Ethnogenesis and Cultural Persistence in the Global Spanish Empire

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The colonial empire built by the Spanish during the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries was the first to reach a global scale. Although more archaeological research has been conducted on Spanish colonial outposts and the impacts of its territorial claims in the Americas than elsewhere, the Spanish empire also included outposts in the Caribbean, the Pacific, Southeast Asia and Africa. This vast political undertaking was a crucial model for its European rivals and partners alike, and was arguably foundational in launching and shaping the early modern era of empire building across oceans and vast territories. Spanish colonists and administrators had measurable impacts on the political organization and economic foci of the local areas where they levied colonial demands for natural resources and labor. The indigenous peoples who occupied those areas on so many continents also had measurable, specific or diffuse impacts on the Europeans in their midst as well. Moreover, indigenous individuals and groups were moved around, both within regions such as the western coastal region of North America and across vast distances between regions, both forcibly and voluntarily. As has been well documented by historians of the era, intermarriage between indigenous, European, African, and other groups of people begat a plethora of new racial (e.g., caste) labels. These two phenomena – intermarriage and migration – produced multicultural, pluralistic colonies, within which individuals variably adopted or invented different material manifestations of identity in dual processes of ethnogenesis and cultural persistence.

This symposium aims to explore the archaeological manifestations of these two related processes in each of seven regions (North America, Mesoamerica, South America, the Caribbean, Pacific, Southeast Asia and Africa) where the Spanish colonial undertaking planted roots; we explicitly adopt the aims of comparative archaeology and interdisciplinarity in order to explore a set of related research questions from this geographically and chronologically broad perspective. These broad research questions include, but are not strictly limited to the following:

1. How did the creation, adoption, or resistance to the complex and dynamic process of ethnogenesis play out in each region of the Spanish empire?

2. Which aspects of local indigenous cultures in those regions persevered through some or all of the Spanish colonial period?

3. How can we trace the cross-cultural exchange and conflicts that are historically documented to have occurred between regions of the empire? And what were their impacts on local indigenous peoples?
4. How did indigenous cultures persist in the face of colonial pressures on their sociopolitical organization, domestic and political economies, languages, art and craft forms, religious practices and beliefs, and household organization?

5. How did interactions between distinct indigenous peoples contribute to processes of ethnogenesis and cultural persistence?

These research questions under the umbrella concepts of ethnogenesis and cultural persistence offer an unusually geographically broad perspective on identity formation and perseverance from a global perspective. The conceptual foci are broad enough to incorporate a wide range of methodologies and approaches, and the three-century chronological focus narrow enough to draw direct connections between case studies across the globe. The combination of the two in a single symposium thus holds much promise for a deep dive into our research questions with an international group of scholars.

**Ethnogenesis in Colonial Settings**

The process of ethnogenesis was a natural one for those living under Spanish colonialism, both for indigenous groups, as well as the agents of colonization (e.g. Cipolla 2013, 2015; Haley and Wilcoxen 1997, 2005; Hill 1996; Hu 2013; Panich 2013; Sider 1994; Voss 2008a, 2008b, 2008c, 2015; Weik 2014). Across time and space in the Spanish empire, as the empire grew, there were more connections between and integration of new groups and cultures into those indigenous ones. Silliman (2005:62) has stated that, “colonialism is not about an event but, rather, about processes of cultural entanglement, whether voluntary or not, in a broader world economy and system of labor, religious conversion, exploitation, material value, settlement, and sometimes imperialism.” Panich (2013) has furthered argued that indigenous and colonist lives in colonial contexts is in a constant process of “becoming.” This process of becoming, the end result of long term cultural entanglement (see Alexander 1998), creates situation where not only indigenous peoples, but also colonists, create new identities as the result of the push and pull of everyday life, of creeping colonialism (Ferris 2009:168-170) which embeds itself in all avenues of life.

The concept of ethnogenesis has been an important tool for understanding change in cultural identity during times of culture change, such as colonialism. At the same time, changes in clothing fashion, culinary traditions, and other aspects of material culture, may simply be an adaption of daily practices to allow the persistence of long-term cultural traditions (Panich 2013), as cultural persistence and agency continued in multiple forms and means (e.g. Arkush 2011). In these instances, changes in material culture are being made by cultural groups not to transform into something new per se, but, rather, as a way to continue to persist and maintain aspects of traditional culture. During the Mission period in southern California, for example, native burials have been found containing a large number of foreign items, such as glass beads, horse trappings, and copper chocolate pots – items which were collected as part of working for colonists in their fields (Douglass et al. 2016). While these items were of colonial origin, they were placed and performed in burials in traditional ways. Although some of those departed Native Californians likely worked on colonial ranchos and farms as cowboys, field hands, or household help, dressed in colonial clothing styles, and performed foreign tasks, at the end of the day they were still indigenous and continued to perform their native traditions (Douglass et al. in press; see Lacson 2015). Panich (2013) argues (see also Rubertone 2012:269-272) that there ought to be a focus on the processes of long-term indigenous and local histories, as part of this “process of becoming” in colonial encounters. As both Lightfoot (2012) and Silliman (2009, 2012) have recently reminded us, changes in and the continuity of cultural traditions were not binary choices for native groups in colonial settings.
Rather, change and continuity were parts of the same process of responding and adapting to newly emerging and evolving colonial surroundings. Furthermore, it is also important to acknowledge that ethnogenesis occurs in a wide variety of contexts, not simply in large, complex social environments like empires (see, for example Beaule 2017a; Lightfoot 2015:9218; Voss 2015:656).

Unlike the past, many scholars today see little value in concepts like “acculturation” and “assimilation,” as they tend to mask individual agency and create indigenous voices which are difficult to hear over the dominant colonizers’ (see for example Farnsworth 1992; Lightfoot et al. 1998; Lightfoot 2015; Stein 2005:25; Van Buren 2010:158). The colonies being discussed in this symposium were all diverse multicultural and pluralistic cultural settings. For example, in a relatively short time after Cortes arrived in Mexico in 1519, Manila Galleons and other trade ships were bringing immigrants to Mexico from many distant regions, including Southeast and Southwest Asians and Africans, creating extremely pluralistic cultural settings (e.g. Casella and Flower 2005; Jamieson 2005; Matthew 2015; Russell 2005; Seijas 2014; Schwaller 2010, 2011). In addition, Manila itself was an extremely diverse colony, with ethnic groups from throughout Asia present. Rather than being brought into the dominant culture, these ethnic enclaves were strong and, as Lightfoot (2015:9217) has put it, “remained in the voids and pockets of settler colonies.” Many scholars today believe that there are multidirectional processes in diverse cultures which can create new identities which encompass a meshing or hybridization of traits, such as ethnogenesis, Creole culture, or mestizaje (e.g., Deagan 2005; Haley and Wilcoxon 1997, 2005; Liebmann 2015; Voss 2008a, 2008b). While within many colonies there were diverse ethnic enclaves, Lightfoot (2015:9218-9219) makes the argument that “we must be careful about perceiving the actions of subordinated peoples in multiethnic communities as constantly directed towards resisting the existence of rigid dominance hierarchies….as emphasis on resistance tends to simplify complicated social relations into a binary relationship of dominance and resistance.” In that same sense, if we are to identify ethnogenesis in these multiethic communities, we must follow Voss’ (2015) urging to identity the “new” and make a strong case for it. It is not enough to assume that an identity is new and therefore ethnogenesis; rather, we must also ensure that these changes are not simply what Voss (2015:656) refers to as “normal fluctuations and adaptations typical of ethnic identity maintenance.” Voss (2015:656) has recently summarized work by Hu (2013), Weik (2014) and Stojanowski (2010) which identify processes which are characteristic of ethnogenesis:

- Well-defined ethnic practices and discourses in contexts where ethnicity was not previously a focus of social identity;
- Transformations of social identity through new relations between a population and a newly dominant institution, as often occurs on colonial frontiers;
- Processes of fusion and aggregation in which diverse people are joined together in a shared ethnic identity;
- Processes of fussion and disaggregation in which people with a former shared ethnic identity separate into multiple new ethnic identities;
- Processes of migration and displacement through which place-based identities lose relevance and are supplanted by new ethnic identities;
- Transformations of non-ethnic identities – religion, nationality, occupation, etc. – into ethnic identities;
- Development of a new ethnic identity through shared experiences of oppression from, or resistance to, a dominant group or institution;
- The development of new ethnic identities to legitimate or maintain unequal access to power or resources.
In this light, scholars today, searching to identify ethnogenesis in colonial contexts, must be interested in identifying new ethnic groups and social identities in social situations which are in flux and novel.

Identity in Colonial Settings
The ability to identify cultural and personal identity is important to be able to understand its transformation in colonial contexts. At numerous sites across the Spanish colonial world, native peoples used and adopted European goods and iconography for either everyday use or special purposes but used them in indigenous ways rather than European ones. Glass beads in California, for example, were likely accepted by Native Californians in part because they were similar — especially white colored ones — to the shell beads which had been part of native traditions for thousands of years. Both glass and shell beads were used as trade items similar to currency and were treated in similar ways in burial contexts during the Mission period (Douglass et al. 2016; see also Hackel 2016). In a more modern colonial context, Liebmann (2015) has recently argued that Hopi Kachinas from the mid-20th Century with faces made to resemble Mickey Mouse resonated with crafts people making them because the iconography was similar to the Hopi tradition of the mouse warrior Tusun Homichi. While a commercial symbol, it resonated with Kachina dancers and craftspeople and conveyed traditional stories and values. Silliman (2005:66) suggests that examples of artifacts and symbols like these are not simply “native” or “colonial” but rather “taken up by individuals to forge their way in new colonial worlds.” These items, and the identities created by Native Americans during colonialization, represent both residence in and resistance to colonial worlds (Silliman 2005:68). Clearly, in examples of identified hybridity of objects, scholars need to be keenly aware of the origins of connections as to avoid what Silliman (2015) has argued are “Frankenstein” versions of hybridity explanations. At the same time, examples of hybridity, like those above, can be powerful and meaningful for exploring the emic meaning of objects (see, for example, Loren 2015).

Categories of gender, race and an individual’s place within a caste system were very important parts of colonial society across the Spanish world. The caste system hailed from the concept of limpieza de sangre, or purity of blood. Legal definitions of caste groups were elaborate and complex, with fine distinctions among different classes of people. Voss (2005: 463) has argued that this system was outwardly a “pigmentocracy,” with lighter-skinned people likely to be higher in the social order; castes also related to lineal ancestry, class, and a variety of other attributes. Colonial society in the heartland of colonies was very rigid in its caste system, and Spanish-colonial sumptuary laws highly restricted both upward and downward movement within this caste system by members of colonial society (Voss 2008a:413; Voss 2008c). Many scholars have argued that there was little mixing between castes or races (mestizaje) in early Spanish colonial settings, such as Mexico. Some scholars however, such as Schwaller (2011), have argued the opposite, based in part on simple demographics in these early colonies. He argues that from the outset of the colonial period, there were simply few Spanish women in these early colonies, which led Spanish men to create interethnic and interracial marriages, which in turn led to new identities and ethnogenesis. Based on archival data, he argues that mestizas (women partially of Indian ancestry) were much more likely to marry a Spaniard than were mestizos; these men of partial Indian ancestry were more likely to marry an india. Even during the early colonial period in central Mexico, Schwaller sees that some mestizos were able to avoid the caste limitations set on them by having strong ties with Spanish life and effectively played the role of españoles. Alternatively, those who had biological ties to Spaniards but were abandoned by their Spanish fathers probably identified with indigenous castes and communities. While intermarriage may have been more prevalent in central Mexico, it may not have been so in other areas of the Spanish empire. In Alta California, for example, which was an established Spanish colony over 200 years later than the core of Mexico, there were very few documented marriages between colonists and soldiers representing the Spanish empire and local indigenous
women (Newell 2009:120–122). In other cases, the Spanish caste system conflated ethnic groups; in the 250 years or so of the Manila Galleons, migrants to the Americas from the Philippines and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Japan, Cathay and India, and Cathay became collectively known as chinos (Chinese) or indios chinos (Chinese Indians) (Slack 2009:35).

Another way of helping break the bonds of the caste system in the core of Spanish colonies was to head towards the periphery of the Spanish empire as a colonist or explorer. Crypto-Jews left the Iberian peninsula for the New World to flee persecution and many continued once they arrived in the core of Mexico and headed to places like what is now New Mexico (Douglass and Graves 2017; Hordes 2005:89). Early overland expeditions to California were also a good opportunity for colonists to transform their identity from one of mixed race to that of Español, far away from the colonial core (Haley and Wilcoxen 1997, 2005; Voss 2008b). At times, people were banished to these far flung places, or otherwise forced to flee to farflung locations (Mehl 2014). The Spanish empire was a vast network of cultures and places in which to transform oneself (see Beaule 2017b) and migration, in different forms, was an important catalyst for change (Weik 2014:198-200).

Clothing in colonial contexts can be a conduit for expressing one’s position within a caste system, whether a colonist or an indigenous person. Within colonial Mexico, Voss (2008a:413–414) has documented how strict fashion rules were tied to the caste system. People with African ancestry were expected to dress in Bourbon fashion and were not allowed to wear luxury goods. Bourbon clothing for those with African ancestry was fastened with ties and laces, rather than buttons or buckles (Voss 2008a:414). More-elite members of Spanish-colonial society were permitted to have plain buttons and buckles on their clothing, but only members of society with the highest status were allowed filigreed and jeweled buttons and ornamental gold or silver buckles. Voss (2008a:414), citing Fisher (1992) and Loren (1999), argued that clothing fasteners “were especially potent objects in representations of racial differences.” This strict set of rules led to some seeking reprieve in the empire’s hinterlands. For example, at the beginning of the overland Anza expedition from southern Arizona to California in the mid-1770s, many of those heading to California were of mixed race and were willing to attempt the expedition as a way to get further away from the harsh restrictions placed on them based on their racial category in the caste system (Voss 2008b). Perhaps to encourage them to endure the long journey, traveling colonists were sometimes issued clothing that was not allowed within the Mexican heartland. Once these same settlers arrived and were established in southern California, within a short time they had transformed their identity from Indian to Spanish, based on self-reporting in census records (Mason 1998). In another (in this case non-Spanish) example, from the sixteenth century British Isles, sumptuary laws were strict and restrictive, dictating what clothing one could wear based on status and hierarchy. Horning (2014: 300-302) documents these constraints in Ireland and the numerous ways people worked around these strict rules. By wearing particular clothing, elites assumed that the clothing illustrated established cultural meanings, but the secondhand trading of clothing allowed lower caste people to “code switch” and appropriate a higher status. In the Andes, Pillsbury (2002:78) writes of Spanish encomenderos who adopted the Inka practice of giving fine textiles as gifts to subject kurakakuna (indigenous nobles) on their encomiendas. Gifting textiles was, in this case, a manifestation of Spanish colonists incorporating indigenous strategies of binding subject elites to themselves in politically indigenous fashion.

Food also plays an important part in expressing identity in colonial settings. Dietler (2007), for example, argues that food is an important medium during colonialism as it aids in understanding the transformative effects of colonialism in cultural identity. He argues that the adoption of alien foods is primarily through actions of individuals or social groups “located differentially within complex relational fields of power and interest” (Dietler 2007:226). That is, elites, commoners, or other groups within a culture may adopt specific foods that
may, through time, be incorporated by other elements of that society. Particular foods may be used to strategically identify social roles. For example, peaches and other orchard fruits were introduced to the Hopi of northern Arizona by the Spanish, and incorporated into Hopi lifeways. Through time, these fruits may have become Hopi rather than Spanish foods. Similarly, the incorporation of Spanish-introduced churro sheep into Navajo culture over time reinforced Navajo, not Spanish, identity. These sheep infused a number of activities, from food (including highly regarded mutton stew), to weaving and trade. Finally, Mills’ (2008) study of colonialism and cuisine among the Zuni Pueblo in New Mexico demonstrates how wheat was introduced by the Spanish and was initially resisted by the Zuni due to its association with colonialists. Through time, Zuni slowly incorporated wheat into aspects of ritual feasts, which gave it local, indigenous cultural meaning. In colonial contexts, food can be a medium of solidarity or differentiation within a group (see for example Mintz and Du Bois 2002:109).

Ties between Spanish Colonies

The colony of Mexico, founded by Cortes in 1519, quickly connected with other portions of the ever-expanding Spanish Empire. Within just a few years of the Spanish conquest of Mexico, there were campaigns to the south into Guatemala, as well as Peru, and north into the southwestern and midwestern United States. By 1565, there was a colony at Manila, which became an economic center for trade and slavery (e.g., Seijas 2014; Tremml 2012). Early Pacific voyages, later including the Manila Galleons, was a systematic expansion of the American campaigns by conquerors like the Alvarado brothers (see Kelsey 2016:59-62). While these different colonial ventures were indeed global in reach, we must resist the trap of focusing on that globalization, as it silences agency (see Berrocal 2016; Monton-Subias et al. 2016).

Colonies fulfilled different goals for Spain (e.g. Douglass and Graves 2017). First, there were minerals and other resources to harvest. Once the colony in Mexico was established, for example, expeditions to the north into the southwest United Stated were launched to search for gold, silver and other resources. Secondly, the Spanish aimed to convert indigenous peoples to Catholicism. Lastly, as outlined by Seijas (2014), another principal goal was the use of labor for extracting natural resources and feeding the continued colonial expansion. This was done in part through colonies which expanded the slave trade. As Seijas (2014:33) asserts, “The foundation of the Spanish Philippines gave rise to the transpacific slave-trade: Manila became the colonial outpost in Asia where slaves were purchased, and the Manila Galleons ships afforded transport to Mexico.... Manila was a slave society during the seventeenth century: slaves did the majority of the labor, and master-slave relations shaped the general social order.” Enslaved people came from many categories of people in Asia, from enslaved Filipinos and other Asians, to Muslim war captives. Slaves in Manila included people from Bornea, Java, Bengal (Bangladesh and India), Ceylon (Sri Lanka), India, Japan, China, Malaysia, various parts of the Philippines, and Timor (Seijas 2014:Figure 2.1). Rodriguez-Alegria (2016) reports that based on archival records, slaves in Mexico during the sixteenth century, based on a small sample, were held by roughly 1/3 of Mexican colonist households. Slave owners came from many walks of life, including tailors, shoemakers and ironsmiths, merchants, miners, and priests. Slave origins were not easily identifiable beyond the categories of “Black,” “Indian,” or “Chichimec.” During this time there was both a trans-Atlantic and trans-Pacific Spanish slave trade, and there was also clearly a program of enslaving indigenous peoples. Slaves also were shipped to Spain from many parts of the world, including native North America (e.g. Matthew 2015).

The slave trade was outlawed in Spain and its colonies very early in the sixteenth century through the Laws of Burgos of 1512, the New Laws of 1545, and a royal decree in 1574 in the Philippines outlawing indigenous slavery, but there were ways to work around these laws. Slaves could be justified by
economic needs, for example, in the Philippines (Seijas 2014:36). In other cases, Christian charity was used as a justification to “save” starving peoples from other religions; by enslaving them, they would be converted to Christianity. As Matthew (2015:84) puts it, “Slaving was a natural extension of Christian expansion during medieval times and progressed after the fall of Constantinople in 1453 and the progression of the Portuguese into the Azores and Madeira Islands and northwest Africa.” Muslims captured during war, for example, could be legally enslaved (Seijas 2014:37).

The Manila galleons and other Spanish ships moved diverse trade goods and slaves between colonies. These ships made many stops across the Pacific, impacting indigenous diets and material inventories of peoples such as the Chamorro in the Marianas (Bayman and Peterson 2016). Rodriguez-Alegria (2016:42-49) studied the inventories of 30 sixteenth-century Spanish colonizers in Mexico to better understand their material belongings during this early period. He concludes that roughly 60% of the items listed were manufactured in Mexico or elsewhere in the Americas, many likely by indigenous peoples. While initially, colonists depended on trade goods from Europe, indigenous craftspeople started copying material forms and styles fairly soon after the conquest (Rodriguez-Alegria 2016:48). That said, almost 39% of the items inventoried came from cities in Europe. Some items in high demand, such as European glass beads, made their way through Mexico and were shipped out to other colonies (e.g., Hackel 2016). Items from Europe, Asia and elsewhere circulated throughout the distribution system, from the top to the bottom. The colony of Manila became an important hub in pre-existing trade networks linking China and Southeast Asian kingdoms, bringing varied Asian goods to Acapulco and beyond, but also silver in enormous quantities to the currency-starved Chinese empire from the Spanish-American colonies (Chia 2006). Soon after colonies were established, a wide variety of new, exotic goods would make their way into the interior of colonial lands, other islands and nations outside direct contact with the Spanish, through exchange networks.

All told, inter-colony trade networks facilitated the exchange of ideas, materials, and people between areas of the empire, creating pluralistic economies and societies. Oceanic shipping routes were complemented by overland expeditions and exchange networks. The establishment of colonies around the globe encouraged the movement of goods, people, ideas and ways of doing things into new environments. Colonial expansion also allowed indigenous groups to align, or fight, local Spanish powers. Spanish armed forces included relatively few Spaniards but many aligned indigenous warriors. For example, the Alvarado brothers' 1520s campaigns into Guatemala had just a few hundred Spaniards, but up to 8,000 central Mexican indigenous warriors (Asselbergs 2008; Matthew 2007, 2012; Restall and Asselbergs 2007). Between campaigns, some of these same indigenous warriors were shipped to other portions of the Spanish Empire, such as Manila or South America. The early Coronado expedition from central Mexico into what is now Kansas, in the central portion of the United States, also had few Spaniards but hundreds of central Mexicans (Douglass and Graves 2017; Flint 2009). Of course, it was not just slaves or warriors who crossed the waters between colonies. Native noblemen and women from various portions of the empire also crossed the Atlantic to visit Spain (Matthew 2015: 88-89).

Organization of symposium
The fifteen papers that follow have been organized geographically, with all but one region represented by two scholarly contributions. The research questions included in this paper’s introduction provide a starting point for our discussion at the SAA meetings, one which promises to be both wide ranging and highly focused by virtue of the international, comparative nature of the participants and our research areas. Indeed, the range of examples cited in this paper alone illustrates how complex interconnections
between aspects of identity and materiality spread around the globe wherever the increasingly multicultural Spanish empire went.

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