, is never socially complete. Thus, widowers tend to remarry quickly (Vogt 1969) and male youths are generally married for the first time before twenty-one years of age. Without a wife, a man cannot hold political or ritual offices of any prestige. This includes widowers as well as single youths. In order to complete service in the cofradia system, for example, it is necessary to have a living resident wife. The important role of the wife in complementing her husband has great antiquity among the Maya, and is not a recent development (see e.g., Gross 1978). Yet, given the central role of the wife in Maya society, women are considered to be inferior to men and they are not always regarded as fulfilling equal but separate roles. Male superiority is expressed in numerous ways, especially by association of man with the superior right side and woman, created from man's left side, according to Ariteco myth, associated with the more sinister elements in culture. Examples of this hierarchical differentiation include the facts that in church women sit to the left of the cross and men to the right and that women walk three or four paces behind their husbands. Women should never place themselves in a higher physical position in respect to their husbands, especially in the sexual act, for fear that it may weaken him and make him susceptible to the attack of malevolent forces. Thus, a wife should never step over her husband while he is sleeping or lying down nor step over his clothing, tools, bed, and the like (see also Hinshaw 1975). The ideological separation of the sexes is further manifest in the person of the witch (q'om) who is often characterized in stories as a female who is out to destroy her husband. In such stories, women, as witches, place themselves in a physically superior position to their sleeping hus-

bands by walking back and forth over his body twelve times, thereby weakening the husband and making him susceptible to misfortune. Witches appear to be the symbols of aggressiveness and express through their acts the converse of the ideal woman.

In the sphere of public affairs, the male head is in charge of the household, represents the members to the larger community, and has final decision over the members' activities. Although the female head (tej) directs the other females of the household and may be found to be the de facto head of the unit, it is still the tixel, (male household head) who represents the household in the political community. It is the male who holds political or ritual offices in the community and in the role of household head has a voice in community affairs. Women hold ritual offices only as a complement to their husbands serving a cargo in a cofradia (there are some exceptions to this). Civil offices have no such complementary role for women. Important here for the problem of residence is that the ideal situation for an Ariteco male is to be in a clear and unambiguous position of control and authority over wife and family. A strong incentive for a male would be to establish a relationship with a woman that was clearly consistent with the ideological and symbolic order.

Land and the Ancestors: The transmission of land from one person to another in agricultural societies has long been viewed as a crucial factor affecting residential alignments as well as constituting a reflection, if not a determinant, of the kinship system (e.g., Morgan 1871, and more recently Goody 1976). The importance of the inheritance of land for the structure of the domestic field of social relations is rarely disputed by Mesoamerican scholars. In Maya communities, where one usually finds that the predominant statistical pattern of land inheritance is from father to sons or other male relatives coupled with an explicit preference for 'ancestral' lands and where the residential alignments seem to favor, statistically if not ideally, a 'patrilocal' pattern, the conclusions reached by anthropologists are usually one of the following: (1) the 'cause' of such a pattern is a 'patrilineal descent' ideology or (2) the 'outcome' or 'result' of such a pattern is a 'patrilineal descent' ideology (for Mesoamerican examples on the former view see Vogt and Ruiz 1965, and for the latter see Collier 1975). Although it is not our intention to enter
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into a debate on the primacy of the chicken or the egg, it is worth noting that a logical or functional connection between inheritance, residence, and some sort of value placed on 'ancestors,' on the one hand, and unilineal kinship system, on the other (see Evans-Pritchard 1965; Fortes 1958:76 and elsewhere) has never been shown. The confusion or problem seems to rest, as Fortes (1969:277) suggests on a "failure to discriminate between the observer's construct and concepts, on the one hand, and the actor's rules and procedures, on the other..." The anthropological issue is this: under what circumstances is it appropriate or not appropriate to apply such concepts as "descent," "unilineal" group, or others especially when such usage carries the full implication of comparability to the African or other specified models (Fortes 1969:277-78).

A good deal of ambiguity has arisen in the Mesoamerican literature from a failure to employ such concepts consistently. For example, one finds the term *patrilineal group* used to designate an aggregate of persons related to each other not only as father and sons but also father-in-law and sons-in-law or daughters-in-law or mother's brother and sister's son and the like. Moreover, while the term *patrilineal inheritance* is usually employed to designate the transmission of property between father and sons, in reading Mesoamerican studies more closely one discovers that daughters also inherit, as well as others such as adoptees, though sons and adoptees are found to inherit most arable land, but not exclusively so (see Bunzel 1952; Vogt 1969; Collier 1975). Thus, we find that the Mesoamerican uses of these concepts are not only questionable conceptually but wrong empirically. The analysis in this section should help elucidate the relation between the observed pan-Maya pattern of emphasizing "ancestral" land and kinship.

In Santiago, as in many Maya communities in Chiapas, Mexico and Guatemala, there are both communal lands and privately held or "owned" land. Consequently, there are a number of ways by which a person may acquire land (*-uluh*). As a jurally adult (i.e. the head of a household) one is eligible to rent (*-kaj*), communal land (*phalali*) at the annual cost of ten cents per *cuarda* (approximately one-fifth of an acre). The yet remaining arable, communal lands that are not in production are located on the upper reaches of the volcanoes San Pedro and Toliman. These particular lands are not very productive or would not be good agricultural lands owing to the steepness of the terrain, thinness of the soil, and the problem of erosion from runoff during the rainy season. These lands have remained forested although some trees are harvested, primarily for firewood. Some land on the higher slopes of San Pedro was cleared for maize farming during the period of field work. Normal swidden techniques were employed: trees were felled, and the undergrowth was burned. Most people, however, simply use these higher areas to collect firewood, herbs, and to hunt birds and epousum.

In addition to communal lands, a household can rent land from another Ate co. In such cases, the cost is usually a share of the harvest. Widows without able male children and spinsters living alone have no other recourse but to rent out their lands for a share of the harvest because of a strict sexual division of labor with regard to agriculture. Finally, land may be rented from Ladino landlords in the southern lowlands. Such land, located primarily in the municipio of Suchitepequez, April Department of Suchitepequez, is highly productive, yielding two maize harvests annually. *Sucate* (a grass or hay) is planted with the first corn crop, and constitutes the only rent for the use of the land over the entire year. Generally, kinsmen or friends will rent contiguous plots (size depending on need and availability), thus ensuring friendly neighbors, traveling companions along "dangerous" roads, and persons to rely upon for assistance during the planting and harvesting seasons.

Since land can be individually owned in Santiago, it can also be sold (*-k'ayixic*) to any other person, Ate co or Ladino. More commonly, however, land sales are restricted to Ate cos and most frequently to kinsmen (*chical*). Depending on the type of land (garden, bean and/or maize fields, orchard, etc.) and its location, prices vary from a few quetzales (dollars) to a thousand quetzales per *cuarda*. The more expensive land is residential (*-rjgar*) and lakeshore property; the latter may be used either for truck gardens or chalets (lots purchased by Ladinos on which to build summer homes). The least expensive land is located on the higher northeast reaches of the volcano Toliman which is found at some distance (9 km.) from the community.
The selling and buying (-log') of land among the Aititecos is a very common practice for both the rich and the poor. Any excess capital is often used to purchase additional land. On the other hand, if cash is needed to offset some unanticipated expense, land is the only asset or commodity that an Aititeco can turn into cash quickly either as collateral for a loan or by direct sale. Thus, if a major illness should befall a family and specialists with special medicines are required, land would be sold, preferably to a kinsman, if cash were not available in the household purse to pay for such expenses. Cases have been recorded of elderly persons who have divided their land among the offspring, yet retained a parcel of land that was to be sold at their death to pay for the funeral expenses. A proper burial, including all the rituals at home, church, and cemetery is of critical importance to Aititecos even though it is expensive. Although one of the offspring would more than likely purchase such land, there have been cases and situations where such land has been sold to another Aititeco.

Thus, transactions involving land are a regular feature of Aititeco life. Land is both an investment and an insurance against future needs. We have found that the amount of purchased land as a share of a family's estate varies from 0 to 90 percent and the percentage appears to vary with the phase of the developmental cycle. Thus, all households heads from the sample with at least one married child had acquired some land through a commercial transaction, but a couple who had just partitioned from a parental household would have only the land and dwelling given to them by one set of parents. It is reasonable to expect, then, that at some point in the life of an Aititeco, land will be purchased or sold, or both by that person. What is the role of the "ancestors" (erolaj) in such a pattern?

In the past, at least, the Aititeco and other highland Maya of Guatemala had a strong identification with their ancestors and with particular regions. This facet of Maya life is clearly expressed in the Popol Vuh and the Annals of the Cakchiquels which lay claim to lands based upon ancestral titles. This sentiment and view is still quite evident in communities of this region. Santiago's participation in this system reflected in the shrines that serve as boundary markers at major crossroads. These markers delineate the town's land base, which is protected by the ancestors who live in the shrines as well as in the various cerros (hills) that line the border of the region. Although membership in the Aititeco community and access to land were based in the past on showing descent from an ancestor, it did not matter which line of descent a person used or how many times descent lines were crossed. The political community was, in effect, recruited through bilateral or cumulative filiation (Gross 1978).

Today, the boundaries and mode of recruitment are not so clear-cut, but, in respect to land, there are still strong sentiments and preferences for ancestral land. Such land, if sold, should only be sold or given to close kinsmen, that is, a descendant or one who shares a common great grandfather or great grandmother. Although, at a very general level, all Aititecos claim to be kinsmen in respect to the outside world (their common expression to denote this is the phrase qeq'alalq'i ("we are brothers" or "kinsmen")), within the community, only those persons who can detail their kinship to a common, specificable ancestor, if descent is not apparent, are felt to be eligible to buy, sell, rent, or trade ancestral land. If land is purchased or sold to a "non-kinsman" a ritual is usually performed, in addition to the legal ceremony, which informs and propitiates the ancestors. Otherwise, Aititecos say, misfortune may befall both buyer and seller. It would seem then, that only land that can be claimed through filiation, or land that has been ritually released, is actually farmable, from an individual's viewpoint. Consequently, land given to a wife at inheritance or household partition might not be looked upon as a real windfall from the husband's point of view. In fact, neglect of wife's property is quite common in Santiago and elsewhere in the highlands (see Bunzel 1952; Hinshaw 1975; Warren 1978).

We mentioned above that a wife residing virilocally has little chance of inheriting land or chattel unless she fulfills her filial obligations. If our analysis is correct, the reason for some daughters not inheriting their share of the parental estate is not merely a function of distance from their natal household. Rather, it appears to be a function of who controls the household resources. In the case of virilocality, the husband controls the household resources and he determines if they shall be used for fulfilling his spouse's filial obligations. This would seem to hold true for the reverse case of uxorial local residence as well. If the essential conflict in a family is over the rights to control the productive and reproductive resources, as many social
Theorists suggest (see Fortes 1958:3), then the husband, in a virilocal situation, would not necessarily welcome the wife's potential source for independence particularly in such a system where he would have no authority over it and cultural reasons for not using it. This point will become clearer in the following section.

How Structural Frameworks Produce Residence Choices

To begin with, it may be observed that the requirements placed upon the last-born child (ch'ip) are institutionalized ways of ensuring each married couple (household heads) of some assistance in old age and a proper ritual passage at death. Gross did not find a single case where the last born seceded from the natal household at marriage. The last born is well socialized into his or her responsibilities by the time he is ready to marry. The reward for fulfilling these expectations is that the last-born child will inherit the site and dwelling of his parents and often the chattle property such as money, cattle, jewelry, and the like. In theory, all such land and chattel should be divided equally among all the surviving offspring, but the parents often save choice land from division to ensure their own maintenance and proper funeral which would devolve to ch'ip, if surviving.

The position of the last born in the social structure appears to be a neat structural way of handling the problem of status and security in old age. This practice, however, is affected by demographic variables. First, there is a high mortality rate in Santiago among children up to age 6 and especially between birth and one year where mortality rates of 40 percent are not exceptional (see Hinshaw, Pyeatt, and Habicht 1972 for rates in other towns around Lake Atitlán). As a consequence of this mortality rate among children, not all last-born children will survive, implying that the institutionalized mechanism of ensuring some security in old age does not operate for all couples nor even in a majority of cases.

An additional demographic factor is that not all couples will succeed in having children. In the event of a barren union, divorce and remarriage are options that are usually followed until offspring are produced or a single person with children (previously divorced) is married. In cases where a couple have no surviving offspring, they will adopt an heir who will fulfill the obligations of the last born. The quest for an heir can also be interpreted as the result of pressure from the political-ritual community. It appears that only persons who have children, real or adopted, hold offices. Additionally, only couples who have assisted children in establishing independent households have sufficient public stature for serious consideration of their arguments in public gatherings. The Ateco expression is that such peoples' "words have meaning." As a consequence, one would expect to find each married couple ensuring that at least one of their offspring or adopted children will remain in the household at marriage. This hypothesis is borne out by both the statistical and normative data on marriage and residence (see Gross 1974). Finally, in cases where there are only daughters, difficulties sometimes arise given the normative and statistical preference for virilocality. This preference will be discussed below.

In the majority of the cases, there are a number of surviving offspring who will marry, and postmarital residence becomes problematic for both parents and children. Ideally, all Atecos would like to have their sons bring wives into the household, and their daughters bring husbands (see discussion in Wisdom 1940 for the Chorti). Owing to economic factors, however, very few are able to achieve the ideal. Indeed, setting up a couple in an independent household is very expensive. Even for couples who reside uxorilocally, the capital and material outlay by the bride's father is far greater than the benefits received from the son-in-law as an additional labor resource or even as a potential wage earner (see Gross 1974 for a detailed discussion). Indeed, some parents find it difficult to set up one child and almost impossible to assist more than one. In general, parents will attempt to assist as many children as possible in establishing an independent household. Aside from statistical support for this finding, additional confirmation is found in observations that rich families tend not to intermarry with other rich families. Among the Atecos, as elsewhere around the lake (see Hinshaw 1975), there is a general sentiment often expressed that one should seek a poor husband or wife. Atecos argue that they work harder, expect less, and are more grateful for that which they receive. Gross found that marriage negotiations with poorer families involved fewer visits before permission for marriage was granted, meaning less expense.
An important point concerning marriage negotiations is that the central issue is where the couple will live after marriage and not necessarily if they should marry. Marriage negotiations among relatives equals in the economic and political sense can be long and grueling where the father of the bride may find the prospective son-in-law acceptable only if he would reside/pay, or uxorilocally. This is particularly true of families with only daughters, where there is an explicit attempt to bring in at least one son-in-law. Where there is resistance to an uxorilocal arrangement, elopement is the institutionalized way out of the stalemate (see Gross 1974). Elopement can only take place if the parents of the boy agree, since it will be they who are legally responsible and must pay any fines or spend time in jail. From this discussion a testable hypothesis emerges: the incidence of elopement should increase as the distribution of wealth becomes more even as a result of more widely available wage labor and other sources of income. On the surface, Paul’s study of elopement (1963) appears to support the above hypothesis.

Finally, male resistance to uxorilocal residence helps explain why last-born daughters fear the difficult to marry, which is reflected in the average age of engagement: last born—22 years; others—16 years (Gross 1974). Additionally, there appears to be a high rate of spinsterhood among the last born. In fact, the only spinster in the sample were last-born females.

A direct consequence of setting up one’s married child with a house site, dwelling, housewares, arable land, and perhaps more, is that the child and spouse will be under the jural control of the parents, since lands are tied and the child is given only rights in usufruct which may be rescinded if filial obligations are not fulfilled. The implication is that the larger the number of children assisted in establishing their own independent households the greater the security in old age. The jural relationships established between parents and children through such prestations are binding even though household partition has occurred, thereby ending the jural minority of the children and the obligations of household membership. Thus, postmarital residence, where bilateral kinship is the rule, provides a way for parents to maintain control over the children even though group or lineage bonds are nonexistent.

Residence Choices Analyzed

It is clear from the preceding description that a couple’s decision on postmarital residence is not one of choice or the weighing of advantages strictly from their perceived needs. More accurately, the decision on postmarital residence is, first of all, not arbitrary but an option between two alternatives. Furthermore, the last-born child has no alternatives. Beyond these constraints, the persons who make the decision are not the newly marrying couple but, rather, the heads of their households. The latter have the jural authority, pay for the various engagement and wedding expenses, and provide for the couple’s support after the marriage; that is, one of the families must be willing to provide such support. Crucially, it is the household head’s position in the community as well as security in old age that are most directly affected by the postmarital residence patterns of their offspring. For a clear understanding of postmarital residence in Santiago, then, there are two major areas of interest which are crucial—that of the prospective groom and bride, and that of their respective household heads.

In general, Atitlan males find uxorilocal residence undesirable. Those particular males who in fact reside uxorilocal have mixed feelings, with negative ones predominating. Those interviewed described their situation as difficult and filled with tension, especially between them and their father-in-law. For example, one young groom related that he awoke one morning with his father-in-law’s hands around his throat screaming that the son-in-law was too arrogant and should get out. According to the groom, the fact that the son-in-law was making one quetzal per day and the father-in-law was earning nothing apparently caused much conflict within the household. A nephew of the father-in-law also supported this view.

In many cases, however, young men have had parallel encounters with their parents; relations are filled with strife and tension, which appears to make the possibility of uxorilocal residence more palatable. Yet, the actual cause of such tension may be the result of parental pressure on the child to seek a pay (uxorilocal) marriage because they are either unable to meet the expenses or do not feel obligated to expend the household resources for a k’ut (petition) marriage. There
are a number of reasons for not feeling obligated, all of which center on the son's cash earnings history (see Gross 1974 for a discussion). Whatever the actual cause for uxorilocal residence may be, it remains clear that Ariteco males, in general, find such an arrangement less than ideal and, at best, a second choice, although for some, it may be the only choice open to them.

Considered in the light of the social structure and its institutions, the bases of these negative sentiments can be clearly perceived. First, the house site, dwelling, arable land, housewares, and other items given to the couple at household partition remain, in the case of uxorilocality, under the authority, if not control, of the bride's father. The son-in-law remains under the thumb, so to speak, even after household partition. At the death of the father-in-law, the son-in-law does not finally succeed to the former's position of authority, rather, it is the daughter (wife) who is the heir and the one who will succeed to the jural authority over the property. In a real sense, the wife will be the household head rather than the husband, at least in terms of property relations. Although sufficient data are not available to make any definitive conclusions, it has been observed in Santiago that a wife's inherited arable land was often neglected until offspring were old enough to work it. This practice appears to hold irrespective of whether residence is virilocal or uxorilocal. Additionally, husbands who reside uxorilocally immediately after marriage, and not at some later date, rarely were found to farm their wife's land even when otherwise landless. Their economic input was derived largely from wages earned through craft specialization, agricultural labor, and/or trade. To what extent the reluctance to exploit the wife's property is related to Ariteco ideas about ancestors and land use is not clear. Many Aritecos say that such beliefs and practices are no longer critical. Yet, the reluctance to exploit such land is present although economic gains are obvious. Whatever the case may be, the husband is in the position of a tenant in respect to his wife's property. The wife is in a de facto position of authority because of the property relations established. The husband, then, must accept her potential authority and her ascendancy over him. This position of inferiority is not consistent with the ideal objective for Ariteco males. He is not the clear and unambiguous head of his household.

Finally, when residing uxorilocally, a man's right to remain on the land in the event that his wife predeceases him is contingent on their producing children. This also holds for women residing virilocally. A man living on his wife's land will not, as a rule, gain jural control over it nor over the children through it. On the other hand, the children will gain control over the mother's property and, thus, they gain a kind of ascendancy over their father. The following account will clearly illustrate the point.

Axwan, at the time of the field study, was a man about 54 years old. By 1972, he had resided uxorilocal for about 35 years. In 1962, after his parents-in-law had died and his wife had received her inheritance, Axwan opened up a small cantina selling both legal and illegal rum. Before this, he was a trader purchasing fruits and vegetables in Santiago and selling them in the fincas on the south coast. In early 1972, his wife died unexpectedly. The cantina was closed for mourning, as was the wife's compound upon which the cantina rested. Although Axwan was very reluctant to give up the cantina to his son, he had no choice in the matter when the son began to push his claim. Even though settled out of court by kinsmen, Axwan refused to talk to the son after the transfer. Moreover, the son's action forced his father (Axwan) to take up the trade business again, since he had no other source of income. His children did not appear ready to support him at that point.

This case aptly illustrates the problems that a male can encounter in uxorilocal residence. After household partition, the wife has a de facto ascendancy over the husband in terms of control over property. In addition, his children will have ascendancy over him should his wife predecease him as in the case of Axwan. It should now be clear why Ariteco males argue that only the poor, the landless, or the orphaned would tolerate a situation where the father-household head is in a subordinate position. Symbolically, ideologically, and sociologically, the relationships between husband and wife and between father and children are skewed. Virilocality is preferred by men because they are in a clear position of control and authority over the land and household, which is more consistent with the structural incentives outlined above.

If the decision about postmarital residence were made strictly by the groom, virilocality would no doubt be the choice with only a
few exceptions. If the bride had a choice, uxorilocality would predominate. Neither the bride nor the groom has that much choice, however, because they must reside in one or the other parental household. The actual choice of postmarital residence is a negotiated decision made by the respective household heads. The groom’s parents will always inform their son well in advance of his courting if they are willing to support his petitioning a wife, or whether he should plan on finding a wife and father-in-law who will take him in. Thus, each son knows before he begins to court whether postmarital residence will be virilocal or uxorilocal. Eloping points this out clearly. Before the boy can elope it is necessary that he have, minimally, his father’s approval, for it is the latter who will suffer any legal reprisal.

Parents, in general, would like to assist each of their children to establish an independent household, but the probability of this happening is slight, given the economic constraints outlined above. All things being equal (if they ever are), sons are preferred over sons-in-law. However, a son-in-law who comes from a poor family is considered to be very attractive for a daughter when uxorilocality is at stake. From the standpoint of the social structure, a son is the ideal recipient. The relationships between the son and the parents is structured first and foremost by the bonds of kinship, implying particular and filial obligations. The prestations of property, real and chattel, given at household partition perpetuates a certain degree of economic and political subordination which is normally lost with secession from the household. Thus, the kinship tie is reinforced with a property relationship which anchors the bonds more firmly. On the other hand, the relationship with the son-in-law is primarily contractual in nature and primarily between the spouses, although respect should always be shown toward the parents of the spouse. The son-in-law has no vested interest in the property given at partition since he will never “own” it or control it. Thus, the relationships between the son-in-law and the wife’s parents have little moral content, and not a lot of advantage for either in real economic terms.

Another concern is for a respected adult career, and a man’s power and prestige are largely dependent upon the number of persons he can rely upon for political, economic and/or moral support. For example, a man, as he gets older, would like to sponsor a saint into his house or some ritual event, or the like. The cost is high and, if assumed alone, often prohibitive. But if he can call upon a number of persons for money or assistance through labor or some other contribution, then his ability to sponsor such an occasion is more likely. The ties and obligations established through kinship but reinforced by prestations of property provide the core of a man’s personal following or support group. This core consists largely of offspring and their spouses, although some collaterals may be included, especially in cases when a sibling’s children are adopted. The binding of such kinsmen early on through the prestations of property at household partition provides the actual core of a man’s personal network that he can and will call upon for support not only in old age but also to fulfill a political-ritual ambition or for economic assistance. Controlling postmarital residence is an important way to ensure a core of supporters and control over them after household partition. During the period when children are members in the parental household, the parents’ jural and economic authority over them is clear. This authority is maintained in the absence of lineage and other corporate kin-group ties through assisting children to establish independent households. Ironically, by providing the means to become independent, the parents continue their juraly dominant position. This analysis explains more clearly the nature of the compound. It is neither an extended family nor a corporate descent group as is often suggested. Obligations are only owed to the natal household heads and not to other members.

The predominance of virilocality, then, is the outcome of a number of features of Ateco life. The factors which influence postmarital residence include ideology, economics, kinship, and polical relations. The outcome revolves around the attempt by Ateco household heads to maintain the domestic dependence of children when marriage, partition, and daily economic independence create new structural relations and imply a new locale.

The implications of this study for monocular or rule-based theories should be clear. Although economic considerations and affective and jural relations are important determinants of residential alignment, they are not the only factors. It is necessary to examine such basic sociocultural features as kinship, marriage, and citizenship which give rise to such surface manifestations. It is misleading and wrong
to analyze residence patterns in terms of discrete rules or types that come into effect at marriage (Fortes 1958:3). Residence patterns are the result of choices based upon a number of incentives as well as of structural constraints that are past, present, and future. A single rule or a single incentive, such as economic greed, would presuppose too rigid a system to be able to respond to varied conditions. The question that must be addressed is what is the structural context in terms of which choices on residence arise and are made, and, importantly, by whom are they made? The latter point of the question—who makes the choice—is rarely addressed, not only in the Maya literature on residence but elsewhere. The general approach is to assume, often mistakenly, that the groom or the couple makes the choice, as it is assumed to be in the U.S.—which, it should be noted, though the U.S. process is not all that clear. (For an example from the Maya literature, see Collier 1975).

The present analysis offers a more complete approach to the examination of residence. Rather than resting the analysis on either a rule of residence that somehow comes into effect at marriage, or describing the choices of individuals attempting to maximize their economic position in the marketplace, or their mechanistic responses to factors in the environment, our approach attempts to analyze the details of the constraints and incentives that set the conditions and determine the options available. By narrowing the field of choices to a manageable few, they become more predictable. By focusing exclusively on amount of land available or other economic variables, we would have missed essential factors in Atitlco residential alignments. The key was to determine who controls both productive and reproductive resources at various phases. This goal led to a focus on the interests of fathers who in fact make the final decision regarding postmarital residence. The household head, the fathers and mothers, will bear the expenses of a marriage including assisting the couple to independence, but the parents, and the fathers in particular, have a vested interest in determining that at least one of their children brings in a spouse at marriage. Preferably, as many children as possible should bring in spouses because it adds to the potential power and authority of an Atitlco father in the community. It thereby becomes possible for a man to pass through the cofradia or other positions of prestige and authority within the community.

In conclusion, this approach to the analysis of residential alignments is more powerful than previous models in that it explains more material. It draws together data that seem to be disparate and unconnected. The approach not only accounts for uxorial residence as well as the predominant virilocal pattern. It also explains such phenomena as spinsterhood, and by implicating bachelorhood, late marriage of last-born women, a function of the witch, intergenerational and husband-wife relations, ancestors, land-tenure issues, and more. Finally, elopement is more clearly understood as an institutional mechanism, rather than as an anomalous event, that has become more prevalent due to a break with tradition, as some scholars have suggested (e.g. Woods and Graves 1973).

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Section III
Symbolism and Ideology
Some Recent Approaches