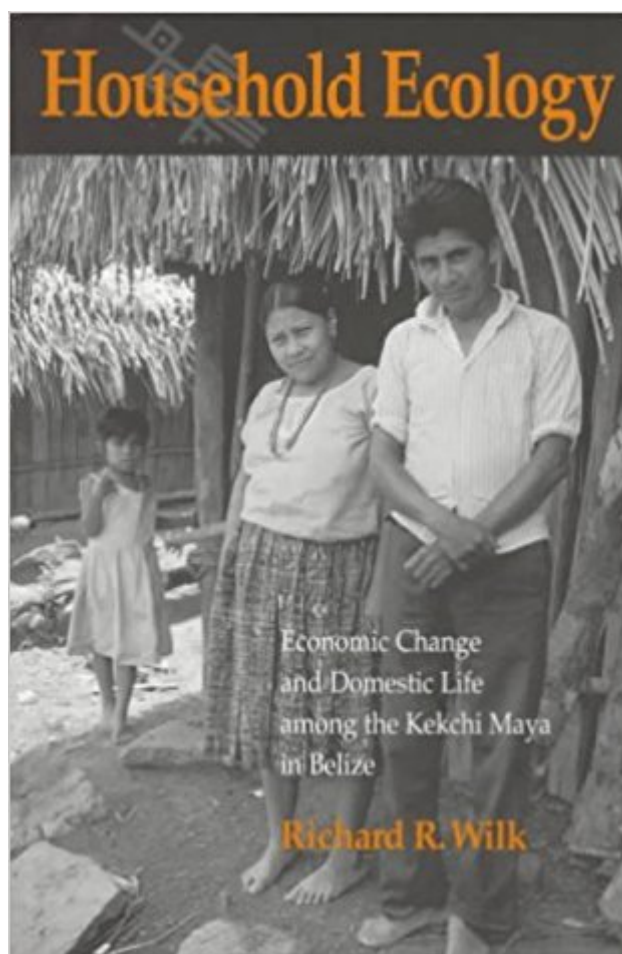


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# Household Ecology: Economic Change And Domestic Life Among The Kekchi Maya In Belize



## Synopsis

Development and economic change are often seen as destructive to the family and to other traditional forms of social organization. Wilk's study of household ecology reveals that the Kekchi Maya of Belize have responded by creating new forms of family organization, working together to face challenges posed by development. Not merely survivors of an ancient splendor, the Kekchi Maya build upon their rich heritage to approach such problems as ethnic strife and rainforest destruction as creative agents. Wilk combines a wealth of detail on agricultural calendars, hunting practices, land tenure, and labor exchanges in a general interpretation of cultural and ecological transformation. He provides a comprehensive analysis of how tropical farmers survive in the difficult rainforest environment, tracing the ingenuity and adaptability of Mayan culture. Fully incorporating the historical context of ecological processes, he documents the importance of household organization in shaping the trajectory of ecological change and shows how delicate this adaptation can be. Analyzing household response to localized economic and ecological settings, Wilk argues that the transformation of the rural economy and of Mayan culture proceeds through the conjunction of global and local processes. The Kekchi refuse to fit into the models of economic evolution set forth in existing scholarship. This sensitive and well-written study challenges current orthodoxies about economic and social change and suggests new approaches to rural development and household ecology.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"A well-developed case study of households among the lowland Maya.... Takes one to the frontier of

this subject." *American Anthropologist* "Challenges conventional images of traditional societies.... An excellent critique of recent theories of economic change in rural societies, well supported by high standards of ethnographic and historical research.... A first-rate study." *American Scientist* "A major step toward explaining how people participate in those processes of social and economic change that have been so dramatically shaping their world for almost five centuries." *Hispanic American Historical Review*

Wilk develops an excellent model for talking about social organization. Based around an ethnography of the Kekchi Maya, household ecology presents a model that allows the anthropologist to deal with such issues as history, gender relations, markets, subsistence and political organization (and that is easily transferred to different settings for comparative work). This is a book for readers interested in understanding how households function as social institutions, it is replete with information and useful data. Not for a beginner, but for the student of anthropology and ecology, this is an important text.

Despite the opaque, academic name, this book is very readable and provides a lot of insight into the economic and cultural life of the Kekchi people in a respectful way. It is good to read a book that both honours the uniqueness of an indigenous people while at the same time recognizing them as creative human beings who respond to life pressures according to internal values like everyone else, and not as some sort of artifact of the past.

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