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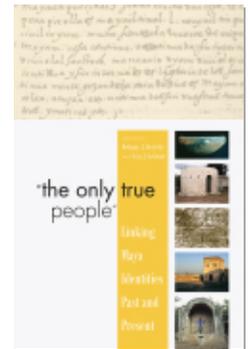
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PART I

Maya Identities of the Present and the Ethnographic Past

Reimagining the World

Maya Religious Practices and the Construction of Ethnicity in a Mesoamerican Frame

C. MATHEWS SAMSON

I visited the Yucatán Peninsula during the summer of 2007 for the first time in over two decades and for the first time since I began doing formal ethnographic work in highland Guatemala in the mid-1990s. I was there mostly as a tourist, hoping to meet my daughter for a few days as she ended an environmental course on the peninsula, and then I stayed for two weeks trying to get a better sense of how people are dealing with cultural and economic changes in the region, as well as a sense of what it means to be Maya among the lowland Yucatek population whose language and culture are often referred to simply as “Maya.” This was not formal research, but some of the cursory differences from Guatemala, where I have been working for the past twenty years, were startling. The sense of openness in movement was a relief after my experience in an increasingly gated Guatemala City, where the population continues to struggle with the increase in violence nearly two decades after the end of the civil conflict there. At the same time, this apparent openness also took other forms—women in shorts, for example, driving motorcycles as the preferred mode of transportation in places like Ticul on the edge of the Puuc region south of Mérida. Although I sometimes found evidence of political or social organizations among the local Maya population—and near the Loltun Caverns I even picked up a self-published book by a local scholar, *apellido* Xiu, on Maya views of death—the closest I came to an obvious public political statement directed toward indigenous concerns was on a mural outside the Casa de la Cultura in the plaza of Felipe Carrillo Puerto (see figure 2.1).¹ Depicting a Maya

person emerging from an ear of corn with a pyramid in the background and with various Maya glyphs and numbers setting the iconographic context for this emergence, the mural bore the words “La Zona Maya No Es Un Museo Etnográfico Es Un Pueblo En Marcha” (The Maya Zone Is Not an Ethnographic Museum; It Is a People on the Move).

Reflecting on those words now, from the perspective of visual and symbolic ethnography, they clearly resonate with my field experiences observing ethnic organizing in the context of the Maya Movement in Guatemala. Often referenced outside of Guatemala as a *pan*-Maya movement driven by the impetus of uniting all Maya peoples (*pueblos*) within a common sense of Maya identity, the movement begins by “reappropriating (from Western academia) and reinterpreting (from an indigenous perspective) research on the ancient and modern Maya” (Fischer 1996:64). Nevertheless, in practice, some tension remains between this overarching *Maya* identity and the local identities affirmed by people who continue to claim affiliation with their language group or community (*municipio*) of residence.

Moreover, while at its broadest extent a pan-Maya identity would indeed cross national boundaries to include all Mayan speakers in Mesoamerica, I suspect that the sentiment of “this” people on the move, like identity more generally, is more rooted in place. Place here is circumscribed by the local context of the Caribbean coast of the Mexican state of Quintana Roo, a place that is also home to the sanctuary of the Talking Cross and a site of ethnic resistance and independence during the Caste War—with both the symbol and the resistance enduring from the mid-nineteenth century. Although the reference to the “Zona Maya” could refer to the larger Mesoamerican region where the Maya live and the Ruta Maya has developed in fits and starts to foment economic, cultural, and tourist interaction in the region, it can probably best be interpreted as an embracing of the independent spirit of the Maya—Yukatek—ancestors who participated in the Caste War. The resistance to exoticization, as if the Maya were pieces in a museum, is surely a statement in response to the sheer volume of tourism in the area—both in the beach resort corridor in Quintana Roo and in the appropriation of the archaeological sites throughout the peninsula in the context of the Mexican government’s policy of indigenismo, which focused on giving attention to Mexico’s prehistoric indigenous heritage while continuing to promote the assimilation of indigenous peoples into mestizo Mexico.² Such resistance is far from the only narrative of engagement with the rapid social change on the peninsula since the 1980s, but it provides a frame of reference and a point of comparison with the cultural emphasis on Maya identity in the Guatemalan highlands.



FIGURE 2.1. Mural, painted by Marcello Jiménez, in the plaza of Felipe Carrillo Puerto, Quintana Roo. Photo by the author.

MAYA NATIONALISM AFTER THE WAR

I begin with this extended vignette because there has been some call for more comparative study of indigenous culture across national boundaries in Mesoamerica (Watanabe and Fischer 2004), and because the multidisciplinary perspective in which this volume is grounded can benefit from consideration of ethnic organizing

in Guatemala, as it has become more trenchant in the post-conflict years. As noted, in various contexts, the ethnogenesis of “the Maya” in Guatemala has been referred to as a movement for Maya nationalism and as a pan-Maya movement that crosses boundaries and seeks to unite in a broad historical and cultural framework perhaps as many as 6 million to 8 million people who continue to speak twenty-eight different languages and who share a cultural tradition rooted in common language origins, cosmology, and lifeways in southern Mexico, Guatemala, and parts of Belize and Honduras.³ As one attempt describes the nature of the movement, “To look for *the unity of the Maya People* has been one of the principal ideals of the Maya Movement in Guatemala. A political and ideological mobilization has been established around this ideal that has appealed to ties of common cultural experience among the indigenous population—a shared past and a collective destiny” (Cumes 2007:86, original emphasis).

The movement burst onto the Guatemalan political scene in the late 1980s and early 1990s as the thirty-year civil conflict wound down, and the trappings of formal democracy were restored on the way to a peace accord that definitively ended the war in 1996. One of the earliest published articles on the movement (Smith 1991) was written for the North American Council on Latin America (NACLA); by the time the Kaqchikel Presbyterian executive of the Hermandad de Presbiterios Mayas wrote for the same publication in 1996, it was claimed that there were over 300 organizations with Maya constituencies (Otzoy 1996). By the end of the conflict, the movement seemed well poised to push for a “multiethnic, pluricultural, and multilingual” state that was the articulated goal of a number of organizations within the movement. This momentum, along with the awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to Rigoberta Menchú in 1992, was emblematic of the rise of Maya identity and the confluence of social movements directed toward the fomenting of ethnic identity and culture as well as toward pushing for the realization of a peace that would end Guatemala’s conflict. The Maya also had an intelligentsia that promoted its agenda both within Guatemalan social and political arenas and among academics in an international context, as well as sometimes through elements of the global human rights community that took an interest in Guatemalan affairs. The most visible spokesperson in articulating the Maya nationalist agenda has been Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, who served as vice minister of education during the administration of Alfonso Portillo (2000–2004) and whose latest book is titled *New Perspectives for the Construction of the Multinational State: Proposals to Overcome the Non-Fulfillment of the Accord on the Identity and Rights of the Indigenous Peoples* (Waqi’ Q’anil Demetrio Cojtí, Son Chonay, and Guaján 2007). The title references the side agreement on indigenous affairs that was negotiated as part of the peace process and finally concluded by the negotiating parties in 1995, but the proposal continues to push for the creation of a truly multiethnic state.

In many ways, the title of the latter work illustrates the force of the Maya Movement in strictly political terms. Although some have argued that Menchú has never been totally accepted by the Maya community as a whole, her seventh-place showing as the presidential candidate for the Encuentro por Guatemala coalition during the 2007 campaign with a total of 101,316 votes (3.09%) puts an exclamation point on the political force of Maya organizing in the national electoral arena at the present time. These results should not overshadow the historic fact of an indigenous woman running for president of Guatemala. At the same time, the comments of the report of the European Union observer commission for the 2007 elections in regard to Menchú's candidacy raise skepticism regarding the possibility of a Maya voting bloc (or perhaps even a Maya political party) in the near future: "The electoral failure of her candidature, which is obviously due to several different factors, seems to underline the fact that at the moment in Guatemala, the conscious indigenous vote is far from being a relevant force" (European Union 2007:48).⁴

Nevertheless, some of the salient issues of ethnogenesis and ethnic identity are brought to the fore in a brief comparison of the context of Maya organizing in Guatemala and in Mexico. In commentary on a series of articles dealing with Maya identity in the Yucatán Peninsula in the *Journal of Latin American Anthropology*, Ueli Hostettler makes these observations regarding Maya identity on the peninsula when refracted in the light of Guatemala's Maya Movement:

By problematizing the "Maya" label, these articles reject an essential approach to ethnicity in the peninsula . . . On the other hand, while they concur in problematizing the history of Maya identity . . . the authors only indirectly address the fact that in the larger Maya area, especially in Guatemala, the term "Maya" and related issues of "Mayaness" have gone "public" and left the academic setting to become one of the mainstays of the Pan-Maya Movement. All political implications of anti-essentialism aside (Warren 1998), it seems that over the last decades a new Maya identity was born in Guatemala which makes deliberate use of the symbolic capital related to the complex and controversial image of the "Maya." (Hostettler 2004:193)

Two issues stand out in Hostettler's commentary. First, there is a differential appropriation of Maya identity in Mexico and Guatemala. While somewhat outside the scope of this chapter, I suggest that some of the difference can be attributed to the relationship of the state to indigenous populations. For a host of reasons, the Maya population in Mexico did not experience the kind of genocidal war experienced by the Maya in Guatemala. Both the legacy of the Mexican Revolution in constituting the state and the character of Mexican *indigenismo* in relation to the state are relevant to this issue, as is the manner in which the state dealt with agrarian concerns in the post-revolutionary period. In the Mexican highlands (in contrast

to the Yucatán Peninsula), the Zapatista uprising coincided with the formal implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 1994, and this was on the heels of the Salinas administration's attack on the foundations of historical agrarian policy when it amended Article 27 of the constitution in 1992, thus privatizing *ejido* land in the context of other changes. While Zapatismo continues to receive scrutiny from a number of directions, including attention drawn to local-level democratization in the context of pluralistic ethnic communities, the movement has not translated into the same kind of engagement with the Mexican state by the Maya population—as Maya—that has been the case in Guatemala. The success of engagement with the state seems open to question in both highland Chiapas and Guatemala, and the issue of autonomy will figure to some degree in how one might gauge the success of the Maya or a more broadly construed indigenous agenda in the context of either nation.⁵ June Nash, in one of the few comparative articles dealing with Maya organizing and the issue of autonomy, argues that so far “Maya have not strengthened their ties with their Maya neighbors across the border. We do not see the fertile exchanges possibly because the governments on both sides have precluded this possibility” (Nash 2004:196).⁶

Second, although issues of indigenous and collective rights require more scrutiny from a number of angles, in the particular case of Guatemala, Richard Adams's early commentary on the Guatemala context situates the Maya movement squarely within a framework of ethnogenesis:

The Maya *intelligentsia* in Guatemala has been very successful in the promotion of the use of the term “Maya” for all of the indigenous people of Guatemala. The objective is to provide a stronger group solidarity to those that before were known as “*indios*” or “*indigenas*.” The term “Maya” is, in fact, constantly arising as a general term for the Guatemalan indigenous population. The consequence of this is that the Mayas of Guatemala triumphed in the invention of a new ethnic group: the Maya, who did not exist in 1950 but who many acknowledge exist in the present, which should be considered a happening of evolutionary significance. (Adams 1995:410, my translation)

Matthew Restall's article on Maya ethnogenesis puts an exclamation point on Adams's interpretation of the historical significance of the “invention” of the Maya. With a particular focus on the lack of a Maya identity in the Colonial period, he writes of an “invented ancient Maya identity (hence the current Maya ‘revival,’ ‘renaissance,’ and ‘resurgence’)” and of “three or four centuries of ‘Maya’ history during which Maya peoples refused to accept categories of identity assigned to them, be it indio or Maya. In a sense, then, the Maya struggled for centuries in the face of steady opposition *against* their own ethnogenesis” (Restall 2004:82, original emphasis).⁷

The recognition of a pan-Maya identity that crosses national and linguistic boundaries contrasts with perceptions of identity-in-place bound to kinship or village groups with shared lifeways and worldviews in both pre-contact and Colonial Mesoamerica. Such recognition clearly entails a constructivist perspective, although it does not address activist essentialism that has become much discussed in terms of the way the larger movement has appropriated cultural traits and the cosmivision of the “ancient Maya” and projected them into the public sphere in support of its pan-Maya agenda. Essentialism is fairly well-trodden ground at this juncture, but it is useful to note the dialectical way the term can be used depending upon who is doing the essentializing. Jon Schackt notes that “‘the invention of the Maya’ could be attributed to Maya scholarship: the archaeologists, anthropologists, etc. who started to use this label for cultural horizons and continuities that interested them. Some of their numbers implicitly ascribe to these continuities an imagined Mayan essence transcending history” (Schackt 2001:11).⁸

BEYOND ETHNOGENESIS

The argument underlying this chapter is that issues of ethnogenesis are probably less important at this point in time than is continued consideration of how indigenous peoples negotiate their multiple identities within the framework of personal experience while in some cases projecting a unified identity in the political arena. Although I ran across at least two references to multiple identities in recent literature on ethnicity in Mesoamerica, I first remember hearing the term in a conversation with Kaqchikel Maya anthropologist Alberto Esquit Choy when we were graduate school colleagues several years ago. Alberto’s family had been affected by *la violencia* in Patzicía during the war, and he had coauthored a book on the Maya Movement (Gálvez Borrell and Esquit Choy 1997). I was working on a project dealing with evangelical participation (or not) in the process of consolidating democracy in Guatemala around the turn of the millennium. A larger issue for me at the time was how to frame pan-Mayanism, on the one hand, while asking how it is possible to be both Maya and Protestant on the other.

What struck me in the field, beginning in 1997 and in some ways continuing to the present, was the frequent disjuncture between the passion surrounding Maya activism in the capital in certain forums designed to foment Maya identity and how little in some ways the Maya Movement seemed to have permeated the fabric of the municipio and the local historical Protestant community where I had done my work in the western part of the department of Quetzaltenango. There were a number of Maya organizations as well as non-government organizations (NGOs) active in the region, so it was not a case of total disassociation unless I asked a question, for

example, about Maya priests or spiritual guides. Among evangelicals I received the almost inevitable response, “Oh, you mean *brujos*.” While the tone sounds dismissive, further investigation revealed considerable certainty that indeed the shamans had power that was counterposed to new power encountered in the person of Jesus, brought initially by the Protestant missionaries. Beyond the immediate issues of conversion and the implications of conversation for identity formation, national political (and therefore cultural) agendas did not loom as large on the horizon of the people with whom I worked. Moreover, even among those who did dedicate themselves to social concerns in terms of pro-community activities or the informal investigation of their indigenous identity and *costumbre*, there was wariness about the new openness immediately after the signing of the peace accord. “Things can change,” one person told me on several occasions.

Some of this wariness has to do with the rural-urban split in Guatemala that frequently shapes social and political perspectives in profound ways. One example can be seen in terms of access to information in rural communities. San Juan Ostuncalco, the municipio where I conducted the majority of my field research, is only seven miles from Guatemala’s second city, Quetzaltenango, but in the late 1990s one could rarely buy a newspaper after noon on a weekday. Even so, in terms of what the media offered during those times of social ferment, supplements to the regular paper were published on a rotating basis in Mam, Kaqchikel, and K’iche’. The offerings reflected the momentum, if not the actual power, of the Maya Movement at that time, and the situation with the print media in the far western highlands today appears less bilingual in many ways than it was at the end of the 1990s.⁹

My own areas of research are grounded in the shifting religious landscape of Guatemala and how that shifting panorama articulates with religion writ large in Latin America and with the political landscape in social and ethnic renewal movements. The nexus, then, is one of religion, ethnicity, politics, and social change in a post-conflict situation. The processes of identity formation in the parallel frames of religion and ethnicity raise the issue of how the ethnography of religion contributes to contemporary understandings of Mayaness—in place and in transnational contexts. Immigrants to the United States, for example, provide satellite video of a patron saint’s fiesta in Florida for the consumption of the home community in the department of Huehuetenango (Steigenga 2006).

Being neither an archaeologist nor an ethnohistorian, I have tended to focus my attention on processes of ethnic renewal, which take into account both individual and collective sense(s) of identity formation and the constraining and adaptive aspects of culture perhaps best articulated in Sherry Ortner’s (2006) version of practice theory. Renewal here entails an emphasis on the processual nature of identity construction when a movement defines its identity in relation

to other groups. Joane Nagel's emphasis on ethnic renewal is rooted in a constructivist view of culture and is a reflection of how "cultural constructions assist in the construction of community when they act to define the boundaries of collective identity, establish membership criteria, generate a shared symbolic vocabulary, and define a common purpose. Cultural constructions promote collective mobilization when they serve as a basis for group solidarity, combine into symbolic systems for defining grievances and setting agendas for collective action, and provide a blueprint or repertoire of tactics" (Nagel 1994:163; cf. Nagel 1996). Ultimately, this perspective provides a more complete framework for considering ethnicity and the possibility of ethnogenesis in Mesoamerica than does the essentialist-constructivist terminology we have been using most recently or the substantivist-instrumental terminology Clifford Geertz (1973) and others were using forty years ago.

In describing her own engagement with practice coming out of a concern with feminism, Ortner found the theory compelling in that it "provid[ed] a dialectical synthesis of the opposition between 'structure' (or the social world as constituted) and 'agency' (or the interested practices of real people) that had not previously been achieved. Moreover, the idea that the world is 'made'—in a very extended and complex sense, of course—through the actions of ordinary people also meant that it could be unmade and remade" (Ortner 2006:16–17). This space of practice is the place where both Maya Movement activists and individuals trying to make sense of their own identity in place engage the *costumbre* handed down by the ancestors and may find themselves differentially engaged in processes directed toward the *reivindicación* of Maya identity. In terms of agency, the issue here is the scale at which people are engaged with political processes involving such *reivindicación*.¹⁰ Are they focused more on the local context and the quotidian activities surrounding community life and subsistence, or do they begin with the more expansive national or transnational context, where the frame of activity involves dialogue even with those who today might insist that they maintain a cosmopolitan perspective on place and identity?

RELIGIOUS PRACTICE, PLURALISM, AND IDENTITY

In certain regards, religion as such received rather less attention than I envisioned when I first became involved with the panel out of which this volume has come. Because much of my work is done with evangelicals, I have reflected for several years on Alan Sandstrom's comment about how Protestantism in Mexico (and by extension in Mesoamerica) can be conceived of as a "third ethnicity." Protestantism in these contexts surely fits the framework of ethnogenesis:

With people's choices defined by the Indian-Mestizo divide, there was little room for radical change in ethnic identity. The Protestant missionaries probably unknowingly provided a third alternative for people experiencing the collapse of the old colonial arrangements and growing influence of the new economic order. Instead of choosing between Indian and Mestizo, they could now become *hermanos*. Converts to Protestantism are neither Indians nor Mestizos but instead form a third ethnic group that sidesteps the traditional social hierarchy with its roots in the colonial past. Members of this new group see themselves as dynamic, progressive, and closely affiliated with the prestige of the United States and its perceived technological and economic superiority. (Sandstrom 2001:277–78)

If Sandstrom is correct, the argument can be made that we have actually witnessed not one but two ethnic movements in Mesoamerica over the past three decades. Moreover, both pan-Mayanism and the advent of Protestantism can be situated within the context of rapid social change indexed in Latin America by post-Colonial global movements of indigenous activism and the oft-noted shift in the center of gravity of Christianity to the global South.¹¹ Nevertheless, given the pluralism of Protestantisms in Latin America, I suspect that Sandstrom's observation holds true more at the community level than at larger scales of analysis.

In framing the issue at the community level, I am suggesting that practice approaches linking structure and agency are more useful in examining the interplay of religious and ethnic identity than are more rigid notions of ethnogenesis, although both optics are useful for understanding identity construction in place and across borders in the Americas. While identity in pre-contact and Colonial Mesoamerica is typically understood to be rooted in particular places and communities, indigenous or Maya Protestant "ethnicity" itself fragments into disparate groups that have differential valences with Mayaness, the larger evangelical community, and the nation-state. Maya evangelicals continue to identify with their language and cultural communities even as they also identify with particular denominations or more broadly conceived religious currents such as Pentecostalism. In this view, in Guatemala and probably in Chiapas and the Yucatán region across the border as well, it is not a coincidence that evangelical religions gained traction and began significant growth only in the 1960s. Henri Gooren reports that in 1960 Guatemala was 5 percent Protestant; that number had grown to 7 percent by 1976 (Gooren 2001:183) and to at least 25 percent by 2001 (Grossman 2002:128).¹²

From another perspective, conversion viewed from the local rather than the aggregate level can be seen as a process that simultaneously involves identity formation and the segmenting of identity.¹³ Geoffrey Braswell attributes the historical evidence for the Nahualization of K'iche' elite culture in the decades prior to contact

in Guatemala to a “pragmatic adaptive strategy” related in part to the development of classes within K’iche’ society and in part to instrumental concerns about the presence of Nahua speakers in close vicinity in the Xoconochco (Soconusco) region along the Pacific Coast (Braswell 2003:303). To be sure, Maya Protestantism represents a different kind of adaptation embodying simultaneously identification with *lo maya* and the potential for the fragmentation of what it means to be Maya within both the individual person and the community as a whole. These dual potentialities are both in evidence when the Biblical Society of Guatemala releases a new translation of the Bible in the Q’eqchi’ language or when a Pentecostal congregation in an *aldea* of Ostuncalco with 9,000 inhabitants has 800 adherents.

This *aldea* is also one in which local shamans are said to have burned the house of Presbyterian missionaries in the 1930s, yet the Mam language predominates in the community and the women, at least, have not given up their distinctive dress as a marker of identity. Such Pentecostal congregations also sometimes provide room for women prophets and pastors, even if they do not address social development issues within local communities. I suggest that this points to a process of the reconstruction of identity at the community level, and it remains to be seen how this reconstruction will be projected into larger spatial frameworks such as that of the *municipio*, which in its entirety is over 80 percent Mam speaking. It is worth noting that the *alcalde* between 2004 and 2008 was a Catholic from the same *aldea*.

One might even argue that in the long term, conversion also represents a process wherein *costumbre* is traded for a new *costumbre*, the shape of which projects a Maya identity of unknown character into the precarious future that is Guatemala’s destiny. Such a new *costumbre* may well incorporate new content in terms of both cosmovision and practice, but it will also reflect continuity with lifeways associated with Maya communities and local ways of adapting to outside influence evident in the Maya cultural tradition for at least two millennia.¹⁴ As in the past, this mode of adaptation will articulate multiple agendas in other frames of reference that remain under negotiation. The nature of Maya identity in the congregation mentioned above surely contrasts with the sense of identity articulated in June 1996, when Presbyterians in the Kaqchikel Presbytery of the National Evangelical Presbyterian Church memorialized Manuel Saquic, their assassinated colleague and director of the presbytery’s human rights office, as a triple martyr—a Maya and a Christian (in the ecumenical sense) dedicated to human rights (Samson 2007:104–7).¹⁵

The ambiguity of these identity struggles in light of larger processes of identity formation can be seen in this excerpt from an interview with a Maya Presbyterian minister. He is literate, with almost a high school education, and he has a long history of activism as a catechist and a member of pro–community service committees

in the largely Mam municipio of San Juan Ostuncalco. My question had to do with what being Maya or even Mam meant to him:

Well if we speak [of] Mam, we understand that we are a group or tribe of the Maya people, descendants of the Maya . . . Some say that we don't come from the Maya, as if we came with the Maya. Now they say we are descendants of the Maya. So there isn't a version or exact information. But as Mams we feel that, yes, we are Maya, we are descendants of the Maya people, and we are from the Mam tribe . . . We feel that, yes, we are an authentic and native (*genuino y natural*) people from Guatemala, a Maya people.

And also, we feel that [our culture] is a treasure. We are not ashamed of being Mams; on the contrary, we are proud to speak in our . . . own language; and now our women dress in their own style of clothes. [It's] not like before when there was shame in front of the Ladinos, because they say we are *indios*, compared us to pigs—dirty, useless. Because the word *indio* means useless, he doesn't know anything. But on the contrary, I am not ashamed to speak my language before the Ladinos. It is my mother language; it is an inheritance from our ancestors. But I am Mam as well; I am proud to be Mam, to be authentic and native from Guatemala.

CONCLUSION

This returns us to the image of the Maya as a *pueblo en marcha*. Responding to pluralism in the arena of the continuing construction of ethnic identity—and in the somewhat more restricted frame of religious practice—demands a move beyond conceptualizations of ethnicity solely defined by the practice of a unified costume that shapes personal and collective identity through the generations. Even so, contemporary formulations of pluralism begin for many in a sense of participation growing out of an enduring identity in continuity with the past. In Mesoamerica, such formulations of ethnicity have the potential to articulate profound political and social challenges to the legitimacy of nation-states founded on constructs of *mestizaje* or *indigenismo* that continue to marginalize indigenous peoples in discourses about the nature of citizenship and the state. More sophisticated affirmations of pluralism move us into the realm of embracing difference within the context of common projects; when it comes to nation building and reconciliation in post-conflict Guatemala, the character of the state itself is brought under scrutiny by the process of Maya ethnic renewal.

Maya religious practices will continue to be a key aspect of the definition of Mayaness and the construction of ethnicity on the Guatemalan national stage. I attended a book presentation in a downtown hotel in Guatemala City during the summer field season of 2007. Admittedly, it was held in Zone 1 and not in the

swank hotels of Zones 9 and 10 of the city's "Zona Viva." Nevertheless, it was attended by 75 to 100 people, mostly Maya, as the book dealt with political parties in the national elections and their stance in regard to Maya issues, specifically Maya women (Ochoa and Garoz 2007). It was also an educational event, with a lively presentation on the book, commentary from two critics, and questions from the audience. I was handed a program as I entered the room where the event was held, and I saw that the assembled were turning in the four directions as a Maya spiritual guide (a priestess in this case) lit candles and opened the event. The invocation was listed as part of the program, and after nearly an hour and a half of presentations, with everyone ready for food, the "closing of the invocation" took place. It was rather hurried but surprisingly ecumenical in nature and tone, much like a hasty benediction when the 11:00 Sunday church service has gone ten minutes too long.

As I left, I wondered about North American battles over the separation of church and state and how the pluralism of religious practices in Guatemala will shape the march of Maya identity and Guatemalan-ness in both time and transnational space in the years to come. It seems clear that governments in Mesoamerica will continue to resist agendas related to the autonomy and collective rights of indigenous peoples even as activists pursue a variety of agendas that will span the spectrum from the ostensibly cultural to the overtly political. The invocation at the book signing demonstrates the increased focus on religion or cosmology as a central aspect of ethnic identity and points to culture as a point of contestation as the Maya deal with multiple or multifaceted identities (LeCount, this volume) tied to local, national, and transnational spaces into the future. For the past, ethnohistorical and archaeological evidence reveals instances of pan-regional identity undergirding the legitimation of elite power in various contexts throughout Mesoamerica (cf. Carmack 1968; Ringle 2004).¹⁶ Although interpreting the record remains an ongoing process, the legitimizing forces of mythology and cosmology strengthen identity construction in the present.

The Maya Movement itself often has a different valence depending on whether the reference is to Maya nationalism in a multi- or pluricultural society or to Maya identity at the local level. In fact, defining Maya culture or identity is complicated at the community level, where purity of "Maya" practice might be less of a problem than at the level of those involved in the creation of a national ideology rooted to some degree in opposition to the culture of "the Other."¹⁷ In pragmatic and political terms, what takes place beyond the community, such as transnational migration or the shaping of government policy in regard to cultural issues like bilingual education or respect for sacred places on the landscape as facets of collective or cultural rights, will also have a bearing on whether identity is reinforced or contested in

various spatial frames. Meanwhile, ethnographers and archaeologists alike will gain a better understanding of the shape of identity in Mesoamerica in the past precisely to the extent that we dedicate ourselves to a clearer reading of the movements of Maya peoples in the present.

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NOTES

1. Xiu was the name of the dominant lineage near Mani at the time of the Spanish incursion (Clendinnen 1987:25).

2. As a colleague notes, the east coast of the peninsula is known as the Maya Riviera in tourist circles.

3. On the use of “cultural tradition” for Mesoamerica, see Carmack, Gasco, and Gosson (2007:5–6). I also continue to be informed by conceptualizations such as that of a Maya cultural region for the place inhabited by contemporary Maya populations in both lowland and highland areas. This perspective is not meant to deny differences between different regions, differences that can also be indexed by the lowland-highland dichotomy and that are reflected in cosmology as well.

4. It is significant that the rural and indigenous population carried center-left candidate Álvaro Colom to victory in the runoff election with Otto Pérez Molina, a retired army general. Colom won in twenty of Guatemala’s twenty-two departments, the first time a candidate won the presidency without carrying Guatemala City since the formal return to democracy in the mid-1980s. This is also pertinent to differential ethnic organizing in rural and urban areas, mentioned below. See the analysis in European Union Election Observation Mission, Guatemala (European Union 2007:59) and the transcript of the interview with Guatemalan author Francisco Goldman on the Democracy Now website (http://www.democracynow.org/2007/11/6/guatemalas_indigenous_countryside_drives_election_victory; accessed October 27, 2009). According to Guatemala’s Supreme Electoral Commission, Menchú, who ran on a left-wing coalition ticket, received 145,080 votes in the 2001 presidential election; that was 2.87 percent of the vote (TSE 2012:156).

None of my commentary here should be taken as ignoring the fragmentation of Guatemalan party politics or the difficulties of forming leftist coalitions in Guatemala and much of Latin America (see Samson 2012).

5. In Guatemala, the Accord on the Right and Identity of Indigenous Peoples has never been ratified by the congress, despite having been approved by the government and guerrilla negotiators in 1995. Likewise, the San Andrés Accords negotiated between the Mexican government and the Zapatista National Liberation Party (EZLN) in late 1995 and 1996 represented a push for both autonomy and Indian rights, but it has also not been acted upon by the Mexican congress (Womack 1999:304–15; Aubrey 2003; Esteva 2003).

6. Other reasons for the divergent trajectories include the geography and the multiplicity of languages spoken in the region. The Maya on the peninsula in Mexico are also separated by long distances from the central power of the Federal District and by their own history of separatism and resistance. In addition, the more diverse indigenous population in Mexico complicates efforts at pan-indigenous organizing in a way not experienced in Guatemala, despite the insistence that the government acknowledge the rights of the Maya, Garífuna, and Xinca peoples (Bill Ringle, personal communication, 2008).

7. While I agree with the general idea here, I am less comfortable with the notion of the invention of an ancient identity. The process seems more dialectical to me, although that is surely a space for debate among ethnohistorians, archaeologists, and ethnographers. This is one of the reasons I emphasize the notion of ethnic renewal (cf. chapter 5, this volume).

8. Schackt's take on the issue of authenticity is that "a person's ethnic identity is authentic to the extent that it is really felt and taken for granted by him/herself and his or her social surroundings" (2001:10). On the essentialism issue, see the relevant sections in Warren (1998) and Fischer (2001).

9. The issue of communications media as a whole requires more formal investigation in terms of how it influences identity and organizing in both urban and rural areas. I suspect that radio and recording media present different stories in terms of bilingualism. From the standpoint of religion in Maya communities, both Catholics and Protestants have access to the airwaves. Moreover, the Protestant traffic in cassette and CD technology with music in Mayan languages as well as Spanish is ubiquitous in the weekly market context.

10. Cojtí and others use this Spanish term frequently in discussing the process of projecting Maya culture into the public sphere. It has not been examined closely enough, although while revising my dissertation for publication I came across a helpful definition of *revendicate* in the context of Louisiana civil law: "to bring an action to enforce rights in (specific property) esp. for the recognition of ownership and the recovery of possession from one wrongfully in possession." See the entry at www.merriam-webster.com/legal/revendicate, accessed October 14, 2016. This provides a powerful interpretive framework in light of the attempt to reclaim culture and identity from the Mestizo state while simultaneously pushing for the creation of a multiethnic state.

11. On indigenous activism, see Brysk (2000) and Cleary and Steigenga (2004). Jenkins (2002) provides a useful introduction to recent changes affecting the character of the global Christian movement.

12. Figures of 30 percent and higher are routinely cited, and occasionally a number as high as 40 percent is given. The 25 percent figure is likely applicable to Chiapas and the states of Yucatán, Campeche, and Quintana Roo as well. In the Guatemalan case (and in Latin America as a whole), 70 percent of Protestants are Pentecostal. To give some time depth, historical Protestants were invited into the country in the early 1880s in the context of efforts by the liberal government to promote modernization and secularization in the face of the Catholic Church. The actual growth rate of evangelicalism appears to have leveled off in the early 1990s, perhaps in part because of the end of the war.

13. The nature of conversion itself is receiving increasing attention in the literature on religion in various disciplines. The notion of conversion as a process makes generalization about the significance of the increasing number of Protestant adherents in various parts of Latin America hazardous at best. See Steigenga and Cleary (2007) for articles that address these issues both theoretically and in various places in Latin America. Humberto Ruz and Garma Navarro (2005) provide a window into the meaning of religious pluralism in contemporary Mesoamerica.

14. See the discussion of “conventions of community” in Watanabe (1992); cf. the sense of communal adaptation discussed in Cook (2001). MacKenzie’s (2010) work examining networks and hierarchy in Maya ethnic activism adds another important dimension for consideration both in Guatemala and in the cross-cultural analysis of ethnic organizing.

15. For more on this kind of inculturated indigenous Protestantism, see also Garrard-Burnett (2004).

16. The references to Tulán as a place of origin in the ethnohistorical record and the spread of the cult of the Feathered Serpent in the archaeological record highlight the historical influence emanating from the core region of central Mexico.

17. In making these comments, I am drawing largely from some of the conclusions of Bastos (2007:373–78), who analyzes the Maya Movement as a process of “Mayanization” within the frame of a multicultural ideology.

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