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Christa D. Cesario

University of Pennsylvania, cesario@sas.upenn.edu

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Abstract

This dissertation tracks the mobilization of Yucatec Maya culture and identity across Yucatán, Mexico and San Francisco, California. Moving within a circulating discourse pertaining to a crisis of culture loss, I pause at three distinct sites to explore how "culture" is deployed for recognition in national and transnational spaces. I focus on Tuch Mukuy, a 17-member community theater troupe in Oxkutzcab, Yucatán; U Najil Xook, a one-member NGO dedicated to Mayan language preservation; and Alianza del Pueblo Maya, an NGO formed by the members of the Yucatec Maya migrant community in San Francisco to represent their interests and provide for their needs.

I explore the efforts of Tuch Mukuy, U Najil Xook, and Alianza del Pueblo Maya to position themselves to be seen as Maya or indigenous by state and non-state actors across shifting fields of power and authority in Mexico and the United States. I examine the ways in which the space of the nation forecloses certain mobilizations of culture and cultural identity, while the space of the transnational open up possibilities for alternative visions and mobilizations of culture and identity.

Within Yucatán, the space of the national, Tuch Mukuy and U Najil Xook are trapped into particular configurations of culture that will always be past-oriented. In Mexico, claims for rights and recognition are made to the nation-state based upon a history of marginalization and state-sponsored cultural assimilationist programs. Maya culture becomes framed, necessarily, through terms of revitalization and preservation, and packaged in the tangible and intangible forms of that which can be saved--such as, language, dress, and traditional practices, and knowledge entailed therein. This past-orientation renders claims to Mayaness as always under the impossible scrutiny of authenticity.

In San Francisco, the space of the transnational, Alianza del Pueblo Maya becomes untethered from the future anterior temporality characteristic of recognition claims within the Mexican nation-state. In a city saturated with civil society organizations dedicated the rights of a range of politicized identities situated in race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, culture, and nation, Alianza must rely on a combination of strategies and alliances to become culturally recognized, but also politically and economically addressed. Coalition, not culture, becomes the space through which claims of recognition are made.

Degree Type

Dissertation

Degree Name

Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)

Graduate Group

Anthropology

First Advisor

Deborah A. Thomas

Keywords

Cultural politics, Heritage, Maya, Migration, Recognition, Temporality

Subject Categories

Latin American Languages and Societies | Latin American Studies | Social and Cultural Anthropology

THE ANXIETY OF RECOGNITION: THE SEARCH FOR LEGIBILITY
OF MAYAN IDENTITIES IN YUCATÁN, MEXICO AND SAN FRANCISCO,

CALIFORNIA

Christa D. Cesario

A DISSERTATION

in

Anthropology

Present to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

in

Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the

Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

2014

Dr. Deborah A. Thomas
Professor of Anthropology
Supervisor of Dissertation

Dr. Clark Erickson
Professor of Anthropology
Graduate Group Chairperson

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Richard M. Leventhal
Professor of Anthropology

Dr. Kathleen D. Hall
Associate Professor of Education and Anthropology

THE ANXIETY OF RECOGNITION: THE SEARCH FOR LEGIBILITY OF MAYAN
IDENTITIES IN YUCATÁN, MEXICO AND SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

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Christa D. Cesario

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

After years of graduate school and the completion of a dissertation I am left with a proliferation of gratitude. At the University of Pennsylvania I have been privileged to work with three incredible mentors: Deborah A. Thomas, my advisor, Richard M. Leventhal, and Kathleen D. Hall. I met Kathleen Hall when I enrolled in her Craft of Ethnography course in the final semester of my graduate school coursework. At that time I was still making the transition from Maya archaeology to cultural anthropology and Dr. Hall was one of the first cultural anthropology professors at Penn to take me seriously as a cultural anthropologist. I am grateful to Richard Leventhal for his unyielding support and for the many opportunities he has given me to work with his Cultural Heritage Center and in Tihosuco. These experiences have helped shaped the way I think about culture and heritage, as well as the role of the anthropologist outside of academia.

I owe my greatest thanks to my advisor and committee chair, Deborah Thomas. Deb agreed to take me on as a student well after I had finished coursework and written my dissertation research proposal. In fact, if I remember correctly, it was the day before my oral exams. Her patience and support have been unwavering, and not only has my work benefited immeasurably from her continued intellectual engagement and guidance, but as an individual, I have as well.

I also owe my thanks to the institutions that have supported this project throughout its various stages. Preliminary research trips to Yucatán were funded by research grants from the Lisa Lin Brody-Foley Endowment of the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, as well as the Foreign

Language and Area Studies (FLAS) Fellowship Program. A Wenner-Gren Dissertation Fieldwork Grant funded the main body of ethnographic research that I conducted between 2009 and 2010 in Yucatán and San Francisco. Finally, the Reed Foundation's Ruth Landes Memorial Research Fund supported the writing phase of this project.

I own a sincere thank you to my first academic advisor at the University of Pennsylvania, Jeremy A. Sabloff. I entered the Penn anthropology graduate program to study Maya archaeology but with every new semester my intellectual interests and pursuits moved further and further afield. Although I turned out not to be the student he had agreed to take on (during his first year back after ten years as Director of the Penn Museum, no less), Dr. Sabloff provided unyielding support and encouragement and remained genuinely engaged with every new turn my research took. I can say with certainty that without his support this dissertation would not exist.

My journey across subfields from archaeology to cultural anthropology was not one I made alone, and I am especially grateful to Shoshaunna Parks for our travels and travails through archaeology and cultural heritage pursuits in Mexico and Central America. I truly value the many late night conversations I had with Jenna Feindel in Oxkutzcab about our respective research projects and the frustration and doubt that invariably come along with ethnographic fieldwork. I owe an enormous debt of gratitude to María Luisa Góngora Pacheco and Ana Patricia Martínez Huchím. Time and again they generously shared their expertise on Mayan cultural revitalization in Yucatán. María Luisa and Ana Patricia were not only my dear friends, but also my family in Yucatán, and I cherish our countless adventures. I have had some of the most engaging conversations

about my research with Alberto Pérez Rendón; his knowledge and insight has enriched my work immeasurably.

In Philadelphia, Britt Dahlberg, Kristen Fellows, Beth Hallowell, Nicholas Limerick, Jordan Pickrell, and Daniel Wyche have all offered invaluable comments on the conference papers that would become dissertation chapters, as well as actual chapter drafts. And a special thank you to Jake Blumgart for his generosity in editing what was certainly difficult prose to wade through. I must also thank Teresa Raczek, not only for years of friendship, but for our many engaging conversations about four-field anthropology, teaching, and the experiences of women in academia (and for letting me colonize her home during the week leading up to the tabling of this dissertation).

I have benefitted in so many ways from the friendships I have made during my years in graduate school at the University of Pennsylvania and I am especially grateful to Kerry Dunn, Kristen Fellows, and Jordan Pickrell for their incredible support and encouragement. I must also thank my friends and colleagues, including Joanne Baron, Crystal Biruk, Britt Dahlberg, Beth Hallowell, Michael Joiner, Sarah Kurnick, Nicholas Limerick, and Derek Newberry, who have helped me to thrive as a person and a scholar.

Of course, none of this would be possible without the love and support I have received from my mother, Joan Cesario, and my father, Robert Cesario. There is no way I can adequately thank them for their years of unwavering confidence.

Finally, it is impossible to express the debt of gratitude I owe to the individuals in Yucatán and San Francisco who agreed to let me into their lives. The use of pseudonyms throughout these pages to protect their identity prohibits formal acknowledgement but I remain forever grateful to them for their patience and generosity.

ABSTRACT

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Christa D. Cesario

Deborah A. Thomas

This dissertation tracks the mobilization of Yucatec Maya culture and identity across Yucatán, Mexico and San Francisco, California. Moving within a circulating discourse pertaining to a crisis of culture loss, I pause at three distinct sites to explore how “culture” is deployed for recognition in national and transnational spaces. I focus on Tuch Mukuy, a 17-member community theater troupe in Oxkutzcab, Yucatán; U Najil Xook, a one-member NGO dedicated to Mayan language preservation; and Alianza del Pueblo Maya, an NGO formed by the members of the Yucatec Maya migrant community in San Francisco to represent their interests and provide for their needs.

I explore the efforts of Tuch Mukuy, U Najil Xook, and Alianza del Pueblo Maya to position themselves to be seen as Maya or indigenous by state and non-state actors across shifting fields of power and authority in Mexico and the United States. I examine the ways in which the space of the nation forecloses certain mobilizations of culture and cultural identity, while the space of the transnational open up possibilities for alternative visions and mobilizations of culture and identity.

Within Yucatán, the space of the national, Tuch Mukuy and U Najil Xook are trapped into particular configurations of culture that will always be past-oriented. In Mexico, claims for rights and recognition are made to the nation-state based upon a

history of marginalization and state-sponsored cultural assimilationist programs. Maya culture becomes framed, necessarily, through terms of revitalization and preservation, and packaged in the tangible and intangible forms of that which can be saved—such as, language, dress, and traditional practices, and knowledge entailed therein. This past-orientation renders claims to Mayaness as always under the impossible scrutiny of authenticity.

In San Francisco, the space of the transnational, *Alianza del Pueblo Maya* becomes untethered from the future anterior temporality characteristic of recognition claims within the Mexican nation-state. In a city saturated with civil society organizations dedicated the rights of a range of politicized identities situated in race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, culture, and nation, *Alianza* must rely on a combination of strategies and alliances to become culturally recognized, but also politically and economically addressed. Coalition, not culture, becomes the space through which claims of recognition are made.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	vi
Table of Contents	viii
List of Tables	x
List of Figures	xi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Research Sites and Entanglement	2
Indigenous Articulations	6
Structure of the Dissertation	11
Chapter 2: The Anxiety of Distinction	15
History of Rural Theater in Mexico	16
Culturas Populares and the First Cohort of Maya Intellectuals	28
Mayan Cultural Autonomy in Yucatecan Community Theater	37
Tuch Mukuy and the Production of Authenticity	42
Discussion	51
Chapter 3: The Anxiety of Belonging	53
Jach Maya	54
Preservation From Indigenismo to Interculturalidad	74

U Najil Xook	85
Mes de las Lenguas Maternas	89
Discussion	93
Chapter 4: The Anxiety of Visibility	95
Overview of the Development of the Official Censuses of Mexico and the United States	103
2010 United States Census Discussion	124
An Introduction to Yucatecan Migration	125
Alianza del Pueblo Maya	134
San Francisco, 2010	140
Discussion	147
Chapter 5: The Anxiety of Coalition	150
Indígena Care Project	154
Grant Writing	158
Discussion	165
Chapter 6: Conclusion	169
Bibliography	172

LIST OF TABLES

- Table 2.1 Distribution of attendees by institution, with the author's institutional abbreviations included.
- Table 2.2 Institutions founded by, and academic and professional appointments of, Alfredo Barrera Vásquez.
- Table 2.3 Grapheme changes proposed by each of the assembled institutions.

LIST OF FIGURES

- Figure 2.1 INDEMAYA guide to the Mes de las Lenguas Maternas events, February 2010.
- Figure 3.1 Racial categories included on U.S. Census schedules between 1790 and 1990 (Nobles 2002:67).
- Figure 3.2 2010 U.S. Census Questions 8 and 9 as they appeared on the bilingual form.
- Figure 3.3 Concrete molded to look like horizontal siding (2nd floor). Oxkutzcab, Yucatán. December 2011. Photograph by Alberto Pérez Rendón. Used with kind permission from Mariel Caamal.
- Figure 3.4 Restaurante Alcatraz. Oxkutzcab, Yucatán. July 2010. Author photograph.
- Figure 3.5 Super California sign (upper left), Plaza California. Oxkutzcab, Yucatán. July 2010. Author photograph.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

This dissertation tracks the mobilization of Yucatec Maya culture and identity across Yucatán, Mexico and San Francisco, California. Moving within a circulating discourse pertaining to a crisis of culture loss, I pause at three distinct sites to explore how “culture” is deployed for recognition in national and transnational spaces. I focus on Tuch Mukuy, a 17-member community theater troupe in Oxkutzcab, Yucatán; U Najil Xook, a one-member NGO dedicated to Mayan language preservation; and Alianza del Pueblo Maya, an NGO formed by the members of the Yucatec Maya migrant community in San Francisco to represent their interests and provide for their needs.

I explore the question of legibility, in particular, how individuals and groups position themselves to be seen as Maya or indigenous by state and non-state actors across shifting fields of power and authority within and across national spaces. More specifically, I ask, what does the transnational *do* to culture? If current cultural recognition movements are historically and geopolitically situated, what happens when they become re-historicized and re-politicized through transnational migration? In this dissertation I will argue that the space of the nation forecloses certain mobilizations of culture and cultural identity, and the space of the transnational open up possibilities for alternative visions and mobilizations.

Research Sites and Entanglement

This argument emerged directly from my work with Tuch Mukuy, U Najil Xook, and Alianza del Pueblo Maya. In this section I will offer a general description of the sites, the particular modes of ethnographic inquiry I engaged in, and finally, I will tie the three sites back to my argument.

Tuch Mukuy is a Yucatec Maya community theater group in Oxkutzcab, Yucatán, founded in 1991 by Florencia Medina Solís, who is known for her work in poetry, storytelling, and theater. I worked with Tuch Mukuy from mid-September through mid-January of 2009-2010. I lived in Florencia's house during this time, which made attending Tuch Mukuy's rehearsals easy, since they took place on her patio. The house was frequently visited by neighbors and troupe members, which helped me to better understand the position of the theater group within their lives. I traveled with Tuch Mukuy to their performances and also attended many community theater festivals where Tuch Mukuy participated, such as the *Ritual de la Muerte Maya* on October 24, 2009 (which I will discuss in chapter two). I interviewed members of Tuch Mukuy, and directors and members of other community theater troupes, as well as noted individuals within the Yucatecan theater community at large, including the director of the Institute of Culture, Yucatán (ICY). I also attended various *teatro regional* performances in Mérida to better understand the larger context of theater in which Tuch Mukuy was situated.

U Najil Xook is an NGO primarily focused on language education and was founded in 2008 by Antonia Quintero Canché, who received her *licenciatura* (a bachelor's degree with a required thesis) in Maya literature and language from the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán in 1996. From mid-January through the beginning of

April 2010, I lived with Antonia at her home in a city in the eastern region of Yucatán near Valladolid. And it is with Antonia that I spent much of my time because U Najil Xook, as I will discuss in detail in chapter three, is essentially an NGO of one person. I attended multiple conference related to the Mayan language—some at which she was a speaker—for example *Cosmogonía, Tradiciones, y Costumbres en la Enseñanza de la Lengua Maya* (Cosmology, Traditions, and Customs in the Teaching of the Mayan Language), which was held at the Universidad Intercultural Morelos, Quintana Roo in January 2010. Conferences like this were filled with talk of loss, and I am certainly not the first to find that dispossession began to sound like the only reason that Maya should be taught. My work with U Najil Xook overlapped with Yucatán’s month long celebration of the UNESCO International Day of Mother Languages, *El Mes de las Lenguas Maternas*, that began on February 21, 2010. During the Mes de las Lenguas Maternas I attended panels on a wide variety of topics including the government’s responsibility for preserving the Mayan language, to the role of literature in the conservation of Maya culture. In attending academic conferences and Mes de las Lenguas Maternas panels and activities, I gained a strong understanding of the conversations occurring across multiple fields—academic and non-academic, state and non-state—concerning the future of the Mayan language.

While I was in Yucatán I attended theater performances and lectures regardless of which theme I happened to be engaged in at the time. While working with U Najil Xook I traveled to the *VII Festival de Teatro de Municipios* that was held in Oxkutzcab from March 26-28, and in which Tuch Mukuy was performed. Antonia and I travel to Oxkutzcab on February 27 to watch Tuch Mukuy perform their play, *Aluxo ’ob* (which I

will discuss in chapter two), for the inauguration of the Mes de las Lenguas Maternas, and Florencia was a panelist for an event on storytelling during that same month.

I lived in San Francisco for three months from April 2010 through June 2010 to work with Alianza del Pueblo Maya, an NGO by and for Yucatec Maya migrants. I spent my days at the Alianza office, attending meetings, working on an English version of their website, running errands with the *promotoras*, and participating in the various “health and wellness” programs offered by the NGO, which I will discuss further in chapter five.

I did not live in the Mission District, where the NGO was located, nor in the neighborhoods of Civic Center or the Tenderloin where most of the Yucatecan migrants rent apartments. Rather, I lived in an apartment about two miles away just north of the Golden Gate Park panhandle and nearer to friends. This did limit my engagement with the Yucatec Maya community to a degree, and largely to Yucatec Maya individuals associated with Alianza in some way. However, because my goal was to track instances of responses to a crisis discourse, my work with the organization itself was better suited to answering my research questions.

Although I chose these three sites because of their differences, I found their boundaries to be increasingly porous. One of the members of Tuch Mukuy had only just returned from nine years in San Francisco when I began my work with the theater group. While in San Francisco he had been participating in various activities with Alianza del Pueblo Maya, and was co-director of their jarana dance troupe. Florencia was a *promotora* for Culturas Populares, where it was her job to help groups develop their grant proposals for PACMYC. Because of Antonia’s reputation as a Maya scholar, she was invited to be the president of the PACMYC selection committee in 2009. The following

year in San Francisco I found one of Antonia's poems posted to the Alianza website and learned that it was given to Alianza by a mutual friend, the anthropologist Anne Whiteside. These intersections illustrate how one can never be exclusively at a single site. Throughout my fieldwork, I was in simultaneous conversation with each organization and each theme.

Possibilities for Recognition

In tracking how, why, and when these groups variously positioned themselves to be seen as Maya or indigenous, I found distinct differences in *possibilities* for cultural recognition between the national and transnational spaces. As I will demonstrate, within Yucatán, the space of the national, Tuch Mukuy and U Najil Xook are trapped into particular configurations of culture that will always be past-oriented. In Mexico, claims for rights and recognition are made to the nation-state based upon a history of marginalization and state-sponsored cultural assimilationist programs. Maya culture becomes framed, necessarily, through terms of revitalization and preservation, and packaged in the tangible and intangible forms of that which can be saved—such as, language, dress, traditional practices, and knowledge entailed therein. The possibilities for alternative social projects are already foreclosed upon by what Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) calls, a “future anterior” temporality. This past-orientation renders claims to Mayaness as always under the impossible scrutiny of authenticity (Povinelli 2002).

In San Francisco, the space of the transnational, Alianza del Pueblo Maya becomes untethered from the future anterior temporality characteristic of recognition claims within the Mexican nation-state. In a city saturated with civil society organizations

dedicated the rights of a range of politicized identities situated in race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, culture, and nation, Alianza must rely on a combination of strategies and alliances to become culturally recognized, but also politically and economically addressed. Coalition, not culture, becomes the space through which claims of recognition are made.

Indigenous Articulations

Politicization of Indigenous Ethnicity in Latin America

The 1990s saw a wave of constitutional reform across Latin America that brought with it transformations in discourses of nationalism and conceptualizations of citizenship. These events triggered a sustained focus on the rise of indigenous social movements (Van Cott 1995; Nelson 1999; Seider 2002; Yashar 1998, 2005) and revitalization projects (Van Cott 1995; Urban and Sherzer 2001). Anthropologists adopted Gayatri Spivak's (1990) notion of "strategic essentialism" to describe the adoption of a kind of "nationalist essentialism" by indigenous groups (Warren 1998:77) and wide-spread performance of "authenticity." Activists in the Pan-Maya movement in Guatemala articulated a self-conscious Pan-identity in order to be a political force within civil society (Fischer 2001; Fischer and Brown 1996; Warren 1998). Amazonia Indians began using new technologies to "maximize the symbolic" and display an "Indianess" legible to western audiences (Conklin 1997; Graham 2002; Turner 1992, 2002), "understanding that authenticity is their biggest asset in national and global arenas" (Graham 2002:206). Despite a veneer of "tactical conformity" (Clifford 2013:46) Rappaport (2005) stresses recognition of the plurality of discourses and voices within Pan-indigenous movements.

Scholars found that such forms of strategic representation can be at odds with local indigenous realities (Jackson 1999; Conklin and Graham 1995), and cautioned that maintaining a narrow scholarly focus on public demonstrations of indigeneity threatens to neglect how indigenous identities are equally shaped through other avenues, such as schools (Garcia 2005). More recently, Shaylih Muehlman (2009) found that the essentializing images previously popularized by indigenous people in environmentalist discourses have led to ambivalence among NGO workers and government officials in contemporary debates over fishing rights for the Cucapá because they “fish like Mexicans” —using motorboats and nets, instead of bows and arrows—which defy earlier imagines of indigenous people as “living in harmony” with nature (*ibid.*).

Production of Indigenous Subjects in Neoliberal Latin America and Beyond

Hale (2005) coined the term neoliberal multiculturalism to describe a limited package of recognition of cultural rights, coupled with neoliberal restructuring that creates increased demand for scarce resources by NGOs and other interest groups. This process leaves the government in the position to divide resources among those groups it believes are least threatening to its authority, giving the state “a means to ‘manage’ multiculturalism while removing its radical or threatening edge” (507). Shannon Speed (2005) claims the Mexican state exploits the discourse of human rights to infringe upon indigenous rights gained through multicultural recognition. And Nancy Postero (2007) asserts that the Law of Popular Participation in Bolivia, which “established new forms of local participation and specifically named Indians as participants” (124), also served to

bring the rural population into the nation by extending the arms of the state to all parts of the country.

Moving away Latin America, Povinelli (2002) found liberal multiculturalism to create “impossible desires” by “inspiring subaltern and minority subjects to identify with the impossible object of an authentic self-identity” (6). To be recognized, any cultural identity must fit within the “brackets of recognition” of liberal tolerance (Povinelli 2011), and she reminds us “recognition is simply one of several forms that the apprehension of alternative social projects and worlds take in late liberalism” (78). James Clifford (2013) refers to debates within settler nations about who “has culture” (Povinelli 2002; Brown 2003) to be “a kind of self-marketing in a system of neoliberal tolerance” (46). Clifford’s “self-marketing” can also be seen in how human beings deploy ethnicity, culture, and identity to create sustainable worlds (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009:21).

Emergent Indigeneities

Anthropologists have seen the communities they have worked with for years suddenly reframe their collective identities and mobilize indigeneity (Turner 1991; Jackson 1991, 1995; Li 2000; Hodgson 2002). Increasingly, indigenous movements are emerging as new forms of political action in countries and regions such as Japan (Siddle 2003), China (Hathaway 2010), and Africa (Sylvain 2002; Hodgson 2002, 2011), although governments continue to deny these claims as “inconvenient indigenous” (Saugestad 2001; see also Hodgson 2001). In Indonesia a particularly forceful claim of indigeneity is being mobilized in response to land dispossession (Tsing 1999; Li 2000; Afiff and Lowe 2007). These groups connect with advocacy organizations sympathetic to

the indigenous cause and take advantage of the resources they have to offer. However, “precarious alliances” can result from fissures between the advocacy agenda of an NGO and the desires and expectations of the community it represents (Hodgson 2011).

Tania Li (2000) and James Clifford (2001) have suggested using of the concept of “articulation” as a framework for understanding why certain claims of indigeneity become thinkable and expressible at different moments across shifting fields of power, and alternatively, why in other places, among other groups, they do not. Clifford (2013) argues, “to think of indigeneity as articulated is to recognize the *diversity* of cultures and histories that currently make claims under this banner” (54). Indigeneity, then, becomes “a mobile term that has been articulated in relation to a range of positions and struggles” (Li 2010:385). For Li (2000) using articulation as an analytic to approach the proliferating expressions of indigeneity allows us to avoid undermining these movements by reducing them to strategic essentialisms or simple historical contingencies. But it also gets us away from questions of authenticity and the essentialization of indigeneity as something primordial and bounded in a particular geographic space.

Michael Hathaway’s work in China explores how public intellectuals act as mediators, mutually constituting indigeneity and environmental discourse (2010). He proposes the term “indigenous space” to describe “the ways that the concept of indigeneous peoples is engaged with and used in specific locales at specific times” (304). Juan Obarrio (2010) found that the invocation of “customary law” in Mozambique leads indigeneity to be fetishized as “precolonial customary”—in both national and international spaces—and “functions as an unexamined ground for the legitimacy of newly recognized forms of local power exercised on behalf of the state, based on the

contemporary interpretations of a mythologized past” (288). Jessica Cattelino (2010) challenges the idea that new forms of indigeneity are emergent in the “gaming era” and suggests that it instead accords with the cultural politics of the settler state (235). She identifies the “double bind” of need-based sovereignty: the exercise of sovereignty requires economic resources. Tribal communities “struggle to position their economic wellbeing not as an anomaly or an abandonment of indigenous ways but, rather, as the result of an ongoing commitment to collective self-governance,” otherwise they might lose the very means necessary for them to exercise sovereignty.

Shaylih Muehlman (2009) cautions that, while articulation is a powerful analytical tool to explain why certain claims to indigeneity and rights are successful, “the same historical conditions that make some subject positions recognizable in forums of public attention can simultaneously shut down the possibility of recognition for other groups” (477). What makes certain indigenous articulations expressible is as important as what renders them inaudible. As I will demonstrate in chapters four and five, Muehlman’s concern is being taken up in San Francisco, as people try to negotiate their own claims to indigeneity without foreclosing those of others.

In following the expression of Yucatec Maya indigeneity in both national and transnational contexts, this dissertation also engages with literature in cultural politics that explore claims of recognition and belonging in the nation-state more broadly. For example, the tension between government sponsored images of national identity and the lived experiences of citizens (Wade 1995; Dávila 1997; Thomas 2004). Thomas raises the spatial and temporal dimensions of heritage in which “folk” blackness has “a territorially grounded past-tenseness about it” (2004:13). She juxtaposes this with

“modern blackness,” which is presentist and mobile. My work takes up such spatiality and temporality through an exploration of Mayaness as locally rooted and past-oriented in Yucatán, and the ever-shifting meaning of indigeneity in San Francisco. Arlene Dávila explores the development of a cultural nationalism in Puerto Rico, in particular, the “shift in terrain of from political action to the realm of culture and cultural politics” (1997:3). Peter Wade (1995) calls for a movement away from essentialist understanding of cultural identity, toward the recognition of the political contexts in which people are forced to choose to identify in one way versus another. My work in San Francisco speaks to both Dávila and Wade’s concerns, however I take these questions out of the space of the Mexican nation and into what is a transnational space for Yucatec migrants. Further, I turn Dávila’s observation on its head and explore how the terrain of culture and cultural politics shifts to the realm of political action.

Structure of the Dissertation

In each chapter I historicize the primary categories of recognition within which each organization is engaged. For Tuch Mukuy this includes theater and state-funded indigenous and popular culture preservation programs; for U Najil Xook, language; and for Alianza, the census. Increasingly, anthropological studies of contemporary cultural recognition in Latin America use the recent wave of multicultural constitutional changes as a zero-point from which claims are made with an eye to authenticity. The particular forms that such claims take become a direct result of new multicultural policy orientations. However, historicizing these categories of recognition makes it difficult to single out multicultural policy as a lone agent. I argue that this past not only informs, but

is built into these contemporary discursive spaces.

Chapter two, the Anxiety of Distinction, traces how the particular forms of Mayaness that Tuch Mukuy has cultivated are rooted in decades of state-sponsored theater in Mexico and state projects of cultural promotion and preservation. I begin with a history of federally funded rural theater in Mexico, which spans the post-revolutionary period of the 1920s through 1982. I then discuss the government agency Dirección General de Culturas Populares founded in 1977 and its funding branch, PACMYC, in 1989. Culturas Populares and PACMYC have had a lasting influence on what is recognized as Maya culture in Yucatán. I demonstrate the influence of state-sponsored theater and Culturas Populares on Tuch Mukuy's particular performance of Mayaness. Anxieties arise as the composition of Tuch Mukuy becomes more representative of "the community" it comes from, straying further from the state's vision of Maya culture and the distinction it has bestowed upon Tuch Mukuy.

Chapter three, the Anxiety of Belonging, draws on my work with Antonia and U Najil Xook. I focus on three moments of heightened focus on the Mayan language throughout the history of Yucatán to understand the history that informs the current Maya language revitalization movement in Yucatán. I begin with the politics surrounding the creation of the 1984 Mayan language alphabet, the current state-recognized standard. I then explore two projects dedicated to the promotion of Maya language and culture in Yucatán that occur at two distinct moments within Mexican and Latin American cultural policy: *indigenismo* and *interculturalidad*. The first is the literary magazine *Yikal Maya Than*, published in Yucatán between 1939 and 1955 and dedicated to the national project of indigenismo. The second, the contemporary primary school program, Ko'one'ex

Kanik Maaya (Let's Learn Maya!), designed to teach the Mayan language to non-Maya students in urban areas. Finally, I situate U Najil Xook within this contemporary landscape of language revitalization in Yucatán, in which being a native Maya speaker (i.e. having spoken Maya since birth) has become the standard through which one's identity as Maya is based.

Chapters four and five shift focus to San Francisco, California. In chapter four, the Anxiety of Visibility, I examine the many factors taken into consideration by Alianza del Pueblo Maya during the 2010 Census drive, in particular, concerning how their constituency might answer the questions regarding Hispanic origin and race in a way that would result in a statistically legible Yucatec Maya population. I show the very different framings of indigeneity throughout the ongoing development of the censuses of Mexico and the United States. I explore the anxieties that arise around which boxes to check and what it means to claim one identity versus another in any given context.

Finally, in chapter five, the Anxiety of Coalition, I examine the grant writing process for Alianza's public health initiative aimed at the indigenous Latin American migrant community in San Francisco, called the Indígena Care Initiative. I discuss how the word "indígena" is strategically deployed to leave room for potential future collaborations with Latino and Native American groups. Anxieties arise from the potential for coalition, which generates imagined obligations and commitments to other civil society organizations, and in particular, a commitment not to foreclose the possibility for the future claims to indigeneity of other groups. Chapters four and five illustrate how Alianza is not simply mobilizing culture toward a particular, tangible end as we see in practices of strategic essentialism, but in fact leaving space for an unknown

future of claim-making. I will show how anthropological theories of strategic essentialism cannot account for these multiple, simultaneous, constantly shifting fields of power in which Alianza is embedded.

*Author's note: to protect the privacy of individuals in San Francisco, I have used pseudonyms for all organizations and their members, as well as Alianza's public health programs. In the Yucatecan context pseudonyms have been used only for Tuch Mukuy, U Najil Xook, and their members.

CHAPTER TWO

The Anxiety of Distinction

One evening, as I sat on Florencia's patio, a man approached the house and asked if *la Maestra* was home. He claimed to be a teacher at a secondary school and had come to ask Florencia about *Janal Pixan* altars. *Janal Pixan* is a Yucatec Maya phrase meaning "Food of the Spirits," and it is essentially the regional variant of the Day of the Dead celebrated throughout the rest of Mexico. Every season, state and local governments stage competitions for the best *Janal Pixan* altar. The competition is open only to school groups, civic organizations, and government offices; individuals and informal groups cannot participate. These expositions are held in the main plazas of the towns for the public to enjoy and the winners of the municipal-level competition go up against each other in the final statewide competition. In many respects, this is a way for the state to demonstrate its commitment to the preservation of the Maya culture.

This visit was just the first of many that would occur over the two weeks leading up to the beginning of *Janal Pixan* at the end of October. The visiting teachers hoped to help their classes win the school competition and move on to the municipal level competition in the main plaza of Oxkutzcab. This is one of the rare times of the year when speaking Maya is valued: if the participants can give some of their presentation in Mayan, they gain points for authenticity.

While I knew Florencia was highly respected for her work in theater and storytelling, at the time, I did not understand why she was also being singled out as an expert on *Janal Pixan* altars. As I came to realize in detail over the next few months,

Florencia is a member of a group of Maya intellectuals in Yucatán who were trained by the Dirección General de Culturas Populares to become anthropologists of their own culture. They have become known as experts and are often asked to comment on Maya-related concerns. This chapter will explore the ways in which the state, through Culturas Populares, created these experts in Maya culture. The vision of authentic Maya culture today, as seen through the work of Tuch Mukuy, is rooted in state-sponsored theater in Mexico. I will begin with a history of rural theater in Mexico, including a discussion of Culturas Populares and its funding branch, PACMYC. This will set the stage for the rise of community theater in Yucatán and Florencia's role in this history. I will close with a look at the particular forms of Mayaness that Tuch Mukuy has cultivated.

History of Rural Theater in Mexico

The only known surviving pre-Colombian Mayan performance text originates from the highland region of Guatemala; the *Rabinal Achi* (The Rabinal Warrior), also known as *Quiché Vinak* (The Man from Quiché), is a dance dramatizing a conflict between the Rabinal and Quiché Maya communities. Scholars suggest that such forms of “theatrical pageantry” were used to satisfy the gods and reinforce the semi-divine nature of rulers (Frischmann 1994:286). In the early colonial period, the 16th century Spanish historian Francisco López de Gómara documented a dance in which Aztec performers imitated the dress and speech of other groups. During the same period, Fray Alonso Ponce wrote of dancers in Purépecha towns who dressed as their armed enemies, the Chichimecas, during his visit to Michoacán between 1548 and 1588 (Frischmann 1991:116-17).

Victoria Bricker (1973) has argued that contemporary performances in Yucatec Maya communities may find their origin in the early colonial period as parodies of the Spanish (Frischmann 1991:117). For example, before becoming Bishop of Yucatán from 1887 until his death in 1897, Crescencio Carillo y Ancona (1871) completed a dissertation in *Literature Antigua de Yucatán* in which he wrote of his experience in rebel Mayan territory in 1849 (during the Caste War) in which he witnessed “a good theatrical performance” with “song and dance” that dramatized “the Spanish invasion and conquest” (1871:261, qtd. in Frischmann 1995:73). Years earlier, another Bishop of Yucatán, the infamous Diego de Landa,¹ observed the Spanish encourage parodies of themselves for their own amusement (Frischmann 1991:117). And in *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas and Yucatán* (1841) the explorer John Lloyd Stephens wrote that the *Bayle de Día* (Dance of the Day) “was intended to give a picture of life at a hacienda” (*ibid.*). Not only did Spanish settlers manipulate pre-Colombian traditions of performance for their own amusement, but the Franciscans quickly capitalized off of the indigenous performers to create their own “theater of evangelization” that presented communities with plays to indoctrinate and reinforce Catholic morality and the new political order (Underiner 2004:21). Decades later the Mexican government would revive rural theater as a means of “cultural indoctrination.” Theater would become a tool used to promote the objectives of indigenismo, to foster the modernization and de-Indianization of the countryside.

¹ de Landa is equally famous for his *Relación de las Cosas de Yucatán* (c. 1566), in which he documents the Mayan system of glyphs that would later become key to its decipherment in the late 20th century, as he is for his destruction of countless Mayan codices and all forms of traditional imagery in the *auto-da-fé* of Maní in 1562.

Indigenismo and the Secretaría de Educación Pública

Created by the new revolutionary government in 1921, SEP, the Secretaría de Educación Pública (Secretariat of Public Education), was charged with bringing the ideals and reforms of the Revolution to the countryside (Vaughn 1997). It was through federal schools that the government would nationalize, modernize, and organize *campesinos* and workers to create popular support for the post-Revolution political party, PNR, the Partido Nacional Revolucionario (National Revolutionary Party) (Vaughn 1997:4-5). In fact, SEP was so skilled at campesino organizing, that PNR—renamed as the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Institutional Revolutionary Party), or PRI, in 1946—would maintain political control over the country for 71 years; in the 2000 election of Vicente Fox of the opposition party, Partido Acción Nacional (National Action Party, PAN), was elected.

SEP is also responsible for the creation of the Six-Year-Plan of social and political reform that guided the presidency of Lázaro Cárdenas (1934-40) through the institutionalization of indigenismo in government policy and development. Indigenismo took on different forms throughout Latin America; in Mexico, indigenismo was a political and social ideology that celebrated indigenous culture and traditions as part of the glorious past of a modern nation, while aiming for the cultural and linguistic assimilation of contemporary indigenous peoples into a unified, homogenous nation-state. Mexico became a model of successful indigenismo policy and practice across Latin America, and held the First Inter-American Indigenist Congress in 1940.

Manuel Gamio and Anthropology in the Service of Indigenismo

The intellectual foundation for Mexico's indigenista policies in the twentieth century can be attributed to the work of Manuel Gamio, the first Director of Mexico's Department of Anthropology (1917). Gamio studied archaeology under Franz Boas at Columbia University from 1909 to 1910. Boas' anthropological revolution extended to Mexico, where he played a major role in the establishment of the International School of Archaeology and Ethnology in Mexico City in 1911. The following year, under the guidance of Boas, Gamio began excavations at the site of San Miguel Amantla in Azcapotzalco. These excavations were significant for their use of the stratigraphic method of archaeological excavation, which allowed ancient cultures to be organized chronologically based upon the depth of artifacts (Brading 1985:77). Gamio's research was the first of its kind in Latin America and he was rewarded with a position in Mexico's Department of Archaeological Monuments in 1912, quickly rising to the rank of Director General (*ibid.*). He succeeded Boas as the Director of the International School of Archaeology and Ethnology in 1916 (*ibid.*), which closed in 1920 due to lack of funds. His most significant contribution to Mexican archaeology, and for which Columbia University awarded him a Ph.D. in 1921, was his investigations and restorations at Teotihuacan from 1917-21 (*ibid.*). Teotihuacan became the greatest public monument in Mexico and the pre-Columbian Aztec civilization became the foundation of the Mexican nation. Through his work, Gamio succeeded in creating one of the first internationally successful national anthropologies (Lomnitz 2001:230).

Acting as both anthropologist and politician, Gamio promoted indigenismo as a means to "Indianize Mexico" and "de-Indianize the Indian," thus uniting the seemingly

disparate groups into a new unified Mexican state characterized by the *mestizo* citizen. This left little room for an indigenous population with its own culture, not to mention Afro-Mexicanos and migrant groups, all of whom were written out of Mexican history. In the new national narrative the Spanish Conquest became the origin of the Mexican race and culture, the result of a Spanish father and an indigenous mother (Loomnitz 2001:53); “the identification of the European with the male and the feminization of the Indian fit well with the formulation of a nationalism that was at once modernizing and protectionist” (*ibid.*).

Gamio (1916) positioned anthropology as a “science of good governance” in his book, *Forjando Patria* (Forging a Nation) (Armstrong-Fumero 2010:2), and believed that only a professional anthropology could ensure the success of revolutionary reforms through the systematic study of the characteristics of indigenous communities (5):

Through anthropology, one gains awareness of the population that is the source of both rulers and those who are ruled over. Through anthropology, one can characterize the abstract and physical nature of men and peoples and deduce the appropriate methods to facilitate their normal evolutionary development.

[Gamio 2010:32].

The work of anthropologists would be employed in the creation of indigenista policies because, as a cultural and political project, indigenismo required the kind of detailed information on the characteristics of indigenous communities that anthropology was well know to collect in the era of salvage ethnography.

We do not intend to incorporate the Indian by “Europeanizing” him in a single blow. On the contrary, we should “Indianize” ourselves a bit, offer our civilization to him in a form that is diluted with his own. Then, he will not find this civilization exotic, cruel, bitter, and incomprehensible. But naturally, our approximation to the Indian should not be exaggerated to a ridiculous extreme. [2010:98]

Gamio's vision of this de/Indianization is most clearly illustrated in *Forjando Patria* in the chapter, "The Work of Art in Mexico." Contemporary Mexican art, Gamio explained, had but two foundations—European and indigenous—that respectively reflect the sensibilities of the two main Mexican social classes—elite and the campesino. Each class would continue to cultivate their art, all the while being influenced, or "reformed," by the other, eventually resulting a single national art form (2010:50). However, what would become the characteristics of Gamio's modern *mestizo* Mexico, although presented as processual, had already been set; to ensure the desired result indigenismo would have to "destroy rather than fortify the peasant culture of native communities... based on the liberal resolve to transform a backward country into a modern nation able to defend itself from foreign hegemony" (Brading 1985:76).

Misiones Culturales, 1920-1938

Federal teachers became the foot soldiers of the indigenista modernization plan. Through itinerant educational outreach teams, SEP's *Misiones Culturales* (Cultural Missions) was charged with the task of *Mexicanidad*, the modernization and integration of rural communities into national life and culture. The economic rehabilitation element of Misiones Culturales began with increasing the interdependency between the countryside and the national economy. Through the teaching of scientific agricultural techniques and various trades, campesinos were trained in the production of marketable goods (Frischmann 1994:287, Underiner 2004:30). This laid the foundation for teachers to unionize rural campesinos and tradesmen into the Confederación Nacional Campesina (National Farmers' Union) and the Confederación de Trabajadores de México (Mexican

Workers Union) (Frischmann 1997:6), which brought into the fold of the official political party of the government, PNR, in 1938 (*ibid.*).

The principal component of the modernization package that Misiones Culturales would impose on rural towns was bi-lingual education to advance literacy in Spanish and combat monolingualism in indigenous languages (Underiner 2004:30). Between 1930 and 1936 four thousand schools were built, each with an adjacent open-air theater; between 1932 and 1940 rural teachers had access to 50 pre-written theater scripts, published in the national journal *El Maestro Rural* (The Rural Teacher; Frischmann 1994:287). *El Maestro Rural* functioned as a federal teacher-training manual in which teachers shared how they implemented SEP policy at the local level. Submissions from teachers themselves covered topics such as local art, music, dance, and their own didactic civic theater scripts and songs. Indeed, theater played a primary role in the dissemination of indigenismo propaganda and information essential to modernizing the countryside, such as health and personal hygiene. Plays and puppet shows were designed to create class consciousness and “convert the countryside to the aims of the Revolution,” what Tamara Underiner calls “evangelical zeal without the religion” (2004:31). Despite their overall success in organizing the countryside, by 1938 many of the Misiones Culturales theaters had fallen into disuse, which Donald Frischmann (1994) attributes largely to a lack of adapting to the interests of its audience.

The plays did not reflect the campesino manner of speaking, thinking, and behaving. Instead, authors—primarily city people—focused on didactic, paternalistic, excessively rhetorical and Manichaeic scripts. Rural teachers adopted the pompous and affected rhetorical style of urban playwrights and politicians for their local plays and public speaking. They promoted the oversimplified worldview that elevated revolutionary governments and their programs to a sacrosanct status. [Frischmann 1994:287-88]

Opposition from rural priests and large landowners was yet another nail in the coffin of Misiones Culturales. SEP reorganized Misiones Culturales in 1942 and the following 6 years yielded the construction of 200 new theaters and the performance of 500 plays and 400 marionette shows (1990:51). Although, the theater program was unable to revive itself for the same reasons that contributed to its decline years earlier, Misiones Culturales succeeded in establishing a precedent for contemporary live theater in the countryside (Frischmann 1990, Underiner 2004).

Nuestro Teatro Campesino, 1950-1964

Nuestro Teatro Campesino (Our Campesino Theater) was the Mexican government's next effort in the use of theater for rural education and community development. Unlike Misiones Culturales, *Nuestro Teatro Campesino* teachers had the option of studying theater as part of their training through courses offered in adult education at CREFAL, the Centro Regional para la Educación Fundamental de América Latina, funded by UNESCO and the Mexican government (Frischmann 1994:289). But once again, the theater professionals involved in *Nuestro Teatro Campesino* viewed the rural population as inept and infantile. The supervisor of *Nuestro Teatro Campesino*, Alfred Mendoza Guitérrez, concluded that campesinos "could neither talk, move, nor think appropriately and thus required massive reeducation before they would appear on stage" (*ibid.*). Rather than rural empowerment through "authentic rural theater," *Nuestro Teatro Campesino* suppressed popular movements in its reinforcement of

- 1) acculturation (imposition of urban theater models);
- 2) folklorism (out-of-context utilization of regional cultural elements);

- 3) massification (rural communities remained passive receivers of a finished project);
- 4) emphasis on respect for existing institutions; and
- 5) predominance of spectacle and comedy over critical ideas. [*ibid.*]

Creativity and collaboration were hampered by increasingly restrictive government cultural policy. To reinforce the status quo plays ignored “socioeconomic issues for didactic law-and-order productions...and ‘campesino’ versions of foreign works such as *Snow White*” (190).

Teatro Conasupo de Orientación Campesina, 1971-1976

Teatro Conasupo de Orientación Campesina (Conasupo Theater for the Campesino) was created in 1971 in the wake of the election of President Luis Echeverría administration (1970-76). Echeverría campaigned on a platform of populist reform, targeting the extreme concentration of wealth among large landholders. Conasupo (Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares, National Company for Popular Consumption) was a state-owned company created in 1965 to organize all food regulatory activities of the government and ensure Mexican food security. It was abolished in 2000 by the Zedillo administration (1995-2000) amidst a wave of neoliberal reforms to Mexico’s trade policy.

Conasupo-sponsored theater was an ideal means to connect rural communities directly with the government and thereby thwarting the local bureaucracies and political bosses that interfered with agrarian reform in rural Mexico. Troupes touring the countryside would attract rural audiences to inform about Conasupo’s programs and

products, such as “crop purchases at guaranteed prices, the building of grain silos and warehouses, the use of recommended fertilizers, and the rudiments of good nutrition” (Frischmann 1994:291). The initial contract between Echeverría and the Teatro Conasupo brigades stipulated that the project was intended to support only campesinos and their needs, and there would be no endorsement of politicians. But as Frischmann (1994) points out, “as direct field agents of Conasupo, the brigades consequently had a political mission—to break traditional local market monopolies controlled by rural bosses by linking the campesinos to the Conasupo program” (291).

Similar to *Nuestro Teatro Campesino*, actors recruited from Mexico City’s Institutional Nacional de Bellas Artes toured with European plays. However, this time theater directors realized that the Mexico City troupes were not only too out-of-touch with the challenges facing the rural population to be effective, but did not share the revolutionary zeal of the previous Misiones Culturales fieldworkers. Once again, with rural theater facing a crisis, a small group of Teatro Conasupo directors inspired by the liberation theory of Paulo Freire and Augusto Boal decided to change their approach (Frischmann 1994). Susana Jones Arriaga, Soledad Ruiz, and Germán Meyer, created troupes of campesino actors that would develop the dramatized material through collective creation (*ibid.*).

Soledad Ruiz directed the first collective campesino group called Xicoténcatl Brigade, a Náhuatl troupe that hailed from San Pedro Tlalcupán, Tlaxcala (Frischmann 1994:292). Xicoténcatl toured with two plays; the first, *El Campesino y el Rico* (The Peasant and the Rich Man), was an improvised farce about “a peasant who sells his crop at submarket prices to a middleman; his angry wife and daughter pursue the merchant and

reclaim the money after a confrontation with his thugs” (*ibid.*). The second, *Xochipitzahuac* (Slender Delicate Flower), was more akin to sacred ritual theater; it included a fertility ritual based on Nahua mythology, a traditional wedding dance, and the personification of deities (*ibid.*). Frischmann suggests that such a focus “demonstrated to the residents of San Pedro that their traditions were indeed worthwhile, valuable, and beautiful”; particularly important in an area marked by encroaching urban sprawl and migration to Mexico City and Puebla (*ibid.*).

Susana Jones Arriaga applied her experience in community theater in working-class areas of Mexico City to her role as a *promotora* with Teatro Conasupo. She coordinated only aspects of the production process, such as stage direction, brainstorming sessions to develop themes, and the structuring of scenes (Frischmann 1994:294). Arriaga and Ruiz wrote that their collective approach had achieved Conasupo’s objectives:

- To provide agricultural, commercial, and nutritional knowledge in order to attain substantial changes in the general standard of living,
- To promote popular organization as a means of putting an end to violations of the law, and to the exploitation of the campesino by middlemen and caciques, and
- To rescue or strengthen local cultural values so that the campesino, particularly the Indian, might retain his original group identity. [295-6]

Still, administrators were hesitant to put the program in the hands of campesinos, and in 1974, only 6 of 16 brigades were collectively run, with five in indigenous languages across Chiapas, Tlaxcala, and Oaxaca (294). By the time Teatro Conasupo lost its financial support with the end of the Echeverría administration, its 52 brigades had given 6,000 performances, for 3.25 million individuals (*ibid.*). Ruiz, Arriaga, and Meyer maintained that their success had everything to do with putting the creative process in the

hands of the campesinos because it allowed them to voice concerns and address problems (Frischmann 1994:296). Through the approaches to theater under Teatro Conasupo, we can begin to see the changing attitudes toward indigenous communities and indigenismo among intellectuals and the government.

Proyecto de Arte Escénico Popular, 1977-1982

After Teatro Conasupo ended Arriaga had trouble finding financial support for collective community theater; the idea of unrestrained popular rural theater was threatening to many government agencies. However, under the recently elected Portillo administration, a new agency under SEP was created with very different aims than earlier indigenismo-inspired educational policy makers. Dirección General de Culturas Populares (Directorate General for Popular Culture) accepted Arriaga's proposal and SEP agreed to reassign a limited number of rural teachers for one year to the *Proyecto de Arte Escénico Popular* (Grassroots Theater Arts Project). Teachers from rural communities were recruited, trained in Mexico City, and sent home as "theater promotores," where they would create local theater troupes alongside educators to develop theater techniques to promote Spanish literacy through bilingual education (Underiner 2004:36). However, unlike earlier attempts at theater this "integration into national life" was not coupled with cultural assimilation (*ibid.*). Rather, influenced by the liberation pedagogy and theater of Boal and Frere, theater and social change became linked and actors were encouraged to "testify" on stage, often using their real names and clothing (Frischmann 1994). The plays engaged with the following themes:

- 1) Social problems: alcoholism, unity-organization, repression, corruption, exploitation, marketing of products, emigration, unemployment, women's issues, reassessment of culture, means of communication, education, petroleum
- 2) Community history: narration, oral tradition, historical documents
- 3) Popular expression: dramatized story, traditional ceremony, *pastorela* (nativity play), dance, fireworks
- 4) Community programs: health, nutrition [Frishmann 1994:297]

Arte Escénico found itself under tighter bureaucratic supervision than its predecessor, Teatro Conasupo, which manifested in restrained artistic creativity, frequent field observations, and regular evaluation reports from field workers. Like Teatro Conasupo, Arte Escénico lasted only as long as the current presidential term; “the high inflation rate at the end of the López Portillo government in 1982 offered justification to the next administration to terminate [Arte Escénico]” (Frishmann 1995:298). Each attempt at rural theater by the government set the stage for the contemporary community theater of Tuch Mukuy. Misiones Culturales set a precedent for rural theater, Teatro Conasupo de Orientación Campesino added brigades of campesino actors and collaborative creation, and finally, Proyecto de Arte Escénico Popular “left behind people of experience and dedication to rural theater” (Frishmann 1994:299), which, we will see, is exactly how Florencia got her start in theater.

Culturas Populares and the First Cohort of Maya Intellectuals

Guillermo Bonfil Batalla and the Pluricultural Turn

The Dirección General de Culturas Populares was created by the anthropologist, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla, in order “to promote the study, conservation, dissemination, and development of indigenous and popular culture in Mexico.”² Bonfil Batalla had been part of a group of young professors—known as The Magnificent Seven—who, in 1968,

² <http://www.culturaspopulareseindigenas.gob.mx/cp/>

began an academic movement that leveled a searing critique against the then current state of Mexican national anthropology. Their manifesto, *De eso que llaman antropología Mexicana* (Of That Which They Call Mexican Anthropology), argued that Mexican anthropology existed only to serve the state and foster indigenismo “and so had abdicated both its critical vocation and its moral obligation to side with the popular classes” (Lomnitz 2001:231). There was a call for anthropologists to break away from state control. In serving as a tool of indigenismo to incorporate the “Indian” into the capitalist system of exploitation, anthropology “had abandoned the scientific and critical potential of the discipline” (232).

Bonfil Batalla argued that the paternalism of indigenismo obscured the multicultural composition of Mexico, what he called *Mexico Profundo* (Deep Mexico), but had not yet succeeded in its goal of de-Indianization and the complete mestizaje-ization of the nation. In his famous book, *Mexico Profundo: Reclaiming a Civilization* (1986), Bonfil Batalla writes that “In affirming our difference, to ourselves and to outsiders, we will be radically denying the would-be hegemony of the West, which rests on the supposition that difference implies inequality and that what is different is by nature inferior” (1996[1986]:176). Bonfil Batalla’s vision, however, substituted one nation building project (indigenismo) with another, and once again, with indigenous people as its target.

Bonfil Batalla has had a lasting influence on the cultural policy of Mexico. In 1972 he became the Director of INAH, the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, a branch of government created in 1939 under the influence of Manuel Gamio. As Director of INAH’s Center for Research and Advanced Study in Social Anthropology

Bonfil Batalla created CIESAS, and was founder and director of the Museo Nacional de las Culturas Populares (National Museum of Popular Culture) in 1982. The mission of the museum is to “recognize the creativity and cultural initiatives of the popular sectors of the country, in order to rescue them, encourage them, and present them to all as of fundamental value and a very rich part of our heritage.”³ This move is reflective of the larger global conversations taking place about indigeneity and culture, which I will discuss in chapter three.

Promotores Culturales de Yucatán

The Dirección General de Culturas Populares opened its Yucatán branch in the city of Valladolid in 1980. Florencia was among its first cohort of *promotores culturales*. The promotor model is to train individuals from indigenous communities in cities and then send them back to their pueblos to act, on behalf of the government, as “agents of change from within” (Underiner 2004:28). It was through this model that the PRI maintained its single-party control over Mexico for 71 years. The promotores act as government representatives, introducing and “promoting” new government modernization and development programs aimed at rural communities.

After she graduated from high school Florencia was unsure of what direction to take her life and work. Her mother learned of a *convocatoria* in which they were searching for bi-lingual individuals to be promotores culturales. She traveled to the town of Peto where nine promotores would be selected from the southeastern part of the state.

³ “La creación del Museo obedeció a la necesidad de reconocer la creatividad y las iniciativas culturales de los sectores populares del país, con el fin de rescatarlas, estimularlas y darlas a conocer con todo su valor como parte fundamental y muy rica de nuestro patrimonio.”
<http://museoculturaspopulares.gob.mx/acerca.php>

Candidates were given an exam that included a written component; an interview with the selection committee that included the esteemed Yucatecan anthropologists Sylvia Terán and Jose Tec Poot, who was the director of newly established Culturas Populares branch; and finally, candidates were asked to speak about a place in their pueblo. Florencia thought back to a visit she made to Loltún, a cave just past the outer limits of Oxkutzcab that contains paintings, mural, and petroglyphs made by the ancient Maya. Along with her own observations, she recalled the information given by the tour guide and put together a speech. She was told that the names of those selected for the promotora program would be printed in the newspaper. Florencia's mother warned her not to get her hopes up since there were 159 people from her region of Yucatán competing for only 9 spots. She and her mother also kept the exam a secret from her father because he would not want her to leave home. As he used to say: *La mujer es para junto de la batea para lavar, junto de la máquina para costurar y junto de la banqueta para tortear* (A woman's place is next to the batea to wash, next to the sewing machine to sew, and next to the stool to make tortillas). They agreed that if she were not selected she would go to Chetumal (the capital of the neighboring state of Quintana Roo) to find secretarial work. Later that day, as Florencia narrates, her mother bought the newspaper and under the title *Resultado de la Selección para el Curso de "Promotores de Cultura Maya"* (Results of the Selection for the "Maya Cultural Promotores" Course) she found her name among the 36 individuals chosen from across Yucatán; Florencia has kept that newspaper clipping to this day. Shortly thereafter, she traveled to Valladolid with nothing but a satchel, her hammock, and the clothes on her back.

Because Cultures Populares was the cultural arm of SEP and INI, the Instituto Nacional de Indigenista (National Indigenist Institute)⁴, the cohort was under the impression that they were going to be trained to be bi-lingual teachers in the Educación Indígena public school system.⁵ The group was taught how to conduct ethnological research, and about topics such as linguistics and history, but the whole time Florencia was wondering, *Dónde está la pedagogía?* (Where is the pedagogy?). At the end of their training the group was told that they were not studying to be teachers, but *promotores*; and more than *promotores*, *promotores investigadores* of the Maya culture, their own culture. The cohort began conducting investigations in Maya communities regarding topics like traditional medicine and socio-economic characteristics. Once their group training concluded each individual was assigned to a different town. Florencia was sent to Maní (not far from her hometown of Oxkutzcab) where she lived for one year conducting ethnological research, including the collection of oral narratives from the town's *abuelos* and *abuelas*. Her work, *Monografía de Oxkutzcab* (Monograph of Oxkutzcab) and *Jop'el baxalo'ob* (Five Games), was published in a very limited run by INI the mid-1980s, along with that of other Yucatec Maya *promotores* whose work covered topics such as *milpa* practices and *j-men* rituals.⁶

Several years later, Carlos Montemayor, a beloved Mexican novelist and historian, selected some of the work by this group of *promotores* to publish in a bi-lingual anthology series called *Maya Dzit'ob Bejla'e/Letras Contemporáneas Mayas*

⁴ INI's establishment in 1948 set the precedent of indigenous people as "the only racially identified members of the Mexican population to have their own government institution" (Stephen 2002:86).

⁵ Educación Indígena is a public school system under SEP whose mission is to bring "culturally and linguistically relevant" education to indigenous pueblos.

⁶ A *milpa* is the word for the plots of land used by families for subsistence farming. *J-men* is often poorly translated as "shaman" or "priest." Being a *j-men* is an incredibly specialized vocation whose many practices and responsibilities include healing and the spiritual cleansing of people and *milpas*,

(Contemporary Maya Literature) that began in 1992. Florencia's volume was titled *U tzikbalilo'ob Oxkutzkab yéetel Maní/Cuentos de Oxkutzcab and Maní* (Stories from Oxkutzcab and Maní). The poems and stories therein have been republished in later works edited by Montemayor, such as *Words of the True Peoples: An Anthology of Contemporary Mexican Indigenous Writers, Volume 1: Poetry* (2004); and *New Songs of the Ceiba: An Anthropology of Contemporary Mayan Writers from the Yucatán Peninsula* (2009). The Montemayor publications brought additional esteem and visibility to the promotores reinforcing their status as experts of the Maya culture.

PACMYC

In 1989, as director of the Dirección General de Culturas Populares, Guillermo Bonfil Batalla launched PACMYC, the Proyecto de Apolo a las Culturas Municipales y Comunitarias (Municipal and Community Cultural Support Project). PACMYC is a grant program intended to support “the recovery and development of popular culture.”⁷ Since its inception, PACMYC has harnessed both federal and state financial resources to support 23,800 “cultural projects,” 65 percent of which are in rural areas, and 50 percent are awarded to indigenous peoples across Mexico. According to its website, PACMYC “aims to continue promoting the development of the popular culture of our country and contribute to the strengthening of community activity, to stimulate the cultural pluralism of Mexico.”⁸

Florencia was assigned to PACMYC in 1995, a role she held until her retirement from Culturas Populares in 2009. Her role as a promotora for PACMYC involved helping

⁷ <http://www.culturaspopulareseindigenas.gob.mx/cp/>

⁸ <http://www.culturaspopulareseindigenas.gob.mx/cp/>

applicants write their proposals and assisting them in the elaboration their projects. Her work was invaluable for adults in rural communities who may not have had access to education beyond primary school and would not have the necessary skills to develop the proposals on their own, a specialized genre of writing. Maria Luisa was also responsible for seeing the projects through to completion, without interfering directly. However, if a proposed project failed to be completed by the grant recipients, it was often the promotora who was held accountable. At the end of the project year, recipients must present their work in some form. For example, if funding were given to a jarana band, considered the traditional music of Yucatán, they might hold a performance the promotora could attend. If funding were given to a woman's sewing collective, the promotora would examine some of their final products.

Florencia and I attended a retrospective ceremony for the 20th anniversary of PACMYC organized by Culturas Populares. Gifts were presented to the promotores—place mats and a copy of a PACMYC retrospective DVD—and checks ceremoniously presented to the 28 PACMYC recipients in attendance. A total of 693,589 pesos (roughly 63,000 dollars) were distributed among 67 projects approved for that PACMYC funding cycle. Antonia, whose work in language preservation I will discuss in chapter two, was president of the selection committee. The most common projects supported by PACMYC are Maya ritual ceremonies, oral histories, music and dance, Maya language literature, and *gremios* and *novenas*. Other projects that have been awarded funding over the past 20 years have gone to ecological projects, traditional cooking, traditional games, traditional medicine, and community theater. However, the largest number of grants in Yucatán has gone to women's sewing collectives. That over the past 20 years PACMYC has

supported 106 sewing groups should come as no surprise. Indigenous women are often viewed as the bearers of culture and tradition and a transition from “traditional” clothing to western styles of dress is taken as a sign of culture loss.

One afternoon at Florencia’s house in Oxkutzcab, I met a young woman from the nearby town of Maní who came to consult with Florencia on her PACMYC application to begin a women’s sewing group. I recognized her immediately. She was one of a group of librarians from across the state with whom I had conducted an exit interview months earlier for feedback on an educational video produced by the Maya Area Cultural Heritage Initiative, and for which I acted as consultant. After nine years, she and the other librarians working in the Maní public library lost their jobs when an opposing political party was elected into office. This is what brought her to Florencia’s house that day.

Returning to the ceremony, the retrospective DVD was screened and in it were interviews with various recipients and promotores about their experiences with PACMYC. Florencia herself was featured in the video along with a women’s sewing group from the town of Xouyam with whom she worked as a promotora. Several weeks earlier I had accompanied Florencia to Xouyam for the filming of this interview along with a small crew. The crew was made up of an anthropologist and a promotor, both of whom worked out of the Culturas Populares office in Mérida, as well as two anthropology students from the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán (UADY), who were filming the video as a fulfillment for their concentration in Comunicación Social. All of the women there that day were dressed in the traditional Maya dress, the *ipil*, with the exception of myself and the female college student. For six of the seven women in the sewing group the *ipil* was their daily dress. The seventh member of the group was the

teenage daughter of Mariana Poot, the group's director. She changed from her blouse and skirt into one of her mother's ipiles just before the filming was to begin. *No le gusta, no esta acostumbrado* (She doesn't like it, she's not used to it), Mariana said of her daughter, who sat there adjusting the shoulders of the ipil until the filming ended and she could change back into her own clothing.

Filming began with a shot of Florencia walking down the dirt road to the gate of Mariana's house compound. *Buenas!* Florencia shouted from the gate. *Ooken!* (Come on in!) Mariana called back. As the students filmed the group of women sewing ipiles the promotor asked Mariana from off camera questions such as: Who taught you to sew? And, how did you buy your supplies before PACMYC? During Florencia's interview, she was asked to comment on the significance of sewing to the Maya culture, and to discuss how the project in Xouyam was trying to *rescatar* and *retomar* (to salvage and to bring back) the needlepoint technique characteristic of that town, called *xmul ooch*. Florencia was also asked to speak about innovation in the technique. Because the women no longer make ipiles from cotton cloth but from nylon, a less expensive and more durable material, they have had to change the material of their *caneva* from cotton to plastic. Caneva is the grid upon which women cross-stitch the floral embroidery that is then sewn directly on top of the ipil around the neckline and encircling the bottom of the dress. As we will see below, the forms of Mayan cultural heritage that are valued, recorded, and promoted by Culturas Populares and PACMYC have played a significant role in shaping Florencia's approach to community theater.

Mayan Cultural Autonomy in Yucatecan Community Theater

Feliciano Sánchez Chan and Theater as Lesson

The formation of Tuch Mukuy in 1991 was the culmination of years of theater performance, beginning with Florencia's work with Culturas Populares in 1981. The first troupe in which Florencia took part was created by another Yucatec Maya promotor Feliciano Sánchez Chan. Sánchez Chan became a *promotor bilingüe* with Proyecto de Arte Escénico Popular in 1980, only two years before it was terminated. Because the promotor model was considered an effective way for the government to infiltrate and influence rural communities, Sánchez Chan was able to continue his work as a promotor under Culturas Populares, and has since become a major figure in Yucatec Mayan theater and poetry. While with Arte Escénico he received theatrical training in Mexico City, and brought these new techniques of theater production with him back to Yucatán. This led to “a series of collectively created works that would address key issues in the Yucatec Mayas' past or present” (Frischmann 2007:24).

Florencia became involved in theater when Feliciano was looking for a woman to join the Mayan-language troupe he was organizing under the Unidad Regional de Culturas Populares in Mérida. Many of their plays were developed collaboratively from improvised sketches, and several of which have been recorded in both Spanish and Maya and published in a multi-volume anthology of Feliciano's work in theater and poetry. The following two plays written by Feliciano, *Las Abejas* (The Bees) and *Las Langostas* (The Locusts), demonstrate the influence of the Arte Escénico style of theater, as a social message was conveyed to the audience by the plays with which this group toured.

Las Abejas begins at Spanish invasion, with the Maya giving *xúunan cab*—the name of both the stingless bee indigenous to Yucatán and the honey it produces—to the Spanish as a form of appeasement, but it serves only to animate their greed. The next scene moves us forward in time to the 19th century where we see wealthy *hacendados* importing European bees to take advantage of their greater yield of honey than *xúunan cab*. The play jumps again, to the mid-20th century, where the Mexican government provides financial support to farmers to raise European bees. Finally, as though this were the natural progression, African killer bees arrive to the peninsula threatening the lives of humans and bees alike. The play ends with the Maya community deciding to harness its traditional knowledge of *xúunan cab* and apply it to increase their yield; in doing so, they reclaim control over their culture and “regain the curative and ceremonial powers they lost when they abandoned the old bees” (Underiner 2004:114).

In *Las Langostas*, the current popularity of soda and junk food is likened to the plague of locusts that hit the Yucatán Peninsula in the 1940s. Over the course of the play a family that once embraced such foods comes to the decision to start farming again after their child develops a severe stomach problem from drinking too much soda. But the damage that junk food has done to the health of their community cannot be escaped. A “modern locust” invades the community—an actor enters the scene wearing a locust mask and an outfit made of soda cans and junk food wrappers—and the community, having made the choice to return to milpa agriculture, fights off the modern locust with traditional farming tools. The play closes with the actors declaring: “A PUEBLO THAT PRODUCES WHAT IT EATS WILL NEVER BE MANIPULATED” (Sánchez Chan qtd. in Underiner 2004:116).

Like Arte Escénico, these two plays are concerned with carrying very distinct social messages to their audience. For example, *Las Abejas* and *Las Langostas* both engage with the issue of health and nutrition. The health message in *Las Langostas* is clear—junk food and soda will make you sick. In *Las Abejas*, although not made explicit, viewers are aware of the medicinal uses of xúunan cab, which would disappear with the extinction of the bee. The stories also engage with the preservation of traditional practice. Both milpa agriculture and the production of xúunan cab require specialized knowledge found within the Maya community. Xúunan cab cannot be produced in the rows of slated boxes most commonly used; the bees will produce honey only in hollowed out logs or the knots in trees, which greatly limits their yield. Finally, these plays serve as strong critiques of consumerism. There are consequences to importing European bees to take advantage of their high yield of honey and increase profits, just as there are consequences to buying cheap junk food instead of raising livestock and farming. Both practices threaten the very core of Maya culture. The stories end in the present where the decisions and actions of contemporary Maya people are weighed and their impacts shown. Maya people are held responsible for the choices they make. And although they return to their traditional knowledge and practices, the damage has been done. All the Pueblo Maya can do moving forward is “define and defend its ongoing position rather than let other groups—including the Mexican government—do it for them” (Underiner 2004:114).

In the late 1980s the Dirección General de Culturas Populares withdrew its financial support for community theater and the regional unit in Mérida had scant resources to offer (Frischmann 2007:24)⁹ beyond those attainable through PACMYC.

⁹ I have yet to find an explanation as to why funding for community-based theater was cut at that time, under the leadership of Marta Turok (1986-1988), a Mexican-born, U.S.-trained anthropologist whose

Without financial support the troupe could not afford to tour the region with their plays and eventually the group of promotores disbanded to their various field placements, or *desaparecer de la oficina* (to disappear to the office), as they called it. However, to encourage the continuation of community theater Sánchez Chan published a manual on putting together a theater troupe of one's own that covered directing, acting, and the collaborative process of creating a play in the hope of the establishment of local and more permanent theater groups (Underiner 2004:105).

Armando Dzul and Sac Nicté

After the Culturas Populares troupe disbanded, Florencia sought to continue her work in theater. She became familiar with the group *Sac Nicté* (White Flower) after it received one of the first PACMYC grants given out in the state of Yucatán. Florencia became a member of Sac Nicté in 1989, until she left two years later over creative differences and began Tuch Mukuy.

The director of Sac Nicté, Armando Dzul, has also been a significant presence in theater in Yucatán. In 1977 he began the Dorote Arango Federal Primary Bilingual School in Mani, within which Sac Nicté originated. Although they no longer travel to large theater events in other states, in the 1980s Sac Nicté had participated in events throughout Mexico and, for example, won first prize in the *Fiesta Regional de Teatro Comunidad* in Oaxaca in 1989 (Frischmann 1991:120). Today, the group no longer rehearses regularly, but will come together for theater events in Yucatán or other invited

research focused on Mayan weavers and textiles in Chiapas, with whom she also organized into a local weavers' cooperative.

performances. For example, I went along with the group when it was invited to perform at a fundraiser in Peto to raise money for a boy's surgery.

Sac Nicté is best known for Dzul's original one-act historical drama *El Auto da Fe o Choque de dos culturas* (The Inquisition or the Clash of Two Cultures). It is based on the auto-da-fe that occurred under the hand of Bishop Diego de Landa in 1562. The play begins with the Mayan prince, Tutul Xiu, recounting his premonition: "Our people will receive unwelcome visitors, white skinned men who will cast us into terrible slavery using two wooden sticks" (*ibid.*), the wooden sticks being the Christian cross, of course. The play continues through various brutalities the Spanish imposed on the Maya—catechization, confiscation of codices and idols, whipping of suspected "idolaters"—with Tutul Xiu trying to reason with and understand de Landa. The idols are set on fire to Maya cries of protest, and the play ends with the words of Tutul Xiu: "Although it may seem that you have defeated us, some day you will suffer the consequences because we were born free—free like the air we breathe, like the birds that fly. And when that day comes, our gods will protect us, and we shall start back down our path" (*ibid.*). Tutul Xiu's final words are "not merely an attempt to retain some hope and dignity in the face of defeat; instead, they represent the firm belief, rooted in Maya prophecy, that the persisting colonial situation will indeed be broken, but not without bloodshed" (Dzul, qtd. in Frischmann 1995:78).

Unlike Feliciano Sánchez Chan, Armando Dzul was not trained in the Arte Esénico and Culturas Populares style of theater that appeals to local cultural identity in order to engage with social problems and community solutions. It is clear that *El Auto da Fe* does not contain the kind of social messages of *Las Abejas* and *Las Langostas*, nor are

there critical choices that have to be made to save the Maya culture—*El Auto da Fe* begins and ends with a prophecy. The differences in style stem primarily from the differences between the two playwrights histories in theater. However, what Dzul and Sánchez Chan do have in common, is an engagement with the theme of Mayan cultural autonomy.

Tuch Mukuy and the Production of Authenticity

When Florencia founded Tuch Mukuy in 1991 the group had only five members. At that time, they performed small sketches that critiqued politicians and government corruption. As Tuch Mukuy became increasingly well known, the group began creating plays whose themes focused on social problems. Florencia brought her theater training with Culturas Populares to Tuch Mukuy. Plays were collaboratively produced; members would discuss various topics after which Florencia would create a skeleton of the play and each individual would develop his or her character. As she would say: *El teatro comunitario, para nosotros, sea usar imaginación* (Community theater, for us, is to use the imagination.)

When I began working with Chan Dzun'un in the fall of 2009 there were 17 members rehearsing on a weekly basis, sometimes twice per week if there were an upcoming performance. Manuel, who in the past has played Tutul Xiu in Sac Nicté's *El Auto da Fe*, had recently returned from spending nine years in San Francisco, where he participated in Alianza del Pueblo Maya's jarana dance troupe. Manuel returned to Oxkutzcab for his daughter Marisol's quinceñera; Marisol is also a member of Tuch Mukuy. Alma, yet another member of the troupe and an esthetician in her early thirties,

was from the neighboring comisaría of Yotholin. Every week she took a cab to the rehearsals along with her nine-year-old son, Daniel, her sister Doña Juanita and her eight-year-old son, Andrés, and their cousin Paloma. Doña Fabiana, who lived across the street from Florencia, was the oldest member of the group at 85. Her 17-year-old grandson, Josúe, worked construction with his father and brother-in-laws. Alán and Diego, 13 and 16 years old respectively, were brothers who lived a few blocks away from Florencia and had been with the troupe for years; Florencia had old photos of a very small Diego dressed up as an *alux*. Also part of the group was Don Sabino, a *milpero*¹⁰ and the oldest male member of Tuch Mukuy, along with his wife Doña Delfina, and two of their daughters, Jazmín, 20, and Ana, 16. During certain times of the year rehearsals had to be planned around Don Sabino's planting and harvesting schedule; his milpa was far outside Oxkutzcab and he would have to spend several days there at a time. Finally, Don Jorge, an amateur wrestler in his younger days, now in his early sixties, was still able to choreograph fake falls without hurting himself. Don Jorge's slapstick could always be relied upon for laughs during Tuch Mukuy performances.

Two of Tuch Mukuy's most well known works are *Aluxo'ob* and *X'tabay*, and they carry with them the same kind of social messages as the work Florencia produced with Feliciano Sánchez Chan and Culturas Popualres. I had the opportunity to see Tuch Mukuy perform each of these plays. I first came to know Tuch Mukuy through attending a dress rehearsal of *X'tabay* at Florencia's house with my Yucatec Maya language class. I saw it again, one year later, when the group performed *X'tabay* at a primary school graduation ceremony in Yotholin. Finally, in March of 2010, I saw *Aluxo'ob* when the

¹⁰ A *milpero* is one who farms a milpa.

group was invited to perform for the opening celebration of the *Mes de Lenguas las Maternas* (Month of Mother Languages),¹¹ held that year in Oxkutzcab.

Aluxo 'ob

Aluxo 'ob is difficult to translate. An alux is a small, dwarf-like mythic being said to exist in the form of stone statutes, and most often found by people when farming their milpas. Aluxes are known to be mischievous and are rarely, if ever, seen in action. Depending upon whom you speak to, aluxes kidnap children and often steal. Moreover, finding an alux (always in its stone form)¹¹ could be a good sign or a bad sign. Tuch Mukuy's *Aluxo 'ob* tells the story of two couples: an elderly couple who maintains their traditional beliefs and practices, and a younger couple that has abandoned them. The play opened with the two couples eating together. The young couple, played by Manuel and Alma, wears western style clothing and gorges on junk food and soda, while the older couple, played by Don Sabino and Doña Juanita in an ipil, eats food made with crops from the milpa. The humor comes from the clash of the two cultures represented through Manuel's lack of traditional knowledge. He does not know how to eat with tortillas or perform common tasks in a Maya household, nor does Manuel understand ritual milpa ceremonies, and instead, looks around confused for the gods of the milpa to whom Don Sabino is praying (Underiner 2004:109).

As expected, Manuel does not believe in aluxes and they punish him for it. A pair of aluxes plays pranks on Manuel over the course of three nights: they steal one shoe, hide another, tickle his ears, and generally confuse him and prevent him from sleeping. One night, Manuel sets a trap for the culprits: he leaves out a calabash for them to steal,

¹¹ I will discuss the *Mes de Lenguas Maternas* in the next chapter.

but makes it strongly scented so he can follow the trail the next day (Underiner 2004:110). He finds the aluxes in a milpa, and after he has caught them, Manuel sells the two aluxes to an American tourist. When Manuel soon becomes ill, the older couple brings him to a j-men who tells Manuel that he can only be cured by returning the aluxes to their home. He eventually finds the tourist and buys back the aluxes. As soon as the aluxes are back in the milpa, Manuel begins to heal.

Tamara Underiner suggests that *Aluxo 'ob* “is manifestly about the cultural negotiations produced in the transaction between local practices and external pressures” (2004:111). The young husband has fallen prey to external pressures. He has given up local knowledge for television and junk food, a stereotypical, homogenizing global culture. The tourists symbolize that culture and “the potential for material power to trump cultural and spiritual power” (*ibid.*). Indeed, the young husband sold off the spiritual protection of the aluxes and became ill. And as Tamara Underiner argues, “the encounter between the local and the foreign does not result in equitable cultural exchange but in a change of ownership of cultural and spiritual wealth; the young man’s personal gain comes at a great cost to him and his family and eventually endangers the community” (*ibid.*). Although buying the aluxes from the tourist may represent the community getting back its culture, to Underiner “the order restored at the end of the play is only provisional...the work sounds the warning that the processes and problems of cultural change are not going to go away and, more important, are the responsibility of the community to itself manage” (112).

X'tabay

As with “alux,” there is no translation for X'tabay. The X'tabay is a mythic, supernatural creature that takes the form of a beautiful woman with long flowing hair who emerges from the ceiba tree at night to seduce wayward men and kill them in an act of passion. Those men that do survive, wake up the next morning in a prickly nopal cactus with a hangover. Tuch Mukuy's *X'tabay* opens in a typical home with a drunken husband shouting and stumbling around. There is a great deal of comedy in Don Jorge stumbling, falling down, and being yelled at by the women of the house until they finally chase him off, along with his equally drunk friend, played by Don Sabino. The second scene takes place at a vaquería and provides a bit of a “folkloric interlude”; partygoers perform the traditional jarana dance for several minutes while Don Jorge and Don Sabino stumble around, shout, and are forced to leave. Later, when the men find themselves alone, the X'tabay appears as a woman in a white dress with long black hair. Don Sabino recognizes her immediately and tries to warn Don Jorge, but to no avail. Don Sabino runs away, leaving a very excited Don Jorge alone with the X'tabay. As the X'tabay leads Don Jorge off stage she turns to reveal the face of a skeleton. The final scene finds Don Jorge passed out next to a cardboard nopal cactus. Three of his young grandchildren come running over, shouting for him to wake him up and the rest of the family drags him home. The play ends with a lesson about the perils of drinking too much.

Aluxo'ob and *X'tabay* dramatize Mayan oral narratives and popular expressions of culture to explore social problems such as consumerism in *Aluxo'ob*, and alcoholism in *X'tabay*. Florencia believes theater to be the ideal medium through which to deliver strong social messages, which is one of her primary objectives. And her work certainly

follows in the long tradition of theater being used as a didactic tool in rural communities in Mexico. The plays revolve around the consequences of a decision made by the protagonist, and it is made very clear that there is a right choice and a wrong choice. But these plays also present a very particular view of Mayan cultural identity as represented through food, clothing, ritual ceremonies, traditional beliefs, and language. In fact, the very presentation of such a caricature of this globalizing culture sets Tuch Mukuy apart and reinforces its Mayanness. Further, the plays invoke the Mayan cultural identity of the audience, who must come with the knowledge of various narratives like the X'tabay or the alux. While each play may address a particular social problem, they share a subtext that warns the audience not to turn its back on its culture.

El Muerte del Imigrante

When I met Tuch Mukuy in 2009, the group was just beginning to prepare a play for the *Ritual de la Muerte Maya* event on October 24 in Oxkutzcab. Ritual de la Muerte Maya (Mayan Death Ritual) is the creation of Maestro Juan de la Rosa, Director of Theater for the Instituto de Culturas, Yucatán. The event includes community theater troupes from across the state of Yucatán and is held in a different municipality each year, just before the start of Janal Pixan. The performances begin outside, just after dark. The only light comes from the candles held by the performers and the candles delineating each performance space. The groups perform simultaneously, three times in a row, while the audience walks around trying to watch as many performances as they can. The evening ends with a funeral-style procession by the groups, everyone holding a candle. The night is equal parts exciting and sombre. Plays must engage with themes of death and

Maya culture. And de la Rosa strictly prohibits comedy performances. The evening is meant to take Mayan ritual seriously.

Tuch Mukuy created *El Muerte del Imigrante* (Death of the Immigrant) to perform at Ritual de la Muerto Maya. The guiding narrative was created during a conversation between Florencia and Don Sabino (which did not include Manuel, as one might assume). The play opens with two migrants, Manuel and Josúe, eating at a taqueria in San Francisco. Manuel discusses how worried he is about the immigration officers and that he has been thinking of returning home. The group decided that only in that scene should the men deliver their lines in Spanish, because they believed they would be more likely for that to occur in San Francisco. The following scene returns the audience to Oxxutzcab, in the home of the immigrant's family. His wife is busy sweeping the floor when she spots a small pile of dirt in the corner of the house. When the family takes a closer look, they see that the pile of dirt is actually an anthill. The wife's father, played by Don Sabino, recognizes them as the *tsay*, an ant that symbolizes imminent death or injury to someone; it is said that the ant is busy digging a grave. When Tuch Mukuy was writing this scene there was a great deal of discussion over *which* ant it was that symbolized death, but in the end the group ceded to Don Sabino whose age combined with his general knowledge about oral narratives and traditional practices like milpa, was convincing enough. In the same scene the family hears the cry of a *xooch* (owl) flying overhead, another sign of imminent death or tragedy. The scene ends with the wife getting a telephone call about her husband's death.

In scene three, two neighbors walk across the stage gossiping about the death of a migrant they had just heard about. The stage opens up to the family holding a *velorio* as

soon as they get the news. In scene four, they receive a visit from an Indemaya representative who explains that it will take time for the body to be returned home.¹² The remainder of the play is a *velorio* for the immigrant, whose body has yet to arrive. The play ends with the immigrant's coffin being carried away in a processional, while two actors follow, pouring water on the floor, to wash away the death.

In their telling of the death of the immigrant, Tuch Mukuy acknowledged the value of Mayan cultural identity through the *content* of the play itself. The *tsay*, the *xooch*, and the final scene of water poured onto the floor, all signal distinctively Mayan forms of traditional knowledge. The inclusion of the Indemaya representative presented an all-too-common Mayan experience and engagement with state bureaucracy. Although Tuch Mukuy also employs the most iconic representations of Mayaness—the *ipil* and the Maya language—they do not rely exclusively on these easily recognizable symbols. However, the foretelling of death by the presence of various animals would also be just as easily construed as traditional Mayan beliefs by the uninitiated.

Authenticity, Language, and Costume

One evening, during a rehearsal of *El Muerte del Imigrante*, a discussion was spurred by, Ana, who was performing the role of the migrant's sister. She asked whether it was necessary for the women in the play to wear the *ipil*, since their roles were of women in a contemporary family and many of the women in Tuch Mukuy did not wear one. It is true, only two of the women in the group wore the garment on a regular basis, Doña Fabiana and Doña Delfina, the eldest women in the troupe. Florencia responded

¹² Indemaya (Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Cultural Maya del Estado de Yucatán, Institute for the Development of Maya Culture in Yucatán) began collaborating with Alianza del Pueblo Maya to organize the transport of cadavers from San Francisco to Yucatán.

that Tuch Mukuy always performs in the ipil, and then turned to me for my opinion. This was not something I wanted to weigh in on, ever, but especially after knowing the group for only a few weeks. With everyone waiting for me to say something, I suggested, “if community theater is representative of the community, and if there are women who do not wear the ipil, then possibly, maybe, perhaps, it could be OK for Ana to not to wear it for this particular performance, since most girls Ana’s age do not wear the ipil anyway?” I wanted to take it back immediately and say instead something akin to “ipiles are really pretty.” But Florencia capitulated and let Ana wear whatever she wanted for the performance, though *insisted* that the wife of the migrant and the other women wear the ipil.

As the rehearsal continued, Florencia announced that the Maya speakers of the group had no reason not to speak Maya. Marisol, 16 years old, who plays one of the gossiping neighbors, understands Maya but does not speak it. She had a very general idea of her lines from having asked her father, Manuel. Marisol struggled with her role, as she tried to both remember her lines in Maya and to pronounce them properly during her scene. The group told Marisol that she needed to be more *chismoso* (gossipy) in her performance—“Don’t try to remember your lines, perform them” Maria Luisa said. Manuel, trying to be reassuring, told Marisol: “If you can’t do it in Maya then don’t.” *Pero el más chevere es en Maya porque lo que distingue Tuch Mukuy es hablar en Maya* (But the best is in Maya, because what distinguishes Tuch Mukuy is speaking in Maya), Florencia reminded everyone.

Discussion

As this chapter has shown, Tuch Mukuy's style of theater fits into a much longer history of theater employed as a didactic tool to educate the Mexican countryside. Every member of Tuch Mukuy (who was over 10 years old) said that they what they most enjoyed about theater, and the reason why they continue to perform, was bringing people messages and traveling to other pueblos. Tuch Mukuy has been hired numerous times to perform as a part of government campaigns to teach communities about topics such as hurricanes, and most recently, domestic violence. And often, these performances come along with a small payment. In 2003, Tuch Mukuy began working with IEGY (Instituto para la Equidad de Género en Yucatán, The Institute for Gender Equality in Yucatán) to perform a play about gender inequality and violence annually. It is Tuch Mukuy's identity as a *Mayan* theater troupe that appeals to IEGY. Tuch Mukuy makes its Mayan identity recognizable through traits such as language, costume, and the adaptation of Mayan oral narratives to the stage. These components, as well as Florencia's reputation and history of work with Culturas Populares, explain the government's reliance on Tuch Mukuy as a means to reach otherwise inaccessible Maya audiences.

However, the inability of the younger members of the troupe to speak Maya encroaches on that distinction. Although Tuch Mukuy is distinguished by its performing in Mayan, it is difficult for Florencia to enforce mono-lingualism among the members. Tuch Mukuy is a theater troupe comprised of multiple families. Mothers and fathers have incorporated their children into the group for various reasons: to keep an eye on their teenage daughters or because they have no one to watch their young children, or more generally, because they have a good time and the opportunity to visit different towns.

Tuch Mukuy may be becoming linguistically and culturally more representative of “the community,” but in doing so they are straying further away from the state’s vision of Mayaness. When I would bring up the language issue in conversation with Florencia, time and again, she disagreed and said that, yes, everyone in the group speaks Mayan. I would argue that Florencia’s insistence represents a cognitive dissonance that, in many ways, is state-imposed. Culturas Populares and PACYMYC rely on an easily recognizable Maya identity that has a great deal to do with language and dress. The projects that PACMYC chooses to fund reflect what the organization considers to fall within indigenous or popular culture, and Florencia is tasked with helping to develop the very proposals under PACMYC consideration. For decades she has been fluent in the forms of indigeneity that the state will recognize. And these are among the primary characteristics that, for example, IEGY looks for in a theater troupe that will carry its message to rural Maya communities. But Ana’s questioning of the necessity of wearing the ipil demonstrates that her vision of the theater group is one in which clothing stands apart from the narrative and the social message being delivered; strategic essentialism is not a part of the program. I will end this chapter with a question that groups like Tuch Mukuy must engage with, even if only in the form of questions like Ana’s or the inability to speak an indigenous language, like Marisol: If a Mayan theater troupe must look and sound a certain way to attain various forms of recognition that, at times, come along with financial (albeit limited) opportunities, what happens when members of the group not only do not share that vision of themselves, but do not believe it to be a defining quality of their performances?

CHAPTER THREE

The Anxiety of Belonging

The day before we were to head to Mérida to attend a panel called *La Función Social de la Lengua Maya* (The Social Function of the Maya Language), Antonia and I were grinding squash seeds that we had laid out to dry the day before. These were gifts for Antonia's friends in Mérida with whom we would be spending a couple of nights as we attended various panels organized as part of Yucatán's month-long celebration of UNESCO's International Day of Mother Languages primarily by Indemaya (Instituto Para el Desarrollo de la Cultural Maya), but sponsored by just about every government agency that could fit its name on the promotional material. As we stood in her parents' yard, taking turns cranking their old hand-mill, we discussed Maya language revitalization in Yucatán. Antonia brought the conversation around to discrimination within this community. "Why can't someone say, 'I'm Maya but I speak Spanish?'" she asked.

Why *can't* someone say, "I'm Maya but I speak Spanish?" What has led Antonia to believe such a statement taboo? Questions like Antonia's bring into relief the underlying language ideologies accompanying the revitalization movement. My goal for this chapter is to interrogate Antonia's critique of power and authority within the language revitalization scene in Yucatán. I will begin with a discussion of the discourse of Jach Maya (or, pure Maya), in particular what this purist register *is* and what it *does*. From here, I will review the history that informs the current revitalization movement through three moments of what I call "language concern" in Yucatán, beginning with the

politics surrounding the creation of the 1984 Mayan language alphabet, the current state-recognized standard. This will be followed by a discussion of two programs of Maya language and culture promotion. The first, *Yikal Maya Than*, is a magazine dedicated to the national project of *indigenismo* that ran from 1939 until 1955. The second, *Ko'one'ex Kanik Maaya* (Let's Learn Maya), is a contemporary primary school curriculum supporting the post-multiculturalism project of *interculturalidad*. In each instance, I will discuss what prompted that particular moment of intensified attention to language and at whom it was directed. Finally, before returning to Yucatán's *Mes de las Lenguas Maternas* (Month of Mother Languages) and the panel, "The Social Function of the Maya Language," I will situate Antonia's NGO, U Najil Xook, within the contemporary landscape of language revitalization in Yucatán, one in which being a native Maya speaker (i.e. having spoken Maya since birth) has become the standard through which one's identity as Maya is based. In the end, I hope that taking up Antonia's question will help shed light on the ways in which linguistic hierarchies are not only re-inscribed over time and space, but the purposes that maintaining such hierarchies may serve at given moments in history, and their potential silencing effects.

Jach Maya

Critics have long noted the insidious forms of exclusion that can result when the ideology of multiculturalism becomes institutionalized in state policy (e.g. Povinelli 2002, Hale 2002, Speed 2005). In the case of language, policies of multicultural recognition often convert variation in graphic representation into a zero-sum game in which "linguistic purism is a common element of the writing used in state institutions and

schools, which tend to treat code switching and lexical borrowings as a threat to the integrity and continuity of indigenous languages” (Armstrong-Fumero 2009:361). In this particular historical moment, the “official” state-recognized version of the Mayan alphabet used across all state institutions and schools in Yucatán, as well as most materials produced today by state and private publishers, was adopted in 1984. A group of representatives from (predominantly) state institutions were tasked with the creation of a unified Mayan alphabet for use in an adult literacy initiative spearheaded by the Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos (INEA), the politics of which I will discuss later in this chapter.

The 1992 constitutional amendments recognized the multicultural composition of the nation, and the Mexican constitution was thusly translated into 13 of the most commonly spoken indigenous languages across the country. The *Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos de los Pueblos Indígenas* (passed on December 15, 2002) was also translated into Maya and, recently, reproduced in the form of bi-lingual booklets published by INAH, the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, and given out at several of the events and panels I attended during el Mes de las Lenguas Maternas. Such translations reflect and attempt to reproduce a linguistic purism that replaces lexical borrowing with creative new constructions of the Maya language that are deemed “authentic,” but are seldom used by people who use Maya for regular communication. For example, in the *Ley General de Derechos Lingüísticos*, “Federal Government of Mexico” is translated into Maya as *U jaalachil noj lu’um méejiko*, or “The rulership of the great land of Mexico” a phrase that would confuse even monolingual Maya speakers, who would have been approximating *federación* as the Maya inflected, *féederasion*

(366). One example of Jach Maya existing outside of official state documents is the case of *dios bo'otik*, the Yucatec Maya phrase used as *gracias* or “thank you.” Dios bo'otik, approximates the sacred Spanish “grace” as “God pays.” Dios bo'otik, has been replaced by *nib óolal*. The English terms and concepts that most approximate, *óolal*, are heart, one's spirit or soul, life force, energy. The best approximation for *nib óolal*, then, is “my spirit or being is content”; a phrase I have never heard used in daily conversation. More than anywhere, *nib óolal* can be found on the last slide of PowerPoint presentations made for conferences and academic lectures, a testament to its professionalized artificiality.

Fernando Armstrong-Fumero terms this purist register, Imaginary Maya, inspired by Guillermo Bonfil Batalla's Imaginary Mexico. Just as Imaginary Mexico was the image of a monolithic national Mexican culture that obscured Deep Mexico, a more complex mosaic of ethnic, class, and cultural identities, Imaginary Maya reflects a monolithic, idealized form of Maya “characterized by an absence of calques, lexical borrowings, or anything else that would challenge the autonomy and exclusivity of Yucatec Maya” (2009:362). Deep Maya is a form of linguistic practice that involves “punning and code switching to exploit a range of phonological ambiguities that exist at the interstices of Spanish and Maya, constituting the speaker's distinctive identity through a style of humor and wit, rather than through speaking a ‘purer’ form of the language” (*ibid.*). In Yucatán this kind of Imaginary Maya is commonly referred to as Jach Maya (or relatedly, *Maya puro* or *Maya originario*), “jach” a word used for emphasis, the Maya word for “very.” Armstrong-Fumero asks, “Does the complicity between multicultural discourse and this elitist Imaginary Maya inflict violence on the everyday speech of persons who, because of a lack of formal education or interest, are

distanced from this purist register?” (2009:369). Despite being a large-scale official validation of the Mayan language, hearing Jach Maya on the television or radio, and seeing it written on billboards or promotional materials, “is not, in and of itself, an empowering experience for native speakers” (*ibid.*). It is not uncommon for language revitalization efforts to adopt a standard alphabet that takes on the role of a high-register. While I agree with Armstrong-Fumero’s critique, focusing on Jach or Imaginary Maya as a problem created by multiculturalism often suffers from a language of intentionality—that this space just opened up and allowed for the creation of new linguistic and cultural hierarchies—obscuring the very hard won battles that led to the official recognition of indigenous and minority language and people.

* * *

Foreign anthropologists working throughout Yucatán recite the same story when a rural Maya speaker told them that no one in their town speaks Jach Maya, that their Maya is *mesclado*, but over there, in that town, those people speak Maya *puro*. In fact, one morning, just for fun, Antonia and I hopped on a bus with the intention of hopping from town to town, asking if the people there spoke Maya. If they directed us to a different town where Jach Maya was spoken, we would travel there and repeat the “experiment.” But buses running to smaller rural towns in the area are few and far between. What was intended as an epic journey brought us to only two towns. The following dialogue is from the first town we visited, Popol Naj. We walked into a small tienda and spoke with Don Sabino, the elderly owner standing behind the counter.¹³

Christa: ¿Wayé, tuláakal wiiniko’ob ku t’aaniko’ob le maaya t’aan?
 (Do the people here speak Maya?)

¹³ Spanish loan words are in italics.

Don Sabino: Ma', xa'k'an, yaan *español* yéetel *ingles*.
(No, none, only Spanish and English)

Christa: ¿Ba'ax ka tuklik, tu'ux ku t'aaniko'ob le jach maaya?
(Where do you think people speak Jach Maya?)

Don Sabino: Waye' mina'an. ¿Kensatu'uxe'? Ich *televisión* ku ya'alal, ich *escuela* le t'a'anal *español*; Ya'ab t'aano'ob ich *español*. ¿Bix u ya'ala'al "*buenos días*"? ¿Bix u ya'ala'al "*tío*"? Mina'an.
(Here, none. Who knows where? On television they speak it, in school they speak Spanish; There is a lot of speaking in Spanish. How do you say "buenos días"? How do you say "uncle"? There isn't a way.)

Antonia: Ku t'aaniko'ob maya le paalalo'obo'?
(Do the children speak Maya?)

Don Sabino: Ku t'aanko'ob *español*.
(They speak Spanish.)

A boy around seven years old enters the tienda:

Boy: ¿Yaan *coditos*?
(Do you have macaroni?)

Don Sabino: Xu'upi'.
(All gone.)

The boy left the tienda and Don Sabino, reflecting upon the exchange, said: *Coditos, es español*. He illustrates this all-or-nothing notion of linguistic purity by recognizing the Spanish word "coditos," and discounting the use of the Maya word *yaan*.

Perhaps a telling anecdotal example to demonstrate the multifaceted referents of Jach Maya can be found in a conversation I had in 2010 in Yaxhachen, a small town in the the municipality of Oxkutzcab located at the end of a long rural highway. I had just returned after completing fieldwork in San Francisco with Alianza del Pueblo Maya, and decided to pay a visit to Doña Venustiana's *molinera*¹⁴ to catch up. As I chatted with

¹⁴ A shop where tortillas are produced. Here women bring large containers of corn to have machine-ground into *masa* and then hand-make tortillas at home over a *comal*; women can also have their masa turned into

Doña Venustiana, out of the corner of my eye I spotted a thick stack paper covered in Maya writing and topped with a large bowl of *masa*. A representative from CDI (Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas) had brought the paper to be used for wrapping stacks of tortillas. Six smiling Maya women (five wearing the traditional *ipil*) were faded into the background of the *Derechos de la Mujer Maya*, written in Maya, with the Spanish translation in smaller font below. However, Venustiana continued to use the plain brown paper used in all molineras to wrap tortillas. The new promotional papers, designed by Indemaya, were stacked under the bowl of masa for lack of use; not because of anything related to the image or text, but because they made the tortillas smell bad after they had been wrapped up. She gladly consented when I asked if I could take a couple. As I gave the papers a closer look her husband, Don Feliciano, walked over and tried to read the Maya. “We used to have culture,” he said. That Feliciano could not read the contemporary text was to him a sign of loss; of words that have fallen out of use from a past when Maya was not only spoken, but written as well.

Many scholars agree that the idea of a “pure” form of indigenous languages, completely independent of Spanish is an ideological construct that has endured since colonial times (see esp. Errington 2001). This continuity makes it difficult to single out multicultural policy as the lone agent in the production of this narrative (Armstrong-Fumero 2009). Further, the idea that Jach Maya is spoken in some pueblo further away is suggestive of a pueblo beyond the reach of “civilization,” less affected by “progress” or “modernity.” It connects language to questions of progress and the modernity of its speakers. In this way, the speaking of Jach Maya indexes the past as opposed to the

tortillas using the gas heated machine at the molinera; and, of course, the owners of the molinera themselves have machine-made tortillas to sell in stacks.

present of contemporary state institutions and schools. The ideology of Jach Maya straddles these two ways of thinking about Maya identity, encompassing both the concept of purity of the language and the lack thereof in the speaker.

Although a “purist” ideology and desire for standardization can be traced back to the colonial period, this does not preclude the relevance of ideologies surrounding standardization at any given moment in time, nor does it preclude the relevance of the specific referent of “purity” in at any moment in time. It is undeniable that there exists today a large context in which contemporary multicultural state policies themselves have a silencing effect. This present is informed by its history. But it is what is unique about these moments that show us how language ideologies adapt to reinscribe linguistic hierarchies.

1984 Alphabet

The language revitalization and rights movement in Yucatán calls for Yucatec Maya to be named an official language of the state of Yucatán. In addition to recognition and validation there are more basic questions of human rights at stake. Granting Yucatec Maya “official” status would come along with an obligation on the part of the government to offer all public services including courts and medical care in Maya, or alternatively, to have translators readily available. This is one reason among many that activists have used to make a case for the standardization of a written Mayan alphabet, a cause that dates back to early colonial Latin America when the teaching of indigenous language literacy was a means of Christian proselytizing. This allowed ecumenical knowledge to be acquired through reading and writing, not memory. Colonial linguistics

was “a project of multiple conversion: of pagan to Christian, of speech to writing, and of the alien to the comprehensible” (Errington 2001:21). In Mexico, indigenismo brought with it a renewed interest in indigenous literacy. Created in 1933, the Mexican Institute of Linguistic Investigations promoted bi-lingual education as the means to incorporate the indigenous population into the nation-state (Barros 1995:279). Multiple variants of the Yucatec Mayan alphabet have been employed since the first efforts by Franciscan missionaries to systematize the spoken word in the 16th century. The current *alfabeto aceptado* is the result of a series of meetings that took place under the behest of the Unidad Regional de Culturas Populares, Yucatán, and INEA, the Instituto Nacional para la Educación de los Adultos, in 1981 and 1984, respectively.

The 1981 and 1984 alphabet meetings were convened in the wake of worldwide conversations about the rights of indigenous communities and the preservation and “safeguarding” of cultural heritage, more generally. The 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage had neglected to address intangible heritage, an omission that spurred conversation surrounding the challenges facing indigenous and minority languages. The *Primer Congreso Indígena* was held in San Cristobal de las Casas, Mexico in 1974 and included 1,230 Mayan delegates from the Tzeltal, Tzotil, Tojolabal, and Chol communities across Mexico (Gaspar Fox and Stephen 1999). Only six years after the 1984 alphabet meetings, Mexico would lead the way in the recognition of indigenous rights by being the first Latin American nation to ratify the International Labor Organization Convention 169,¹⁵ which guaranteed the rights of indigenous peoples to the full measure of human rights and

¹⁵ Significant, despite it being a move by then-President Salinas to garner support for future neoliberal reform

fundamental freedoms, and the general rights of citizenship without discrimination. The 1984 alphabet meetings, however, were convened not in pursuit of Maya resistance or with an eye to questions of human rights, but under the behest of INEA, to adopt a single alphabet for Yucatec Maya for an adult literacy initiative.

In her 2004 dissertation Michal Brody explores the language ideologies underlying the multiple variations of written Maya, and “the multi-faceted nature of alphabetic writing as a technology, a form of linguistic code, a socially-located practice, and an individually-located competency” (ix). Brody’s analysis included the role of the 1984 alphabet in the ongoing development of the Maya language, supplementing the published minutes of the final day of a week-long meeting of various state and non-state language specialists, with contemporary interviews with various attendees.

In 1981 Culturas Populares, Yucatán—still housed under SEP, the Secretaría de Educación Pública¹⁶—assembled representatives from five state agencies and three university-affiliated delegates with the goal of implementing an official alphabet to be used universally in all written forms of Yucatec Maya (Brody 2004:143). This would be the first institutional attempt at creating a definitive standard alphabet for institutional purposes. Attendees included representatives from the following state agencies: the Departamento de Educación Indígena under SEP (Educación Indígena), INI, the Instituto Nacional Indigenistas, INAH, the Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, and UADY, the Universidad Autónoma de Yucatán. Although the group anointed the resulting alphabet “official,” the absence of any formal publicity campaign left the alphabet unacknowledged by intellectuals, writers, and publishers at large.

¹⁶ Today, Culturas Populares is housed under CONACULTA (Consejo Nacional para las Culturas y Artes), also a branch of SEP.

In 1984, representatives from the same state agencies were reconvened by INEA, along with the Academia de la Lengua Maya—an NGO dedicated to the promotion, education, and conservation of the Maya language—to adopt a unified alphabet for use in an adult literacy initiative. INEA had three explicit criteria for this new alphabet: (1) that it be compatible with Spanish to foster writing skills in both languages, (2) that it be based upon the phonology of the language, as opposed to any regional register, and (3) that it be easily reproduced in typeface. The distribution of attendees among the various participating institutions was unbalanced. Table 2.1 shows the distribution of attendees by institution, including the names of the four representatives cited in Brody (2004). Of the 21 total participants, only 2 came from a non-state organization, the Academia de la Lengua Maya; and unlike the 1981 meetings, no university scholars were in attendance. Also left uninvited were Maya community groups and leaders, and Maya writers, a significant omission for a language with a sizeable contemporary body of literature (the exact breakdown of native to non-native speakers is not enumerated in the Brody text). Table 2.1 shows the breakdown of representatives per institution.

In her thesis, Brody identifies by name only four attendees: Hernán Morales Medina of INI, Domingo Dzul Poot of INAH, José Tec Poot of Culturas Populares, and Juan Ramón Bastarrachea Manzano of the Academia de la Lengua Maya. Hernán Morales Medina dedicated himself to education. Between 1959 and 1965 he was the regional director of SEP, during which time he organized the largest Mission Cultural in Yucatán that included 24 teachers and 3 vehicles, along with materials for carpentry, rural industries, and mechanical workshops (Yerves Caballos 2012). Morales Medina was

also the Secretary General of the National Campaign against Illiteracy (1944-46), and served as the state delegate on the National Council for Educational Development.

Institution & Representative (if applicable)	Institutional Abbreviation	No. Of Participants
Instituto para la Educación de los Adultos	INEA	10
Departamento de Educación Indígena, SEP	Educación Indígena	5
Instituto Nacional Indigenistas Rep. Hernán Morales Medina	INI	2
Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia Rep. Domingo Dzul Poot, Author, Paleographer	INAH	1
Unidad Regional de Culturas Populares Rep. José Tec Poot, Anthropologist	Culturas Populares	1
Academia de la Lengua Maya (non-state) Rep. Juan Ramón Bastarrachea Manzano	As is	2

Table 2.1. Distribution of attendees by institution, with the author’s institutional abbreviations included

Domingo Dzul Poot worked as a paleographic transcriber for INAH from 1977-2007, and has become a renowned writer and storyteller. He has published multiple books, several on stories he learned from his parents as a child: *Tradiciones Literarias Mayas* (1983), *Cuentos Mayas I* (1985), *Cuentos Mayas II* (1986), *Leyendas y Tradiciones Históricas Mayas* (1987), *Leyendas Mayas* (2002), and *Relatos Que la Abuela Contaba* (2010). The state established an award in his name, the *Premio Estatal de Narrativa en Lengua Maya Domingo Dzul Poot*, and in 2012 the government of Yucatán awarded him the Yucatán Medallion for “his contribution to the growth and development of the state” (Durán Vela 2012). José Tec Poot became the regional director of Cultural Populares when it was

introduced to Yucatán in 1980. He dedicated himself to the creation of programs to train rural artisans in new techniques that would help improve the quality of their work (Chi Lavadores 2008). Tec Poot was recognized for his efforts in 1992, when the state government established the *Premio Estatal de Artesanías “José Tec Poot.”* Finally, Juan Ramón Bastarrachea Manzano was a Yucatecan anthropologist and one of the three main editors of the Cordemex, a comprehensive Yucatec Maya dictionary, published in 1980.¹⁷ The Cordemex was designed to be a comprehensive list of Yucatec Mayan words with all known definitions, including previous uses found in books and older anthropological texts. It is still consulted to this day by scholars working in Yucatán.

Linguistics and linguistic scientists held the most influence in the direction of the meeting’s discussions and final decisions, propelled in part by their commitment to the life’s work of the recently deceased Alfredo Barrera Vásquez, who founded the Academia de la Lengua Maya in 1937. Dzul Poot, Tec Poot, and Bastarraches Manzano had all worked with Barrera Vásquez, a universally respected Yucatecán linguist credited with bringing validation and professionalization to anthropological and linguistic sciences in Yucatán through his scientific approach to language maintenance (148). Raised as a bi-lingual Maya-Spanish speaker, Barrera Vásquez was educated in Europe and Mexico City, he returned to Yucatán in 1937 and was named director of the Museo Arqueológico e Histórico de Yucatán. He was a prolific scholar who founded numerous institutions throughout Yucatán and was appointed to several distinguished positions (see Table 2.2).

¹⁷ Named after the Mexican henequen monopoly, Cordemex.

Year	Institution founded
1937	Academia de la Lengua Maya
1939	Biblioteca Crescencio Carillo y Ancona
1940	Instituto de Etnografía, Historia y Bibliografía de Yucatán
1959	Instituto Yucatec de Antropología e Historia
1959	Centro de Estudios Mayas
1965	Centro de Estudios Antropológicos
Appointments	
1937	Director, Museo Arqueológico e Histórico de Yucatán.
1948	Director, Instituto de Alfabetización Para Indígenas Monolingües en México
1949	Professor of the Linguistics and Sociology of Latin America, Tulane University
1950	Chief of Programs for the Study of Vernacular Languages in Education, UNESCO

Table 2.2. Institutions founded by, and academic and professional appointments of, Alfredo Barrera Vásquez

In 1939 Barrera Vásquez and his colleagues at the Academia de la Lengua Maya published a phonetic alphabet for Yucatec Maya, introducing the use phonetic transcription characters of American linguistics with Yucatec Maya. It was believed that this scientific treatment would bring legitimacy to the language, and therefore, respectability and esteem to its speakers and the Maya culture at large, thereby countering the racism leveled against Maya people in Yucatán. Barerra Vásquez and his team are responsible for compiling and editing the massive Cordemex. It should come as no surprise, then, that many participants made frequent reference to having worked with Barrera Vásquez to enhance their own credentials and expertise.

While the initial intent of the meetings was the selection of a standard alphabet for the INEA adult literacy campaign, the group expanded the purpose of this alphabet to extend across all state institutions to be used universally for all future writing in Yucatec Maya. This decision was critiqued by only two participants—one from INEA, the institution that convened the meetings—on the grounds that (1) this group did not have

the authority to institute such a change and (2) that such an unplanned expansion eclipsed the interests of all other stakeholders (148).

Equally important to understanding the meetings is the issue of who was *not* in attendance. Representatives from the neighboring states of Quintana Roo and Campeche, as well as northern Belize, where Yucatec Maya is also spoken, were not invited. Yucatán is the most populated, politically powerful, and wealthy of the three states comprising the Yucatán Peninsula. And because of its concentration of power and wealth, the major universities (UNAM and UADY), and for a time the only universities, are located in Mérida, as well as publishing houses, and its state branches of federal institutions—for example, INAH, INEA, INI, and Culturas Populares—are better funded and draw what they would consider to be the best talent. Therefore, it is unsurprising that the convening institution, INEA, choose not to be inclusive of out-of-state actors. This, combined with the exclusion of Maya writers (other than Dzul) and Maya community groups, as Brody rightly argues, only serves to replicate “the cultural dominance of the non-indigenous over the indigenous populations and the political dominance of the federal entity over the several states and the peninsula as a whole” (Brody 2004:146).

Ensuing Debates

As the participants engaged in debate over linguistic minutiae and the ethics of community inclusion, Hernán Morales Medina of INI argued for the continued use of the Cordemex alphabet. Not only was there no need to change what had been working well, he argued, but such an unnecessary change left those who actually use the alphabet for communication “subject to the fashions and fluctuations of non-indigenous linguists,

whose science, rather than helping to save a language, contributes to its destruction” and further harm being done to indigenous people (INEA 1984:17 qtd. in Brody 2004:150). The anthropologist José Tec Poot, of Culturas Populares, shared Morales Medina’s concern with the legitimacy of the participants to make such decisions in isolation from speakers themselves, with whose knowledge and language practices this process should begin. Brody summarizes, he “closed by saying that any final product of the meeting should not be solely a creation of linguistics directed *to* the people but also a production *of* the people” (2004:150). Tec Poot argued for the importance of a linguistic approach to a unified alphabet, securing his authority by stating that he had worked with Barrera Vásquez. The remaining papers and participants shared Tec Poot’s argument for a linguistic approach to a standard alphabet, but remained unconvinced of the importance of the inclusion of Maya voices. The consensus seemed to be that only linguists had the authority and scientific expertise to make such decisions, especially since literacy was uncommon among Maya speakers.

The most controversial decisions made by the group centered around the following three proposed changes to the 1981 alphabet—then the institutional standard—regarding the following consonant phonemes: /h/, /ts, ts’/. Table 2.3 shows the grapheme changes proposed by the participating institutions, as well as the consonant phonemes as represented in the 1981 alphabet and the Cordemex for comparison. The final row lists the eventual changes in graphic variants made in 1984. Before continuing with a discussion of these changes, it is worth noting the groups’ apparently uneventful decision to add markers of high tone to long vowels (i.e. áa, ée, íi, óo, úu). Although Brody footnotes that for lack of linguist research on vowel tones across different regions of the

peninsula it is difficult to discuss the particular politics of these changes, given that Yucatec Maya is a tonal language, it is reasonable to speculate that there exist differences in length and pitch of vowels among groups of speakers throughout the peninsula, which would render this amendment to the alphabet to be equally privileging of the regional register used by speakers and scientists assembled in Mérida.

Institutions	/ts/	/ts’/	/h/
Cordemex	ts	ts’	h
1981	tz	dz	j
Culturas Populares	tz	dz	j
INAH	ts	ts’	h
INI, Educación Indígena, Academia de la Lengua Maya,	ts	ts’	j
1984	ts	ts’	j

Table 2.3. Grapheme changes proposed by each of the assembled institutions

Returning to the debates at hand, it was decided that /h/ would remain as represented in the 1981 alphabet, because <j> “would not present problems for people who write in Yucatec Maya and Spanish” (INEA 1984:39 qtd. in Brody 2004:153). However, the Spanish sound represented by <j> is not phonetically equivalent to /h/ in Yucatec Maya. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) symbol, <h>, that had been in use prior to 1981, had already perfectly represented the phoneme /h/ in Yucatec Maya. As Brody explains,

The IPA argument was completely disregarded in the case of <j>. The IPA symbol for the sound it represents in Yucatec Maya is <h> — the graph that had already been used for centuries. The <j> was adopted in Yucatec Maya in order to accommodate the decidedly unscientific value of <h> in Spanish, which appears in the orthography but is phonetically unrealized. [156]

The transcript records INAH’s only representative, Domingo Dzul Poot, as the lone proponent of a return to <h>, and as such, little debate ensued (153). Although, the issue

of <h>/<j> was not nearly as controversial among the participants as that surrounding the phonemes /ts, ts'/ (as we will see in a moment), that the opinion of Don Domingo Dzul, a renown Yucatec Maya writer and storyteller, was so swiftly disregarded by the participants on pseudo-scientific grounds supports the conclusion that linguistic science (or, in this case, what was considered to be) was privileged over the practices, priorities, and experiences of the larger community Maya speakers and writers.

The decision to amend the 1981 alphabet such that <ts, ts'> would replace <tz, dz> as the graphemes used to represent the phoneme /ts, ts'/, proved to be the most contentious issue among the participants. José Tec Poot (anthropologist, Culturas Populares), who earlier had argued for the inclusion Maya speakers, appealed to tradition and familiarity in his argument for retaining the well known <tz, dz> digrapheme. Not only are these graphemes accepted by the Maya community, but they are the exact graphemes that have been and continue to be used in Maya place names and surnames across the Peninsula, and further, are officially recognized by the state (153).

Significance of <tz, dz> Across the Yucatecan Landscape

Yucatán is essentially a limestone shelf above sitting atop pockets of fresh water. In a peninsula void of rivers, the location of *cenotes*¹⁸ was once a significant factor in the settlement process. This significance is reflected in the popularity of town names that contain the word “cenote.” Originally written in the pre-1984 alphabet, these names are recorded as “dzonot,” a spelling seen on town signs, bus schedules, and everywhere else the name might appear in written form. For example, the above conversation with Don Sabino occurred in the town of Chan Dzonot (Little Cenote). Spelled with letters from the

¹⁸ Caves leading to underground water sources.

1984 alphabet, this name would read Chan Ts'ono'ot. Of the 92 percent of municipalities across Yucatán with Yucatec Maya names, two-thirds are spelled using the older graphemes <dz> and <tz> (Brody 2004:176); these numbers would be even greater if the names of *comisariás* (smaller pueblos under the jurisdiction of a municipality) were included in the analysis. That so many municipalities (and even more *comisariás*) contain <dz> and <tz> is testament to the importance of cenotes among Maya people across the peninsula.

Such a pattern can also be seen among Maya surnames; Dzib, Dzul, and Tzuc are not uncommon. Although not highly visible in signage, Brody argues that these names remain significant within personal consciousness (177). Contextualizing this within the alphabet debate, Brody explains that

The oft-repeated argument that the <tz, dz> are preferable because “they are in our names and the names of our towns” demonstrates a sense of ownership and an identification of the graphs with “us” and “our.” In fact, however, the prominence of <dz> is mainly an accident of topography and technology; that graph was a relatively recent replacement for the <ɔ>, which had been used invariantly for three centuries until it was rendered impractical by 20th century printing technology. I have never heard anyone disclaim or discredit <dz> for its recent introduction; it is firmly entrenched in conventional wisdom as traditional and authentic. [190]

El Diagrama Absurdo

Juan Ramón Bastarrachea Manzano of Academia de la Lengua Maya rejected José Tec Poot's appeal to consistency and familiarity on the grounds that tradition should not enter into in decision-making. In her archival research of the conference proceedings Brody found five arguments made in support of <ts, ts'> and against <dz, tz>. Bastarrachea once again appealed to linguistic science stating, first, that these were also

the IPA symbols for phonemes /ts, ts'/, and second, that <ts> is also the same symbol used by most European languages with the phoneme /ts/ (Brody 2004:153). Not only is his argument the very appeal to tradition that Bastarrachea himself had already discounted, but it is also an untrue claim, although Brody found no evidence of it being challenged in session. Third, because neither <d> nor <z> currently appear as independent graphemes in written Yucatec Maya, they should not be used as one of its digraphemes. Barrera Vásquez himself considered <dz> “*el digrama absurdo*” (1944) although maintained its usage in the Cordemex, which was published 36 years later, in 1980 (Brody 2004:190). Fourth, <ts, ts'> maintains “symmetry and congruence with the other four pairs of glottalized consonants—<p, p'>, <t, t'>, <k, k'>, and <ch, ch'>” (154). And finally, like the other pairs of glottalized consonants <ts, ts'> are in continuous alphabetical order, whereas <tz, dz> are not; certainly not an unsurprising concern among individuals with a scientific approach to language.

Because <dz> has become a universally recognized marker of Maya identity throughout Yucatán, it comes as no surprise that it inspired such lengthy debate among the participants at the 1984 meetings, nor that its final defeat left supporters with the widespread belief that the 1984 alphabet was a project of, by, and for linguists. However, we have seen other late 20th and early 21st century efforts toward the standardization of written indigenous and minority languages performed expressly for the purpose of empowerment and cultural reaffirmation. In Guatemala, for example, Maya people themselves initiated the process of adopting a standard alphabet to unify all 20 Mayan languages spoken throughout the country. It was the first act of the newly established Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala, the creation of which was an integral

component of post-genocide community rebuilding and Pan-Maya activism. The standardization process began at a meeting held by the Academia in June 1987 at the Centro de Investigaciones Regionales de Mesoamérica (England 1996). The meetings were prompted by a concern over the proliferation of alphabets, which they believed was a result of foreign influence (*ibid.* 183). Eliminating the multiple earlier versions of Mayan alphabets in Guatemala created by non-Mayas in favor of one, standardized alphabet across all languages and adopted by Maya speakers themselves, would facilitate organizing across Maya communities, foster a surge of literary expression, and would be a meaningful expression of autonomy (Brody 2004:158-160). Some one hundred Maya people assembled and established the selection criteria for each of their languages (England 1996:183). Although non-Maya linguists were invited to offer their opinions and expertise, they were given no vote in the selection process, a powerful action to show that Maya people were now in control of all decisions made about Mayan languages. The group agreed that decisions would not be guided by Spanish orthographic principles, not only because they were not suitable to Mayan languages but also because writing in Mayan was not to be used as a means for teaching Spanish literacy, but rather for the value of writing itself and to extend its use into other domains (England 1996:183).

The Guatemala case makes a significant departure from the 1984 alphabet meetings in which it was INEA, not the Maya community, who convened the meetings, and further, toward the goal of Spanish literacy. Compatibility with Spanish was a prerequisite for the 1984 alphabet, which INEA believed was necessary to foster writing skills in both languages. For example, in the case of /h/, as discussed above, maintenance of the graphic variant <j> was a decision that unambiguously privileged Spanish

orthography. The final unified alphabet of Mayan languages in Guatemala was made official through presidential decree, a very different outcome than that of the 1981 alphabet, which suffered from a lack of publicity and therefore went unacknowledged, as well as the 1984 alphabet, which is still not officially recognized. Finally, at the time of the 1984 meetings, there already existed a thriving Yucatec Maya literature. The creation of that particular standardized register of written Maya, instead, was a reaffirmation to linguists of the scientific value of their work.

Preservation From *Indigenismo* to *Interculturalidad*

The following section will explore two projects dedicated to the promotion of Maya language and culture in Yucatán at two distinct moments within Mexican and Latin American cultural policy: *indigenismo* and *interculturalidad*. The first, *Yikal Maya Than*, is a literary magazine published in Yucatán between 1939 and 1955. The second, Ko'one'ex Kanik Maaya (Let's Learn Maya!), is a contemporary public school program designed to, as the name implies, teach the Mayan language. Both cultural projects target the non-Maya-speaking Yucateco community.

Yikal Maya Than, 1939-1955

In their 1994 article “The Cultural or Ethnic Identity of the Literary Magazine *Yikal Maya Than*”¹⁹ Harald Moßbrucker, Barbara Pfeiler, and Hilaria Maas Collí investigate why a magazine focused on the promotion of Maya language and culture in Yucatán originated precisely when it did in 1939. To this end, they analyzed all issues of

¹⁹ “La Identidad Cultural o Étnica en la Revista Literaria *Yikal Maya Than*.” All translations of Moßbrucker, et al. (1994) are mine.

Yikal published between 1939 and 1943 (issue numbers 1-52), and in 1955 (issue numbers 186-188), the final year of its publication. Each issue of magazine numbered around 30 pages and included anywhere from 8 to 14 individual contributions, spanning topics such as Maya language and indigenous education, poetry and Maya legends, and general historical texts, as well as Spanish-language advertisements and letters to the editor (Moßbrucker 1994:154). Texts were largely reprinted material from past magazines and newspapers dating as far back as the 19th century (156). The authors found the editors of *Yikal* to be influenced by two major concerns of the time: the spread of indigenismo as an intellectual pursuit and the socio-political turn occurring throughout Mexico and Yucatán (*ibid.*). But before I move forward with this discussion of *Yikal*, it is important to note that in this context, “Yucatecan,” refers to the non-Mayan population of Yucatán. In chapter four, I will discuss how this distinction transforms itself in a transnational context.

Why Yikal? Why Now?

The editors of *Yikal Maya Than* answered a call by President Lázaro Cárdenas to conserve indigenous languages through the education of indigenous communities in their own language. Recall from chapter two that the Cárdenas administration (1934-40) was the first to institute government policy specifically guided by the ideology of indigenismo. The founder and director of the magazine, Paulino Novelo Erosa, called upon various Yucatecan intellectuals including professors, doctors, and lawyers to create a publication through which they could educate the population about the history, traditions, and language of Yucatán (Moßbrucker 1994:155). Through *Yikal* primary and

secondary school teachers, in particular, would become familiarized with basic aspects of the indigenous language of their pupils in order to achieve indigenismo's goal of the acculturation and nationalization of "the Indian" through bi-lingual education (*ibid.*). More generally, the magazine would educate Yucatecos about the origins of their culture and traditions. Frequent declarations of patriotism and praise of Yucatecos were oriented toward an ancient Maya heritage, proclaiming it to be one of the greatest civilizations in the world (*ibid.*). In this way the editors and contributors of *Yikal* would fulfill their duty of *forjando patria* while fostering a distinctly Yucatecan identity set apart from the nation-building project of *mestizaje* built around an Aztec heritage. Yucatecos found themselves being written out of the nationalist narrative as the new, Mexican "race" was constructed around the confluence of European and Aztec heritage.

This tension was reflected socio-politically, as well. By 1939 Yucatán found itself in an increasingly isolated and adversarial position to the Mexican federation. Significant factors contributing to its geographic and economic self-containment were the successful henequen industry of the 19th and early 20th centuries whose debt peonage system ensured the permanence of a Mayan workforce (Wells 1985:137), as well as Yucatán's geographic isolation from the rest of Mexico, which kept the railroad and highway systems of Yucatán and the State divided until 1950 and 1961, respectively (Brannon and Baklanoff 1987). After repeated attempts at succession, in 1915, General Salvador Alvarado and his 7,000 troops marched on Mérida in order to enforce the reforms of the Mexican Revolution in Yucatán. The federally appointed governor Alvarado made unprecedented reforms, most notably, passing decrees to end the debt peonage system of hacienda agriculture (1915); to make primary education free and obligatory, establishing

schools in rural areas throughout Yucatán (1916); and to organize two Congresos Feministas in 1916, which resulted in laws guaranteeing women equality under the law, lowering the legal emancipation age from 30 to 21 years, and permitting civil divorce. But it was the seizure and redistribution of vast amounts of henequen hacienda land in 1937 by General Lázaro Cárdenas that was the final insult to Yucatecan elites after a long period of conflict with the federal government (Moßbrucker 1994:155). The upper classes of Mérida experienced a mounting loss of control over the Peninsula, not only politically and economically, but a cultural loss as well (*ibid.*). The intellectual class, in particular, sought to develop something distinctly Yucatecan as a way to neutralize an increasing Mexican presence.

The editors' dual agenda of *forjando patria* and fostering a deep regional connection is perhaps best reflected in the goals expressed in *Yikal's* first anniversary issue: "to be a spokesperson so that the language of Xiu y Cocom²⁰ becomes known in its true form, and to expose the work of ancient and modern writers regarding the traditions, legends, and folklore of Yucatán"²¹ (Moßbrucker 1994:153). And further, that "Yikal Maya Than is the one magazine that the home of every Yucateco who cares about his traditions should not be without"²² (154).

Analysis of the contents of Yikal Maya Than, 1939-1943

Moßbrucker et al. analyzed the Maya and Yucatecan cultural identity presented in the magazine in two parts: issues published between 1939-43, and those published in

²⁰ Xiu and Cocom are the names of the two major pre-Colombian Maya families in Yucatán

²¹ "Ser portavoz para que el idioma de los Xiu y Cocom se diera a conocer en su verdadera estructura, divulgándose además las obras de los escritores antiguos y modernos acerca de las tradiciones, leyendas y folklore de Yucatán." [Yikal Maya Than, Año 2, No. 13, 1940:5]

²² "Yikal Maya Than es la Revista que no debe faltar en el hogar de todo yucateco que verdaderamente siente sus tradiciones." [Yikal Maya Than, Año 2, No. 12, 1940:20]

1955. Among the historical texts chosen for reprint between 1939 and 1943, the history of Yucatán is presented as the history of the Maya and Spanish living amongst one another with the violence conveniently missing. Through such texts their goal “was the synthesis of these two cultures in order to create the regional culture, the Yucateca” (156). The editors were their own target audience; intellectuals interested in Maya language, culture, and traditions, as well as academics in Yucatán, Mexico, the U.S., and Europe (160).

Between 1939-43 editorials related to the Mayan language highlighted its antiquity and the importance of the very existence of such a long-standing indigenous language to contemporary Yucatecan identity (157). Moßbrucker et al., found the importance of language to identity highlighted throughout the magazine. The writer H. Pérez Martínez, governor of the state of Campeche, argued, “the greatest monument of any race (is) ITS LANGUAGE,”²³ and Carrillo y Ancona—who contributed many historical texts to the magazine—wrote similarly, “the greatest and most true monument of a people is the language they speak”²⁴ (*ibid.*). It is fitting, then, that the two sections constant among all issues were the “Particularities of the Maya Language” and the “Maya Phonetic Alphabet” (157). Learning a Mayan free of Spanish borrowings would simultaneously make the case for the import of learning a Spanish free of the Castellanization of Mayan words. The importance placed on language purity feeds into the discourse of indigenismo and educación indígena as the means through which to achieve acculturation of the indigenous community of Yucatán (and Mexico at large).

²³ “El edificio más grande que tiene toda raza, (is) SU IDIOMA.” [Año 1, No. 5, 1940:5]

²⁴ “El major y más verídico monument de un pueblo es la lengua que habla.” [Año 1, No. 5, 1940:5]

Among the literary texts of the magazine, Moßbrucker et al., found poetry to be preoccupied with the difficulty of the life of the Maya *campesino* as a subjugated figure, which fit perfectly with indigenismo's narrative of the impoverished, marginalized indigenous peasant. In fact, the poetry—written in Mayan and bilingual forms—contained the only examples where authors presented contemporary Maya peoples and wrote about them as subjects rather than objects of education and civilization (158), with a specific focus on the harshness of their lives. Further, across their sample, Moßbrucker et al., found only two stories in which the Maya were painted in a positive light and the Spanish, negatively. It is noteworthy that both cases were legends of the ancient Maya. Otherwise, the Spanish were written about positively and their presence in Yucatán depicted as valuable.

Analysis of the contents of Yikal Maya Than, 1955

By 1955, the final year of publication, the magazine's commitment to fostering a sense of Yucatecan identity through Maya culture and identity appeared to be waning, such that the penultimate issue, for example, contained three stories that had nothing to do with the Maya and a description of Carnival in Mérida (Moßbrucker et al. 1994:159). The final edition contained the legend of the Franciscan friar, Jerónimo de Aguilar, a Spanish castaway along the coast of Yucatán in 1511 (*ibid.*) who was instrumental in the Spanish seizure of the Aztec Empire. Editorial space once given to the celebration of “la raza maya” was ceded to contributions “preoccupied with the justification and glorification of the Spanish and their descendants in Yucatán” (*ibid.*). For example, *Yikal* concluded with “Los Mártires de Tituc,” a tribute to General Novelo and his soldiers,

who were murdered by the Maya forces during the Caste War (1847-1901) (*ibid.*). These Maya forces were themselves fighting for freedom from debt peonage—a time referred to as *el tiempo de esclavitud* to this day.

It was in this tremendous military action, perished in a heroic manner, the valiant Colonel Novelo, who, at the foot of a tree, wielded his saber and defended himself until the moment when a machete strike brought him to the ground, where he was savagely quartered. In this same action they died...all of them, with epic boldness, with extraordinary valor, they die as heroes.²⁵ [*ibid.*]

Although throughout the magazine's run the editors acknowledged the brutality of Spanish conquest and colonization, this was consistently neutralized by their message that the Spanish brought much needed civilization and Catholicism to Yucatán (160), a universally shared elite colonial position. Moßbrucker et al. conclude that as the political and intellectual commitments to indigenismo waned among intellectuals throughout Mexico since the first issues of *Yikal Maya Than*, the editors' commitments did so as well.

Ko'one'ex Kanik Maaya, 1992-Present

Unlike the bi-lingual education efforts of indigenismo that sought assimilation, the SEGEY (the Secretaría de Educación del Gobierno del Estado de Yucatán) program, Ko'one'ex Kanik Maaya (Let's Learn Maya!) has as its focus interculturalidad—a concept taking hold in education policy throughout Latin America. And just like indigenismo, interculturalidad is understood differently in different countries in Latin America. In her work on education and multicultural development in Peru, María Elena García (2005)

²⁵ En esta tremenda acción de armas, pereció de una manera heroica el valeroso coronel Novelo, quién al pie de un árbol, blandiendo el sable, se defendía bizarramente, hasta el momento en que un machetazo le hizo rodar por tierra, donde fué salvajemente descuartizado. En esa misma acción murieron /.../, todos ellos con épico denuedo, con valor extraordinario, como mueren los heroes. [Año 16, Nos. 187, 188, 1955:59]

makes the distinction between multiculturalism and interculturalidad as one of action. Whereas multiculturalism stops at the *recognition* and respect of cultural difference, “interculturalidad is the *practice* of a multiculturalism in which citizens reach across cultural and linguistic differences to imagine a democratic community” (3), or what Nancy Postero (2007) describes as an “interactive process of mutual influence among bearers of cultural and especially linguistic difference” (13). Postero prefers the term “state sponsored-multiculturalism,” because interculturalidad, she argues, is not “a utopian goal but a project promulgated by the government” (2007:13). Education, of course, has historically been the ideal medium through which to disseminate state/nationalist agendas.

That which would become the public school program, Ko’one’ex Kanik Maaya (from here on referred to as Ko’one’ex), began taking shape among a small group of Maya intellectuals and educators amid a wave of multicultural constitutional reforms across Latin America, as well as the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of the European invasion of the Americas. A 1992 amendment to the Mexican Constitution recognized the pluricultural composition of the nation and the rights of indigenous peoples to “preserve and enrich their language, knowledge, and all elements constituting their culture and identity” (Article 2, Section A, No. IV). In response the group created a local television program called Ko’one’x Kanik Maya T’an (Let’s Learn the Maya Language) “to teach, to show, and to make Maya heard”²⁶ (Briceño Chel 2007, qtd. in Medina et al. 2009:3). It was after the programming was achieved that the group decided to use the classroom as the medium through which to promote Mayan language revitalization. Ko’one’ex was officially instituted in 15 schools on October 12, 1996,

²⁶ “enseñar, mostrar, y hace escuchar Maya”

rising to 35 the following academic year. The goals and objectives of Ko'one'ex as written on the SEGEY website are as follows:

- To reaffirm the knowledge and the speaking of Maya as part of our national identity.
- To promote formal and informal education of the Maya language in urban and suburban settings.
- To learn the cultural achievements of the great Maya civilization.
- To promote the oral and written use of the Maya language.
- To contribute to the strengthening of the Maya culture through language.

[SEGEY 2014, translation mine]

The program reaches students in the third through sixth grades across the four regions of Yucatán. The southern zone, the region of corn and citrus cultivation, the towns of Peto, Tzucacab, Tekax, Oxkutzcab, Muna, and Umán; the eastern zone, a region of cattle ranching and industry, Conkal, Homún, Valladolid, and Tizimín. Along the northern coast, most notable for its fishing villages and low-key tourism, the program is limited to Progreso and Celestún, and finally, in Mérida, the capital of Yucatán (Medina, et al. 2009:5). In 2007 Ko'one'ex celebrated its 15th anniversary with 30 schools added to the program (Mayab T'aan 2010). In the 2007-08 school year, Ko'one'ex reached 18,338 children throughout 87 schools across 22 municipalities. Of these schools, 22 were located in Mérida and 65 were spread among 21 municipalities across the northern, eastern, and southern zones of the state (Medina, et al. 2013:77-78).

Native Maya speakers under 30 years old comprise the majority of the program's "facilitators" (Medina, et al. 2009:4). These are young people with *bachilleres* degrees whose work with the program grants them entry into the Universidad Pedagógica Nacional, Mérida (UPN, *ibid.*). That these facilitators have *bachilleres* is not insignificant and serves to index their ethnic and class backgrounds. Post-secondary school education follows several tracks, not entirely unrelated to a student's ethnic and class background.

Very generally, high school graduates seeking higher education may go one of a few general tracks, two of which are relevant to this discussion: Universidad, or COBAY (Colegio de Bachilleres). Traditionally, only students from upper class households who had attended the top high schools in Mérida would be considered for admission to the two major public²⁷ universities in Yucatán, also in Mérida: UNAM, the Universidad Autónoma de México, and UADY. Although these universities are no longer so restrictive, additional public universities have been established in largely Maya regions such as Valladolid, Felipe Carillo Puerto, and Morelos, and are meant to make higher education more accessible to the Maya population (although in many ways further segregating education). University degrees are *licenciaturas*, roughly equivalent to a three- or four-year bachelor's degree, with a requisite thesis. A licenciatura gives one status as a *licenciado*, which carries a degree of overt prestige as “Lic.” is put before one's name. It is also the prerequisite for a Master's degree. A bachiller indexes less cultural and economic capital. Simply put, it's less prestigious and gives one fewer options for employment than a licenciatura. This program will allow its facilitators to obtain a degree in education without having to first gain a licenciatura. Instead of professional teachers, full-time facilitators are hired. Thus far no data is available about what happens once the facilitators finish their degrees at the UPN, or if they continue with Ko'one'ex.

Academic research about Ko'one'ex undertaken with a critical eye—or undertaken by Maya academics, in general—is not readily available. In a 2009 paper written by Patricia Medina Melgarejo, a professor at UPN, and Alejandro Gonzalez Celia and Guillermo Contreras Gil, both faculty of Education at UADY, it is argued that

²⁷ Unlike the United States, the top universities in Mexico are public.

Ko'one'ex's critical intercultural intervention lies in its directionality—Spanish speakers learn Maya from Maya instructors. Facilitators “invite” Spanish speakers “to learn their language and worldview without looking for explicit recognition of the pueblo Maya” (2009:4). Contributing to this lack of explicit recognition is that Ko'one'ex is an *apollo escolar*, which means it is offered only to enrich students' education, not to be a foundational component. Unlike subjects such as mathematics or history, students do not receive grades on their report cards. In certain schools particularly adept students may be given extra credit in History of Yucatán or in Spanish class (2009:5). In the Mérida region, student participation in Ko'one'ex is a voluntary, extracurricular activity.

In a 2009 presentation on the development plan of the Secretaría de Educación Indígena, bilingual intercultural education is described as both a political and ethnic project. Politically it is a reorientation of the relationship between the pueblo indígena and the federal government, meant to open up a space for dialogue and communication between cultures (SEI slide 8). As a “shared ethnic project,” bilingual intercultural education begins with the “principle of reciprocal recognition” (slide 8). If the facilitator-student relationship created by Ko'one'ex is intended to achieve “dialogue and communication between cultures,” the facilitator is left to stand-in for the entire pueblo Maya.

Medina et al. view Ko'one'ex as playing two important roles in the multicultural reality of Yucatán: (1) to promote and strengthen the Mayan language, and (2) to foster attitudes of respect for the cultural and linguistic diversity that exists in the state, through active learning in their own classrooms from teachers of the Maya language (2009:6). Ko'one'ex is intended to “helps schools to exercise their right to intercultural programs to

“subvert” the historically asymmetrical socio-political relationship that characterizes the Peninsula” (10). Presumably, Ko’one’ex’s intercultural design is what prevents it from being taught in schools with largely Maya-speaking students—who also do not have formal education in how to read and write in Maya—Ko’one’ex would not fulfill its role as a “shared ethnic project.” Ko’one’ex promotes Jach Maya as activism, but further reinforces the inequality in educational opportunity and literacy. Further, Medina et al. may portray Ko’one’ex as “a strategy of Maya resistance” (9), but Ko’one’ex’s interculturality may be, in some ways, not so far removed from *Yikal*’s indigenismo. Both projects are directed at a non-Maya population throughout Yucatán and promote an “Imaginary Maya.” The presentation by the Secretaría de Educación Indígena described the goal of Ko’one’ex as: “the teaching of the Maya language and culture to the boys and girls of urban and suburban areas will enrich their cultural, regional, national, historic, linguistic, and anthropological [knowledge]” (slide 23). Just as García found in her study of the bilingual intercultural education of Quechua in Peru, “intercultural education is a national—and not an indigenous—project (2005:81). As we saw in the case of *Yikal*, the Maya language is being recognized and valorized within a nation-building project.

U Najil Xook

Antonia received a licenciatura in Anthropology and Linguistics from UADY in 1996, and completed the coursework for a Master’s Degree in the same areas. She worked for Indemaya in Mérida for a few years before leaving to teach Maya literature and linguistics at the Universidad del Oriente in Valladolid, Yucatán. She has had books of her poetry and short stories published and her well-known skills in the Maya language

led her to be hired by Dante Books²⁸ to edit the next edition of their Spanish-Maya pocket dictionary. In addition, she and her university students were given the job of translating the Mexican constitution into Yucatec Maya. Clearly, her skillfulness with the Maya language is widely recognized and respected.

U Najil Xook was officially registered as an NGO in March of 2006, but began taking shape in Antonia's mind a year earlier. According to Antonia, U Najil Xook "began as a meeting among neighbors and friends interested, principally, in doing pro-Maya work, but also regional cultural work. Not all members speak Maya [only her mother and father] but all are interested in doing something cultural."²⁹ Antonia was president of the original board of directors (a role she maintains), her late father the Treasurer, and neighbor Gerardo, the Secretary. The remaining seven members of the board of directors included Antonia's mother, three siblings, and three neighbors. The following is the mission statement of U Najil Xook:

The mission of the association is the revitalization, teaching, and diffusion of the Maya culture; the revitalization of the traditions and arts of the contemporary Pueblo Maya; the teaching of the history and writings of the Pueblo Maya; the diffusion of the knowledge, beliefs, and spirituality of the Pueblo Maya; the study of the elements that make-up the Maya culture (gastronomy, dress, language, literature); and in general, the celebration of all of the acts, agreements, and lawful contracts of any nature agreed upon by the Board of Directors.³⁰

Despite its extensive mission, U Najil Xook is a small operation; the NGO's office doubles as a bedroom for Antonia, a small one room/one bath concrete structure built on

²⁸ The leading bookseller and publisher in Yucatán.

²⁹ "...vamos a cumplir cuatro años pero nació como una reunion de vecinos y amigos para hacer labor, principalmente labor pro maya, pero también labor cultural regional. No todos los socios hablan Maya, pero todos están interesados para hacer algo cultural."

³⁰ "El objeto social de la Asociación es: la revitalización, enseñanza y difusión de la cultura maya; la revitalización de las tradiciones y artes del pueblo maya contemporáneo; la enseñanza de la historia y escritura del pueblo maya; la difusión de los saberes, creencias y espiritualidad del pueblo maya; el estudio de los elementos que conforman la cultura maya (gastronomía, vestimenta, lengua, literatura); y en general, la celebración de todos los actos, convenios y contratos lícitos de cualquiera naturaleza que acuerde el Consejo Directivo."

her family's land roughly twenty yards from her sister Veronica's house. Pati commissioned a *palopa* to be built at the end of the driveway between the two houses, where she holds U Najil Xook activities. Because she was teaching during the week, Pati had only weekends to devote to U Najil Xook. In 2008 U Najil Xook began offering a children's Maya language class every Sunday, advertised by word of mouth among family and neighbors. The class is informal; students can join in anytime.

In daily practice this 11-member NGO exists only on paper: it is one individual, Antonia. She gives talks at various conferences citing U Najil Xook as her institutional affiliation, puts out the magazine *K'aaylay*, offers a children's Maya language class every weekend held under the large palopa on her property, she occasionally organizes large events at which her sister cooks, her father plays saxophone with his jarana band, and her niece dances the jarana for everyone—those that I was a party to included a book launch for her friend and fellow writer Feliciano Sánchez Chan³¹ who spoke to the small crowd about writing stories and plays and led literary creation-related activities; or the celebration/screening of a puppet show DVD and coloring book produced by the U.S. organization MACHI (the Maya Area Cultural Heritage Initiative) who also hired Antonia to translate a puppet show script and coloring book text into Maya. U Najil Xook is Antonia's creation and labor of love. However, due to its scale I was left wondering if U Najil Xook 'counted' as an NGO worthy of study because Antonia is just one person and U Najil Xook is not her full-time occupation; she does not wake up and work from nine to five on any specific agenda. In fact, in my first discussion with Antonia about working with U Najil Xook for my dissertation, she frequently characterized U Najil

³¹ Recall from chapter one that Feliciano Sanchez Chan is widely known for his work in Maya theater.

Xook's activities as *sencillo*³² or *el poco que hacemos*.³³ Antonia keeps U Najil Xook's activities minimal to avoid an official government interference or presence. In particular, she recalled an event planned by another organization in which the sacrosanct atmosphere of a *j-men* ceremony was interrupted by an intrusive government presence. The organization had requested (and received) funding for the event from CDI, the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas, who sent a representative to ensure that everyone in attendance signed a registry for CDI's records. She explained that now *tratemos de evitar*³⁴ the government and its disruptive presence; it is too much trouble for *un mil pesos de ayuda*.³⁵

The 21st century has witnessed an explosive growth in the presence of NGOs and other non-government affiliated organizations in Yucatán and on the world scene, at large. Certainly, these organizations are taking over state functions in response to increasing cuts in public spending on social services. But what does it mean when these services are a woman's afternoon? Our notions of what constitutes an NGO and NGO activity are worth challenging. As commonly represented in anthropological literature, NGOs are often multi-person entities, with a space where members assemble, hold meetings, and work toward a well-defined objective (legislative change, recognition of rights, conservation, development, education). We have created an image of what a 'real' NGO looks like. During my fieldwork I often felt as though I was spending time with a friend and writer, as opposed to participating in the inner workings of an NGO, as was the case with Alianza del Pueblo Maya in San Francisco. U Najil Xook looked so

³² "basic"

³³ "the little that we do"

³⁴ "we try to avoid"

³⁵ "one thousand pesos of aid"

different from what I was used to reading about in anthropological texts, both from an “inside” perspective, (e.g. Riles 2000, Schuller 2012), or from the “outside,” presented as subjects (e.g. Ferguson 1994, Moose 2005). U Najil Xook is a person. It is a form of social activism that we do not often recognize as activism because it takes place outside of more formal institutional spaces. Teaching informal language classes or having children over for tamales is often considered women’s work, going unrecognized as activism. Securing this status is a different way for individual and grassroots organizations to represent what they are doing to an outside community that is fluent in a different (i.e. institutional) language. Further, having this designation opens up such small operations to channels of funding that might otherwise view them as invalid. For Antonia, this NGO-status comes with the recognition and validation of admittedly informal cultural work.

El Mes de las Lenguas Maternas

I would like to return to the celebration of the UNESCO’s International Day of Mother Languages in Yucatán. Throughout this month-long celebration various panels were held on topics related to the Maya language. Some of the panels I attended include: *Narratives of the Abuelos*, within which both Florencia and Domingo Dzul Poot (the INAH representative at the 1984 meetings) participated as storytellers; *The Role of Literature in the Preservation of Maya Language and Culture*; *The Social Function of the Maya Language*, in which Maya speakers discussed the stigma associated with speaking Maya, as well as how to fortify the language; *The Maya Language in the Work of Government Bodies*, with a panel consisting of representatives from various state

agencies; *The Legal Situation of the Maya Language*, at which they passed out bi-lingual copies of the Ley General de las Lenguas Indígenas; and *Upon Whom Does the Maya Language Depend?*³⁶ This last panel asked, why do we want the Maya language to survive? And, what haven't we done to cause the Maya language to be in the situation that it is in, when it has so much prestige internationally?

The month also included topics one would traditionally expect in a language celebration such as jokes and riddles, traditional games, gastronomy, and theater performances. And because of the one-to-one correspondence between Maya language and Maya culture, there were also events dedicated to gastronomy, traditional games and medicines, and dance. Panels were organized by academics, NGOs, government organizations, schools.

I would like to take a moment to discuss the cover image of the Mes de las Lenguas Maternas event guide and calendar published by Indemaya (Figure 2.1). The cover markets in the trope of indigenous women as bearers of culture and tradition. These images link the Mayan language to women, but more specifically to women who wear the ipil and the *terno*, “traditional” dress that is meant to index “Mayaness.” Again, we find the one-to-one correspondence between language and culture. But the cover is also telling an interesting story regarding class and age. The older women are dressed in the ipil, which would be worn on a regular basis and is quite common among women of that age throughout Yucatán. The young women on the cover are dressed in the *terno*, a dress worn on formal occasions by both Maya and non-Maya individuals—although much less so by young women—that is often embraced as traditional Yucateco or *mestizo* attire.

³⁶ Naraciones de los Abuelos; El Papel de la Literatura en la Preservación de la Lengua y Cultura Maya; La Función Social de la Lengua Maya; La Lengua Maya en el Quehacer de las Instancias Governmentales; ¿De quién depende la sobrevivencia de la lengua maya?; La Lengua Maya en Instancias Jurídicas



Figure 2.1. Indemaya guide to the Mes de las Lenguas Maternas events, February 2010.

Now, because it was a month devoted to the celebration mother languages, a point made at every panel I attended that everyone involved is a native speaker, whose experience speaking Maya since birth colored everything about how they viewed the world. This point about speaking “since birth” was reiterated at every possible occasion. Certainly, this is not something one hears only during events like these, but in conversations about “Mayaness” in this movement in general.

Returning to the panel that opened this chapter, “The Social Function of the Maya Language,” asked speakers to discuss the question of who should shoulder the responsibility to preserve the language. The three invited panelists alongside Antonia were equally, if not more, well known for their work on the Maya language scene. Feliciano moderated the panel, asking two organizing issues: the stigma associated with speaking Maya, and who is responsible for strengthening the Maya language. All four panelists spoke about how Maya was a part of them, a *riqueza*, and something that they were proud to speak without any feeling of stigmatization, effectively sidestepping the very real issue of shame felt among many Maya speakers, especially among young people, due to existing discrimination against Maya people in Yucatán. To the second issue at hand, that of the responsibility for the promotion and strengthening of the Maya language, Antonia responded that everyone had a part to play. A second participant, a Maya Professor at UADY with a Ph.D. in linguistics and literature from UNAM, who also holds an investigator position with INAH, argued that we must find other uses for the Maya language, that it needed to be “repurposed,” and not surprisingly, focused in on the role of institutions in the strengthening of the Maya language, and represented a very different approach from *el poco que hacemos*. Finally, the organizer, in an impassioned

closing speech on behalf of the language itself, and speaking for the entire panel, reiterated the point that they were all “Maya speakers from birth” and as such, it was harder for all of the mesa participants to think in Spanish than Maya because their first language was Maya. Antonia herself, however, although she shared his views on preserving the language, was not such a speaker.

Discussion

Jan Blommaert (1999) reminds us that the outcomes of any language ideological debate are tied to already existing conflict and inequality among groups of speakers and speech communities, for example, “restrictions on the use of certain languages/varieties; the loss of social opportunities when these restrictions are not observed by speakers; the negative stigmatization of certain languages/varieties; [and the] associative labels attached to languages/varieties” (2). And, as language is metonymic of its speakers, such inequality is grafted onto the speakers themselves. Antonia is frequently in situations where the focus is on the language and the qualifier of “having spoken from birth” is invoked. That invocation immediately produces a kind of hierarchy: Maya people, insofar as they are “Maya people,” have been speaking the Maya language since birth. Antonia has a certain anxiety in the face of this: sharing the goals of the movement, she has *not* been a Maya speaker from birth. Here she is caught between two value systems: on the one hand, she can speak Jach Maya, write it, use that alphabet and has taught the language—taught the form of the language valued in and by this wider movement, and what is widely seen by people who are not part of this movement as “authentic Maya.” At the same time, she is also receiving the message that one’s authenticity as a Maya person

is established above all by having spoken the language for all of one's life, and thus, that one's authenticity as a speaker as well. One could argue that this is precisely the kind of alienation that I have claimed characterizes the experience of Maya people outside this particular movement in relation to the discourse of authenticity within it that Antonia herself must seem, from some point of view, to represent.

Despite sharing the goals and many of the values of the Maya language movement Antonia's own experience betrays some of the important inconsistencies within the discourse of authenticity that serves to sustain that movement, at least in its present form. She is indeed aware of this conflict but because of her commitment to the values and goals of this movement, that underlying anxiety of belonging is never articulated. The question is a pragmatic one, wherein this discourse serves a purpose Antonia believes in, and thus goes un-discussed because of its seeming political usefulness; an anxiety about belonging that stems from having dedicated herself and her life to this movement and its goals, to question some of its basic assumptions could very well place her in a greater position of exteriority with regard to the movement as a whole, or undermine it entirely. The issue here is more than language fluency having a one-to-one correlation with group membership. Bartolomé Alonso Caamal, a noted Mayan scholar and activist, has said of standardizing, or "normalizing" Maya, that it is not just about creating norms, but is a social and cultural movement that has the implication of giving Maya people a voice in politics. When linguistic unity is seen as one of the few strategies left through which to decolonize the Maya of Yucatán, there become great stakes in Maya people-as-Maya-speakers.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Anxiety of Visibility

An estimated 15,000 Yucatec Maya migrants live in San Francisco. A San Francisco Chronicle article from 2002 stated that the Mexican Consulate in San Francisco estimated that as many as 10,000 Yucatec Maya migrants could be living in the Bay Area, based upon the 1,600 consular identification cards issued to Yucatecos that year, but offered no further information on how such an estimate was calculated (Hendricks 2002). Years later the numbers quoted in various newspaper articles and blogs rose from 10,000 to 15, to even 20,000, in San Francisco and 25,000 in the greater Bay Area (Huber 2009, Sierra Alonso 2010, Quart 2011, Hernandez 2012).

I found myself going around in circles attempting to track down where these estimates originated and the trail always led back to Alianza del Pueblo Maya, an NGO organized and operated by and for Yucatec Maya migrants, whose offices are located in the rapidly gentrifying Mission District of San Francisco. The estimates are not only posted on Alianza's website, but they are the same numbers quoted to the press when the NGO gives interviews and they are the same numbers variously relied upon by academics in the U.S. and Yucatán. When I asked then president of Alianza for the sources of these numbers—on a website he designed—he could not recall precisely, but thought that perhaps they were from a study done several years ago by one of the local colleges, although he could not remember which one.

It was time to track down anthropologists in San Francisco working on Yucatec

Maya migrant issues.³⁷ From Anne Whiteside and Patricia Baquedano-Lopez I learned that the estimate of 15,000 Yucatecos living in San Francisco originated from a set of surveys undertaken by Indemaya (Instituto Para el Desarrollo de la Cultura Maya del Estado de Yucatán) and published in its 2005 report *Diagnóstico de Migración y Políticas Públicas en el Estado de Yucatán: Síntesis Diagnóstica*. In the most recent approximations we find the Yucateco population back at 10,000 to 15,000 (Hellerstein 2013), while also rising to 20,000, which likely stems from little more than the fact that the population of migrants would have steadily risen from 15,000 over the past several years. Why was I so focused on these numbers? What did I expect to gain from them?

It has long been established that “undocumented” migrants are difficult to accurately enumerate, in no small part because many are explicitly trying not to be for fear of arrest and deportation by a country that has targeted and labeled them as “illegal” and as a problem to be solved. As Nickolas Rose articulates in *Powers of Freedom* (1999), “To count a problem is to define it and make it amendable to government. To govern a problem requires that it be counted” (221). Therefore, to render oneself illegible—to be non-enumerable—is a way of asserting the choice *not* to participate in a system that identifies individuals as objects of knowledge, and in particular, knowledge that is frequently manipulated to serve various political agendas.

This chapter is concerned with the *desire* to be counted, or more specifically, to be rendered legible, not only to the state, but also to civil society. I engage with the question of legibility through an examination the many factors taken into account by the board of Alianza del Pueblo Maya during the 2010 census drive concerning how to fill in

³⁷ Dr. Anne Whiteside, City College of San Francisco, and Dr. Patricia Baquedano-López, University of California, Berkeley kindly provided this information.

the questions regarding Hispanic Origin (Person 1, Question 8) and Race (Person 1, Question 9) in a way that would result in a statistically legible population of Yucatec Maya individuals in San Francisco. At stake for Alianza is the potential for increased access to material and other government or private resources in the future, since funding for various health and social welfare programs necessitate a target population. This particular moment offers a window into how “indigeneity” and “Mayaness” are negotiated through a politics of naming and enumeration. I will explore the anxiety that develops around the potential achievement of such legibility and what that tells us about how state processes of avowal set the terms for these very considerations and conversations.

This chapter is also rooted in a landscape of coalition politics playing out in a city saturated with organizations dedicated to the rights of a range politicized identities situated in race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, culture, and nation. For Alianza, the potential for coalition generates imagined obligations and commitments to other civil society organizations. As Alianza considers the history of these categories, not only as politicized identities in the United States and in Mexico, but also as legal categories, the organization struggles to discern what its relationship should be, and could be, to them. In this context, anxieties arise about what it means to claim one identity versus another in any given context, and further, to be recognized as such by others, by not only the government, but also by other NGOs and organizations, and their target constituents. My goal for this chapter is to illustrate how Alianza is not simply mobilizing culture toward a particular, tangible end as we see in practices of strategic essentialism, but in fact leaving space for an unknown future of claim-making.

Numeracy and Census in Anthropology

The manipulation of numbers and statistics through the census has become a central device in the practice of statecraft (Cohn 1987, Anderson 1991, Appadurai 1993). As a technique of enumeration the census facilitates a particular social reality to come into existence through the statistical data derived therein, leaving the census as a key site where the politics of representation play out. In *Seeing Like a State* (1998) James Scott uses the development of scientific forestry in 18th century Prussia and Saxony as a window into the production of knowledge and control over the population. He argues that in its “raw” form the natural world is too “bureaucratically indigestible” for the state to manage according to its economic interests. The state imposition of utilitarian logic to forests—“seeing” only commercial timber and erasing all other forest products that were valuable to the local population—resulted in a miniaturized version with little resemblance to that occupied by its residents. The forest was abstracted and simplified according to the state’s objective of maximum commodity production, which it then imposed onto the forest to bring it into reality; all non-commercial resources were extracted and replaced with straight mono-crop rows of timber—the practice of “fiscal forestry.”

Appadurai (1993) illustrates how the map and census are incorporated into the same surveillance scheme: “number, by its nature, flattens idiosyncrasies and creates boundaries around those homogenous bodies, since it performatively limits their extent. In this latter regard, statistics are to be bodies and social types what maps are to territories; they flatten and enclose” (334). The map and census become further entangled when we consider the map as more than just an instrument of knowledge of a

geographical area, but as an object to be “filled in’ with knowledge of the population within its borders (Mitchell 2008:9); it is “a mechanism for collecting, storing, and manipulating multiple levels of information” (*ibid.*). In looking specifically at the role of numbers in the colonial imagination, through the practice of bureaucratic power; specifically, how quantification was employed *to do things*, and how contemporary community politics and violence has its roots in the colonial period. He argues that we need to look beyond the classificatory logic of colonial administrations/regimes and explore how numbers themselves, through quantification and measurement, were used in all forms of bureaucratic control from censuses, to maps and agricultural surveys, what Appadurai calls the “colonial archive” (315). As with Scott’s example of scientific forestry, numbers made colonial domains digestible or “knowable” to the metropolis. The creation of the colonial archive was not about learning or discovery, but about the ability of numbers to legitimate power, discipline populations, and justify policy initiatives. Numbers were employed to make the Indian population legible according to classifications created in accord with British sensibilities. However, the colonial state’s inscription of this new system of quantification on to the Indian body led to “the self-mobilization of these groups into a variety of larger translocal political forms” (329).

Bernard Cohn’s (1983) study of the development of the British colonial census in India (1871-1901) demonstrates just how census procedures can lead to a consciousness of identity and, in his case, the legitimation of claims to desired new statuses that came to extend translocally as castes (241); and that have since become entrenched in “the political, cultural and religious battles at the heart of Punjabi politics which have been crucial down to the present” (250). Although confounded over the caste “system,” the

British believed that properly governing the Indian people would require an understanding of caste and religion (242). Census questions were designed according to British ways of knowing and governing populations, which meant an understanding of caste as social hierarchy related to racial purity. The social standing that the British imagined of each caste became directly tied to opportunities in terms of access to education, resources, jobs, military conscription, and leadership positions (249). The significance of census information to British rule was widely acknowledged, such that, by 1931, certain groups even distributed handbills with what the people in their area should answer for the categories Religion, Sect, Caste, Race, and Language (250). The census played a key role in objectifying Indian race and culture for the British, but also made an object of it to the Indian population itself; having to answer enumerators' categorical inquires opened up a space for Indians to ask such questions of themselves (230). Here, we see Ian Hacking's (1999[1986]) "making up people" at work. "Making up people" is based upon the concept of dynamic nominalism, "people spontaneously come to fit their categories" (161), not because "there was a kind of person who came increasingly to be recognized by bureaucrats or by students of human nature but rather that a kind of person came into being at the same time as the kind itself was being invented" (165).

Not unlike Cohn, Benedict Anderson argues that it was not the racial/ethnic *classification* of the population that was the most significant innovation of the colonial state's census project, but its "systematic *quantification*" (1991:168). In the earliest days of European colonial rule, the ends of enumerations of the population were predetermined, taken for the purpose of tax collection and military service; counts were focused on male bodies and the number of individual households. After the 1850s,

however, Indonesian colonial authorities were taking increasingly detailed enumerations of the population, including women and children, and ethnicity, to no material or preconceived end. This new racial and ethnic classification imagined by the imperial state was reified through what Anderson called “imperial administrative penetration” (165). This penetration was orchestrated through the organization of new bureaucratic functions based on racial and ethnic hierarchies; the state multiplied in size and function, permeating the daily lives of its domain in the image of new social institutions. “The flow of subject populations through the mesh of differential schools, courts, clinics, police stations and immigration offices created ‘traffic-habits’ which in time gave real social life to the state’s earlier fantasies” (169).

The above section illustrates how “categories that may have begun as the artificial intentions of cadastral surveyors, census takers, judges, or police officers can end by becoming categories that organize people’s daily experience precisely because they are embedded in state-centered institutions that structure that experience” (Scott 1998:3). Recent census studies within Latin America shift their focus to the role of immigration and indigeneity in the development of census categories, in particular, those of race and color. João Pacheco de Oliveira (2000) looks at the shift in Brazil’s long distinction between people of color, and Indians. Brazil was a nation of *pardos*, a generic term indicative of the mixing of color groups; a melting pot of Portuguese settlers, African slaves, and the native population. The color category, *pardo*, stands apart from “indian,” a term linked to a legal status, thereby differentiating the two groups. Indian as a juridical status allows Brazil to maintain the “conceptual strictness” of the census color classification to maintain the *meztizo* narrative (197). Oliveira found that between 1940

and 1980 the number of individuals recorded as black or white under the census color category decreased, while the number of pardos increased, as pardo came to mean something distinctly different in different regions of the country (198). For example, in the north, a region of few European immigrants and “where black slaves were not introduced in significant numbers...the pardo category evokes Indian ancestry and identity” (198). But if “indian” were a color category in itself, it would disrupt the conceptual strictness of Brazil as a racial democracy, which needs the growing pardo category to maintain strictness (197). Influenced by campaigns for the demarcation of indigenous lands organized by NGOs, indigenous movements, and international organizations, the new federal constitution of 1988 contained an amendment recognizing the rights of the Indian population to land, the use of their language, and self-governance, and in 1991 the census began to include an option for people to declare themselves as “indigenous” in the question regarding color, opening up new spheres of recognition beyond pardo.

Kimberly Simmons’ (2009) found contemporary Dominican identity, and ideas about race and nation in general, rooted in periods of emigration out of the DR by Spanish Creoles, and immigration into the DR by Haitians in the early to mid-20th century. Ideas of race, culture, and nationality were constantly re-formulated to establish distance from blackness, in order to reaffirm distance from Haiti and its citizens as descendants of an African slave population. The state has two ways to institute this difference in color and race: the census, and the *cédula* (national ID card). *Indio* as a color category on the *cédula* reinforces Dominican identity as connected to the Taino past of the DR because both *negro* and *mulatto* would register Haitian descent. *Indio* came to

represent anything that was not black. *Mestizo*, then, as a racial category on the census, also serves to reaffirm Dominicanness as a mixture of European and Indian racial categories. In my discussion of the U.S. census I plan to bridge the divide between a top-down view of the co-creation of census and society, in both Mexico and the U.S., with an “on-the-ground” view of the individuals filling out the census who must work through the process of objectifying themselves in order to be seen by the state.

Overview of the Development of the Official Censuses of Mexico and the United States

The following section explores the development of the national censuses of Mexico and the United States, in particular, the ever-evolving race and ethnicity categories. I begin with the first official colonial census of Yucatán in 1549 and move through the development of the modern national census of Mexico from independence to the post-revolutionary period, and finally the current neoliberal era. From there, I move to the U.S. with a discussion of the national census from the very first in 1790, through 1970, and end on a discussion of the transformation of the Hispanic Origin question introduced in 1980. This will bring the discussion full circle to the 2010 debate among the board of Alianza introduced above. My goal is not simply to provide an historical account of the censuses of Mexico and the U.S., but to demonstrate how the census is variously used to both engender and reflect the national narrative, through their very different approaches to race, ethnicity, and indigeneity.

Mexican Census, 1549-2010

Caste and Culture in the Colonial Census

The first official colonial census of the territory that today we recognize as Yucatán, was taken in 1549 and used largely for tributary and military purposes. It returned a count of 240,000 Maya individuals across Yucatán (Farriss 1984:86), a number that has quadrupled to this day according to the particular language-metric used by the modern Mexican census. According to historians, Yucatán was viewed by the Spanish authority as an inhospitable backwater with little to offer by way of commercial natural resources (Farriss 1984:30). Therefore, unlike the rest of New Spain, the Catholic Church held the lion's share of influence and power of rule in the lives of the Maya.

The population that the Spanish encountered throughout the peninsula during conquest was, according to Wolfgang Gabbit (2001), "to a great extent, linguistically and culturally homogenous, but divided politically into more than 16 federations of states and petty states frequently waging war against one another" (465). In his attempt to reconstruct Maya social and political organization and identity between 1550-1850, Matthew Restall (1997) found no explicit ethnic consciousness among the Maya in the written record, but rather, a collective identity based upon long established notions of community and kin, *cah* and *chibal* (15). *Cah* was a municipal community and *chibal* a patronym group whose members make up what was essentially an extended family existing within the *cah*. As an identifier in Maya notarial texts, a person or group would appear as the following: *ah* [cah name]-*ob*³⁸ and *ah* [patronym group]-*ob*. Restall found "no formal organization of *chibal* members beyond the *cah* level" (17). Although neither Maya nor *indio* were ethnic terms in the Maya written record, the Spanish were

³⁸ *-ob* is the plural suffix

categorized as *dzul*, the Maya concept of outsider or foreigner. As individual towns became administrative units under Spanish rule, these pre-Hispanic federations and states dissolved (Gabbert 2001:465).

Nancy Farriss (1984) found the following variety of legally defined ethnic and racial identities or *castas* in the colonial census of Yucatan.

Vecinos: all non-Indian Spaniards

Criados: legally Indian, but in the service of a Spaniard who took on their tribute payment.

Naborías: descendants of *criados* who served as day laborers for Spaniards in the cities; they retained the legal category of Indian and many Indian labor obligations and were required to pay one-half of normal tribute tax.

Indios del pueblo: those of the legal category of Indian who lived outside of urban centers.

Indios hidalgos: descendants of the central Mexican authorities who came to Yucatán to join Montejo's forces; they were exempt from paying tax and tribute.

Mestizos: those of Indian-Spanish descent.

Pardos: Africans and all those of African descent. [103-109]

As noted earlier, the Spanish lacked a critical mass in the region; this resulted in Maya as the language most widely spoken across the peninsula, as well as shared characteristics in regional diet and dress. Often, it was only through a Spanish or Maya surname that one was identifiable in colonial documents (109). Culturally, then, there was no fixed boundary between those legally categorized as Indians and those in non-Indian categories. Occupation, legitimate or illegitimate birth, or lightness of skin, for example, could make all the difference for a mestizo or an indio hidalgo to gain passage into the privileged vecino casta over the course of his lifetime (108). As individuals considered *naborías* and *indios del pueblo* moved back-and-forth between rural and suburban areas,

so too would their identities as *naboría* and *indio del pueblo*.

Independence, Revolution

The United States of Mexico achieved independence in 1821. Although the 1824 Constitution mandated a national census every ten years, this failed to materialize due to political turmoil plaguing Mexico throughout the 19th century. In addition to never-ending power struggles between the Centralists and the Federalists, the government was faced with multiple independence movements throughout the 1830s and 1840s in Texas, Tabasco, República de Yucatán, and República del Rio Grande; the U.S.-Mexican War (1846-48); the War of the Reform (1858-61); the Second Mexican Empire (1864-67); and the overthrow of the Lerdista Regime in Chihuahua (1876). The first successful effort toward a systematic, statistical national census as we know it today did not occur until 1895, under the regime of Porfirio Diaz, president of the republic from 1876 to 1911. At this time, an individual's status as "indio" could be self-ascribed or determined by the census administrator. Beginning in 1900, it was decided that a *Censo General de Población* would be conducted every ten years and would focus on the living conditions of the population. I would argue that previous ethnic and racial categories ceased to be included explicitly in the census for fear of revealing a large non-mestizo population, acting as a foil to the indigenista agenda of assimilation. The Censo General de Población has asked of nationality and language, although more subtle markers used to estimate an indigenous population remained in flux for decades. The shift to language as the sole determining factor of indigeneity began in 1900 and 1910, wherein individuals were asked to list their native language or language spoken habitually. With the rise of

indigenismo, this proved to be problematic for the Álvaro Obregón government in 1921³⁹ when it registered a large bilingual population (Spanish alongside an indigenous language) that had yet to be fully assimilated to the Spanish language.

The 1940 census undertaken between the outgoing leftist Lázaro Cárdenas administration and the incoming right-wing Manuel Ávila Camacho saw a move to economically determinative cultural traits to estimate “indio” status. For example, the 6^o Censo General de Población (1940) asked the following questions:

Por Costumbre or de Manera Habitual

- 37. Come pan de trigo o no
- 38. Anda descalzado
- 39. Usa huaraches
- 40. Usa zapatos
- 41. Si es varón, usa pantalón o calzón – Si es del sexo femenino usa “*envuelto*”, “*enagua*” o falda. Vestido completo etc. (escribase la palabra correspondiente)
- 42. Duerme en el suelo, en hamaca, “*tapexco*”, catre o cama (escribe)

Daily Life

- 37. Do you eat bread made of wheat flour
- 38. Do you walk barefoot
- 39. Do you wear sandals
- 40. Do you wear shoes
- 41. If you are a man, do you wear pants or calzón – If you are a woman, do you wear an “*envuelto*,” an “*enagua*,” a skirt, a full dress, etc. (write the corresponding word)
- 42. Do you sleep on the floor, in a hammock, “*straw mat*”, cot, or bed (write)

Bread made of wheat flour was used as a marker of mestizaje, as corn tortillas were characteristic of indigenous communities, as well as walking barefoot or in sandals, wearing *calzon*, *envuelto*, and *enagua*, and finally, sleeping in hammocks and on straw mats. In the 1950s and 1960s, only the questions regarding bread and footwear remained in “Por Costumbre o de Manera Habitual,” and in 1970, only footwear. The census was renamed Censo General de Población y Vivienda under the presidency of José López Portillo in 1980 and we see the elimination of footwear as well, leaving us once again with language. This time, however, respondents were given only two options: (1) does the individual speak an indigenous language—yes or no—and which one, and (2) does the individual speak Spanish—yes or no.

³⁹ The census had to be postponed for one year due to upheaval caused by the Mexican Revolution.

The Era of Neoliberal Multiculturalism

The most recent Censos Generales de Población y Vivienda—2000 and 2010—adopted two different modes of data collection: the long form and the short form.⁴⁰ A new category appeared on the long form only: *Pertenencia Étnica* (Ethnicity) in 2000. Respondents were asked: “Is (PERSON) náhuatl, maya, zapotec, mixtec, or another indigenous group?”⁴¹ and given the option only to circle “Sí” or “No.” The question was reformulated for the 2010 census as *Autodescripción Étnica* (Ethnic Self-Description), in which respondents were asked: “In accordance with the culture of (PERSON), is s(he) considered indigenous?”⁴² Again, respondents had the option only to circle “Sí” or “No.” There is an interesting shift in perspective between 2000 and 2010, which the title of the category alone obscures. Initially, it is from the respondents’ point of view that the question of indigeneity is determined. However, in the following census cycle, individuals are asked to respond from the point of view of the culture that they belong to. I do not have the knowledge to speak to the reason behind this particular change, but the addition of an ethnicity-related question, more generally, was certainly spurred by the massive wave of constitutional change occurring throughout Latin America. Many countries have fashioned entirely new constitutions—Brazil (1988), Colombia (1991), Paraguay (1992), Peru (1993), Ecuador (in 1998 and 2008), Venezuela (1999), and Bolivia (2009). While others have made significant reforms—Argentina (1994) and Costa Rica (1989) (Uprimny 2011:1587). As we will see, key among these included the simultaneous adoption of neoliberal policy and the recognition of the pluricultural composition of the

⁴⁰ The use of the long and short forms was adopted after Mexico introduced the *Conteos de Población y Vivienda*, specific population and housing counts, in 1995 and carried out separately, every ten years, in the years ending in five: INEGI: <http://www.inegi.org.mx/est/contenidos/proyectos/ccpv/presentacion.aspx>

⁴¹ ¿(NOMBRE) es náhuatl, maya zapoteco, mixteco, o de otro grupo indígena?

⁴² De acuerdo con la cultura de (NOMBRE), ¿ella (él) se considera indígena?

national population. In 1992 President Carlos Salinas de Gortari made several such reforms to the Mexican constitution that focused on both the recognition of the indigenous population, and the opening of trade and denationalization of land.

After a controversial election in 1988, Salinas was looking to legitimize his administration both domestically and to the international community in order to garner support to implement new neoliberal policies (de la Peña 2006:287). His first step toward this process began on June 6, 1990 when by presidential decree Salinas founded the *Comisión Nacional de los Derechos Humanos* (National Human Rights Commission). Later, on September 5, Salinas ratified the International Labor Organization Convention 169 (drafted in 1989) that focused on the identification, recognition, non-discrimination, and the consultation and participation of indigenous peoples in all decisions and development that might affect them. In July 1991 Article 2 of the Mexican Constitution was amended to read:

The Mexican nation is one and indivisible. The nation has a pluricultural composition based upon its indigenous peoples (*pueblos*) that have descended from those living in the country's current territory at the time of colonization, and have maintained all or part of their social institutions, economies, cultures, and politics. Their consciousness of their indigenous identity should be the fundamental criteria in determining to whom indigenous law will be applied...

- A. This constitution recognizes and guarantees the right of indigenous peoples and communities to self-determination and, as a result, the autonomy to:
 - I. Decide their internal forms of social, economic, political, and cultural organization.
 - II. Apply their own systems of regulation and conflict resolution *subject to the general principles of this Constitution...*
 - III. To chose to live according to their traditional practices and norms.
 - IV. To preserve and enrich their language, knowledge, and all elements constituting their culture and identity.
 - V. To conserve and improve their "habitat" and preserve the integrity of their lands *in accordance with this Constitution.*
 - VI. Be entitled to the forms of estate and land tenure established by this Constitution and all derived legislation, as well as to all private and

communal property rights, and to the preferential use of the natural resources located at the places which the communities live, with the exception of those identified as strategic areas *according to this Constitution*...

- B. IX. [The State will] consult indigenous peoples (pueblos) and incorporate their proposals and recommendations in the elaboration of the National Development Plan and those of the states and municipalities.
[Mex. Const. art. II, sec. A–B.IX, emphasis mine]

As Guillermo de la Peña (2006) has explained, although this was the first time the Mexican constitution explicitly acknowledged the existence of indigenous peoples, Article 2 was widely criticized by indigenous groups for its ambiguous language that gives the Constitutional government final authority. Further, key aspects of the ILO Convention 169 were omitted, such as “the validity of the Indian authorities and normative systems, the legitimacy of territorial demands, and the right of the indigenous people to participate in all public decisions that affected their lives and resources” (287-88). These omissions were key in Salinas’ plans to reform trade and denationalize land and set the stage for the Zapatista Rebellion that began on January 1, 1994.

In February of 1992, roughly one year later after the amendment of Article 2, Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution was amended to allow for the privatization of *ejido* land, a significant move both politically and economically. Land reform had been a major goal of the Mexican Revolution and a significant part of the identity of the newly liberated Mexican nation, with *Tierra y Libertad* (Land and Freedom) the powerful slogan of the Revolutionaries. As part of the post-Revolution Constitution of 1917, Article 27 nationalized all lands and mandated its equitable redistribution from wealthy *hacendados* to *campesinos* through agricultural land grants, called ejidos. Although ejido land would be federally owned, ejido members were given land title sanctioning their right to work the land collectively and from which they were expected to earn their

primary income. Article 27 was regulated by the Agrarian Reform Law, which rendered ejido lands inalienable and non-transferable. Further, the right to acquire land was restricted to Mexicans by birth or nationalization, and Mexican companies. Salinas' amendment to Article 27 effectively denationalized land—allowing it to be sold, leased, or mortgaged—a particularly contentious move since small-scale collective farming remained the primary income of the vast majority of indigenous communities throughout Mexico.

...The law, with respect to the decisions and agreements of the ejidatario to adopt the conditions in order to take advantage of their natural resources, shall regulate the rights of every ejidatario over his land. It shall establish the procedures by which ejidatarios may create partnerships amongst themselves, with the State, or with third parties over the use of lands; and it shall authorize ejidatarios to transfer their property rights among the members of the community; as well as establish the requirements and procedures by which the ejidos may grant an ejidatario dominion over his ejido property. In the case of the alienation of ejido land, the rights provided by this law shall be respected. [Mex. Const. art. XXVII, sec. VII, par. 3]

Later that same year, on December 17, Salinas met with U.S. President George H.W. Bush and Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney to ceremoniously sign the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), to be ratified by each nation's legislative body and go into effect on January 1, 1994. NAFTA was designed to eliminate barriers to trade and facilitate investment between the U.S., Canada, and Mexico. With U.S.-Canada trade already largely duty-free, NAFTA made its most significant contribution in the elimination of tariffs on over one-half of all Mexican exports to the U.S. and over one-third of U.S. exports to Mexico. Within 15 years all U.S.-Mexico tariffs were to be phased out entirely. NAFTA's elimination of tariffs on U.S. agricultural exports had devastating impacts on Mexican farmers, who could not compete with the large-scale, subsidized U.S. imports that flooded the market. NAFTA combined with Article 27 had a

particularly devastating impact on indigenous communities, who largely rely on farming for subsistence and income. Despite guarantees made to indigenous communities in Article 2 regarding the maintenance of traditional practices and integrity to land, Mexico's dual adoption neoliberal constitutional reforms along with ambiguous human rights' discourse and legislation, enabled the state to infringe upon those very rights (see especially Speed 2005).

This irony was lost on no one and on January 1, 1994, the official start date of NAFTA, the Zapatistas led an uprising in Chiapas. They protested not only NAFTA but all neoliberal reforms that serve to further disenfranchise indigenous peoples, and they demanded political autonomy and control over the natural resources upon which indigenous communities relied. But Salinas had too much momentum; later that same year, on May 18, Mexico was admitted into the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development (OECD). Salinas effectively legislated an end to the (imagined) revolutionary Mexican nation of *Tierra y Libertad* and the world embraced a new neoliberal, multicultural Mexico.

As we make our way back to the Mexican census, where does this leave us? The above discussion illustrates the ways in which the census is used as a tool through which the Mexican state makes and remakes the individuals within its domain into citizens. I argue that the Mexican state most clearly shaped the image of the Mexican citizen through the question of language. That language has become a critical point of contention within nationalist politics (Arel 2002) is well documented in the history of the Mexican national census. Before 1970, the Mexican census used a box to check if one spoke Spanish, and next to that to write-in other languages spoken. Details for this became

increasingly precise, such that individuals were asked to list their indigenous language or dialect, if spoken, or if one was a foreigner, to print their natal language. This changed in 1970. Individuals filling out the forms were asked if they spoke an indigenous language (and to write-in which one) and below this, if they spoke Spanish. Foreign languages were no longer an option. Such increasingly restrictive fluency options dictate what the state recognizes as acceptable for its citizens any given point in time (2002:115). For decades language became a safe way for the state to implicitly enumerate its indigenous population. To ask a question specifically pertaining to race and ethnicity, as we have come to know in the U.S. Census, would be to admit that Mexico was not an ethnically homogenous mestizo nation.

Language is thoroughly entangled with state power and authority (Kymlicka 1995). This inherent link is evidenced through the lingua franca of state operations (Arel 2002:92), for example, congressional sessions, or in this case, the very language in which the census is written. An “official” language need not be codified through federal legislation for it to engender certain rights and privileges to its speakers; those with the power and authority to speak dictate the language. This has facilitated language becoming a popular cultural marker around which (predominantly) minority groups galvanize to demand recognition, and in some cases, sovereignty (Urla 1993, Hornberger 1998, Warren 1998, Graham 2002, García 2005, Gustafson 2009). One need only look to the UNESCO Universal Declaration on Linguistic Rights (1996) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008) to see how language rights have come to be viewed as human rights to be recognized and upheld by the state. More than just the freedom to speak a particular language, state recognition comes with the expectation and

obligation for the equal distribution of state services, in this case, to the speakers of an officially recognized indigenous language group. Examples range from the ceremonial, such as the written translation of the constitution into minority languages, to the more substantial provision of translator services to aid speakers of minority languages in courts of law or hospitals.

Language as a marker of identity, however, is far from stable (Arel 2002:93). Individuals gain new language abilities over time and their “private” language, often the language spoken at home, may shift as well (*ibid.*). This can be particularly ambiguous when language is used precisely as an indicator of group or ethnic boundaries. In Yucatán—as elsewhere with speakers of indigenous languages—Maya-speaking parents often raise their children in Spanish, believing this will help their children succeed. In the federal census parents would be reported as Maya speakers, but not their children, and therefore implicitly not Maya. In chapter three I discuss this equation of language with cultural identity. It has been in flux because the Mexican state used language as a marker, first, to realize its vision through census statistics, and later, to understand the pluricultural character of its citizenry. In the following section, I offer an historical overview of the treatment of race and ethnicity in the U.S. Census. The explicit questioning of color and race that we will examine in case of the U.S. Census would have challenged the national origin myth of *mestizaje* in post-Revolution Mexico.

United States Census, 1790-1970

As mandated by the U.S. Constitution, every federal census has included a category regarding race since its origin in 1790. The Constitutional Convention of 1787

established the bicameral Congress to balance power between small and large states, with equal representation in the Senate, and delegate distribution in the House of Representatives in accordance with a state's population size. Here, numbers were used to legitimate the authority of the state as a representative body and, further, to re-legitimate this authority with regular adjustments for population growth, thereby inscribing a link between politics and enumeration in the Constitution (Peterson 1987:192 cited in Rose 1999:222). The ensuing debate over just who was a representable subject, and how to enumerate such a subject, resulted in the Three-Fifths Compromise. It this question of precisely *how* the population would be counted that cemented the census' role in the spatial and racial distribution of power in the U.S. (Rose 1999:222).

Originally titled "Color," the category was retitled "Color or Race" in 1900, and finally "Race" in 1950. Until the first self-enumeration schedules in 1960, census enumerators based their reports on visual criteria given in the Bureau's official instructions. The following by Melissa Nobles (2002:67) details all racial categories included in the census between 1790 and 1990 (Figure 3.1). The earliest distinctions among racial categories were of Free Whites, Free Colored Persons, and Slaves. These distinctions were augmented over time, with Chinese (1870), Japanese (1890), Filipino, Hindu and Korean (1920), Mexican (appearing only in 1930 and 1940), Hawaiian, Aleut, Eskimo (1970), Vietnamese, Asian Indian, Samoan, and Guamanian (1980), and finally, Other Asian or Pacific Islander (1990) (*ibid.*). Many of these categories arose due to extensive lobbying by racial and ethnic interest groups, as well as the increased presence of particular groups as a result of labor migration. For example, in 1870, "Chinese" was

added to the schedule in response to the large wave of migrant labor from China enlisted for the construction of the transcontinental railroad and agricultural work in California.

2.1 *US Census Race Categories 1790–2000*
(Presented in the order in which they appeared on schedules)

<i>1790 – 1840</i>	
1790	Free White Males; Free White Females; All Other Free Persons; Slaves
1800	Free White Males; Free White Females; All Other Free Persons, except Indians Not Taxed; Slaves
1810	Free White Males; Free White Females; All Other Free Persons, except Indians Not Taxed; Slaves
1820	Free White Males; Free White Females; Free Colored Persons (including all other persons, except Indians Not Taxed); Slaves
1830	Free White Persons; Free Colored Persons; Slaves
1840	Free White Persons; Free Colored Persons; Slaves
<i>1850 – 1920</i>	
1850 ¹	Black; Mulatto
1860 ²	Black; Mulatto; (Indian)
1870	White; Black; Mulatto; Chinese; Indian
1880	White; Black; Mulatto; Chinese; Indian
1890	White; Black; Mulatto; Quadroon; Octoroon; Chinese; Japanese; Indian
1900	White; Black; Chinese; Japanese; Indian
1910	White; Black; Mulatto; Chinese; Japanese; Indian; Other (+write in)
1920	White; Black; Mulatto; Indian; Chinese; Japanese; Filipino; Hindu; Korean; Other (+write in)
<i>1930 – 1960</i>	
1930	White; Negro; Mexican; Indian; Chinese; Japanese; Filipino; Hindu; Korean; (Other races, spell out in full)
1940	White; Negro; Indian; Chinese; Japanese; Filipino; Hindu; Korean; (Other races, spell out in full)
1950	White; Negro; Indian; Japanese; Chinese; Filipino; (Other race – spell out)
1960	White; Negro; American Indian; Japanese; Chinese; Filipino; Hawaiian; Part-Hawaiian; Aleut Eskimo, etc.
<i>1970 – 1990</i>	
1970	White; Negro or Black; Indian (Amer.); Japanese; Chinese; Filipino; Hawaiian; Korean; Other (print race)
1980	White; Negro or Black; Japanese; Chinese; Filipino; Korean; Vietnamese; Indian (Amer.); Asian Indian; Hawaiian; Guamanian; Samoan; Eskimo; Aleut; Other (specify)
1990	White; Black or Negro; Indian (Amer.); Eskimo; Aleut; Chinese; Filipino; Hawaiian; Korean; Vietnamese; Japanese; Asian Indian; Samoan; Guamanian; Other API (Asian or Pacific Islander); Other race

¹ In 1850 and 1860, free persons were enumerated on schedules for ‘free inhabitants’; slaves were enumerated on schedules designated for ‘slave inhabitants.’ On the free schedule, enumerator instructions read (in part): “In all cases where the person is white leave the space blank in the column marked ‘Color.’”

² Although “Indian” was not listed on the census schedule, the instructions read: “‘Indians.’ – Indians not taxed are not to be enumerated. The families of Indians who have renounced tribal rule, and who under State or Territorial laws exercise the rights of citizens, are to be enumerated. In all such cases write “Ind.” opposite their names, in column 6, under heading ‘Color.’” As in the 1850 census, enumerators were instructed to leave the space blank when the person was white.

Figure 3.1. Racial categories included on U.S. Census schedules between 1790 and 1990 (Nobles 2002:67).

The second U.S. Census in 1800 amended the “Free Colored Persons” category with, “except Indians Not Taxed” (Indian denoting Native American). Indians not taxed were those living under tribal rule within distinct territories set aside through treaties with the American government. Taxed Indians, on the other hand, were those who exercise the rights of U.S. citizens, having renounced tribal rule (*ibid.*). Nobles interrogates the rationale behind such racial distinctions in these early censuses in which “representation depended on civil status, whether one was free or slave, and whether one was taxed or not (*ibid.*).” For example, as written, the Three-Fifths Compromise did not address race explicitly, but rather, one’s civil status as free or enslaved. Nobles argues that this obscured the very different political experiences of free blacks, who did not share the same rights and privileges as whites.

1850-1920

1850 introduced a separate schedule for “free inhabitants” and “slave inhabitants,” the Census Bureau believing this would lead to a more accurate count of household inhabitants. Following the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 the census reverted back to a single schedule. With accurate enumeration in mind, the census of 1850 came with specific instructions for enumerators to determine racial identity. In particular, due to the lobbying efforts of Josiah Nott—racial theorist, medical doctor, scientist, and slave owner—“Mulatto” was added (2002:51) along with the mandate: “It is very desirable that these particulars be carefully regarded.”⁴³ The successful petitioning for the inclusion of “Mulatto” has been seen as indicative of the use of census data by polygenist race science to prove “racial hybrids” inferior, living shorter lives, and

⁴³ U.S. Census Bureau, 1850.

suffering from reduced fertility to that of their “pure” parents (Nobles 2002:51). Very generally, scientific polygenism believed that human races originated in isolation from each other leaving them as mutually exclusive and unchangeable, and with such physical and intellectual differences as to rank them on a scale of superiority and inferiority.⁴⁴ Eugenicists linked the racial statistical data provided by the census to statistics on crime and mental health to support their arguments about racial decline (Rose 1999:210), which essentially created a “moral topography” through the abstraction and simplification of the population to fit their objectives. In fact, instructions to enumerators of 1870 stressed, “important scientific results depend upon the correct determination of this class” (U.S. Census Bureau 1870:10). This focus on distinguishing between black and mulatto remained evident in the 1890 enumerators’ instructions:

Be particularly careful to distinguish between blacks, mulattos, quadroons, and octoroons. The word "black" should be used to describe those persons who have three-fourths or more black blood; "mulatto," those persons who have from three-eighths to five-eighths black blood; "quadroon," those persons who have one-fourth black blood; and "octoroon," those persons who have one-eighth or any trace of black blood. [U.S. Census Bureau 1890:23]

1930-1970

Beginning in 1930, detailed instructions were offered for additional racial designations. It was made clear that in the case of “mixed races,” any mixture of white and non-white should be recorded as the non-white parent, and any mixture including black should be reported as “Negro”; all others were to be reported according to the race of the father. However, “if Indian blood predominates and the status as an Indian is

⁴⁴ Anthropology was certainly not immune to such Social Darwinist thought (Baker 1998). Franz Boas’ research fought against these very ideas, creating the foundation of what would become American Anthropology.

generally accepted in the community,” report the individual as Indian (U.S. Census Bureau 1930:26). “Mexican” was included as a racial category in 1930 because the Census Bureau believed Mexican laborers were difficult to classify with regard to race, and desired to record separate figures for Mexican nationals, unless “definitely white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese” (*ibid.*). In 1940 “Mexican” was removed from the schedule and enumerators were instructed to record Mexicans as white “unless definitely of Indian or other non-white race” (U.S. Census Bureau 1940:43) (the rationale behind this change is unknown to this author). 1960 saw the first self-enumeration schedule with Race remaining the exclusive category to record this form of “identity” until 1980. The increasing incoherence of the Census Bureau’s assemblage of officially recognized racial and ethnic identities is apparent. In the following section I take a closer look at Mexican, Latino, and Indigenous identities in the U.S. Census after 1970, and explore how the impossibly tangled categories of race and Hispanic origin were navigated by Alianza del Pueblo Maya.

Latinos and Indigeneity in the United States Census, 1980-2010

Much work has focused on how poorly designed the census is to produce an accurate numerical representation of the Latino population in the U.S. (see especially, Rodríguez 2000, Nobles 2000). My goal in this section is not to review this body of work, but to briefly walk through the development of the current Hispanic/Latino/Spanish Origin question on the U.S. census schedule in order to introduce the issues Alianza faced in 2010 over the representation of indigenous peoples from Latin America.

Before 1980, “Spanish/Hispanic” identity was inferred indirectly through approaches such as Spanish surname, place of birth, place of parents’ birth, and English speaking ability (Goldscheider 2002:83). After a wave of civil rights legislation passed in the 1960s, however, Mexican-American activist organizations and the Hispanic Advisory Committee began to demand a self-reporting technique to ensure better statistical representation, in order to take advantage of increasing opportunities made available through civil rights legislation (Chodin 1986:406). Such monetarization of numbers requires a specific target population to be brought into numerical being in order to justify the acquisition of resources. This led to the question “Spanish/Hispanic origin or descent” to be introduced to the census in 1980 after the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued Statistical Directive No. 15 in 1977. Directive No. 15 established that, in order to be in compliance with recent civil rights legislation, the following five racial categories must be followed by all federal agencies that relied on statistical reporting (Nobles 2000:80). Further, the OMB stated these categories “should not be interpreted as being scientific or anthropological in nature...They have been developed in response to needs expressed by both the executive branch and Congress” (Nobles 2000:80).

1. American Indian or Alaskan Native—A person having origins in any of the original peoples of North America, and who maintains cultural identification through tribal affiliations or community recognition.
2. Asian or Pacific Islander—A person having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, the Indian subcontinent, or the Pacific Islands. This area includes, for example, China, India, Japan, Korea, the Philippine Islands, and Samoa.
3. Black—A person having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa.
4. *Hispanic—A person of Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American culture or origin, regardless of race.*

5. White—A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, North Africa, or the Middle East. [Nobles 2000:80-81, emphasis mine]

Here, Hispanic is a “culture or origin, regardless of race.” This is a significant departure from the schedule of 1930 when Mexican, in particular, was considered a distinctive racial category “unless definitely white, Negro, Indian, Chinese, or Japanese,” as well as that of 1940 when Mexican was fully racialized as white, unless “definitely Negro or Indian.” The Census Bureau instituted Directive No. 15 in the form of two separate questions, one including American Indian or Alaskan Native, Asian or Pacific Islander, Black, and White as racial categories; the other, isolating Hispanic origin as explicitly non-racial (Figure 3.1).

However, the Bureau’s distinction between race and Spanish/Hispanic national origin did not resonate universally; an estimated 40 percent of all targeted respondents omitted this question, instead writing-in cultural or national-origin terms, such as Dominican, Honduran, and Boricua, in the space provided for “other” under “Is this person...,” the intended race category (Rodriguez 2000:130). In comparison, less than 3 percent of the non-Hispanic population claimed “other race,” and 57 percent of Hispanics checked the box for white and 4.6 percent for black, Asian, or Native American combined (*ibid.*). In 1990 the Census Bureau retitled “Is this person...” to “Race” in order to avoid similar confusion with what the Bureau believed were two mutually exclusive questions regarding race and Spanish/Hispanic national origin. Yet the number of Hispanics choosing “other race” rose by 3 percent, with 97.5 percent of those respondents writing-in a Hispanic origin/ethnicity (*ibid.*).

The Census Bureau attributed this confusion to the ordering of the two questions. With Race first and Hispanic origin three questions later, respondents may have read the

Hispanic origin question as another racial category and one that they had already answered above (Huizar Murillo and Cerda 2004:281). It is not necessarily an issue of misinterpretation or misunderstanding of the questions, but of different conceptions of race, more generally. Scholars have observed that many Hispanics view race as any combination of characteristics *in addition to* skin color, like nationality, national origin, ethnicity, and culture (Rodríguez 2000:131; see also Duany 2002, Orr and Singh 2012). Further, “different understandings of race also were evident in many colloquial expressions, such as Mexican Americans’ references to themselves as *raza* and the common use of the term *raza* to refer to culture and national origin, for example, *la raza dominicana* (the Dominican race), *la raza colombiana* (the Columbian race)” (Rodríguez 2000:131).⁴⁵ In 2000 yet another clarification attempt was made and the two questions were reversed and listed consecutively in hopes that respondents would recognize the Bureau’s distinction between race and Hispanic origin, specifically that Hispanic-ness is not itself a race, nor a stand-alone category, but a cultural or ethnic category to be *coupled* with race (*ibid.*). And if all else failed, the Bureau hoped that the directive “NOTE: please answer BOTH questions 7 and 8” would be clear.

Maria DeLugan (2010) argues that the combination “Hispanic American Indian” made possible in the 2000 Census has the ability to accurately “count” indigenous peoples from Latin America—marking any box under Spanish/Hispanic/Latino, and marking the box for American Indian under Race. She suggests that as an ethnoracial category, Hispanic American Indian, allows indigenous people to distinguish themselves from the all-encompassing Hispanic or Latino, while simultaneously evading the

⁴⁵ Analyses also indicated that many foreign-born non-Hispanics answered the question in ways other than the Bureau of the Census had intended.

collapsing ethnic identity into that of a nation-state, for example, Mexican or Puerto Rican (88). However, this particular combination offered by the 2000 census yielded a population count of 407,000 Hispanic American Indians nation-wide, an obvious undercount according to scholars and advocacy groups. DeLugan attributes to this uncertainty over the meaning of this “new” Hispanic category, aspects of which were discussed above. Leading to further ambiguity, respondents self-enumerating as American Indian were asked to print the name of the “enrolled or principal tribe.” But “tribe” is not a form of designation used by indigenous peoples from Latin America (Huizar Murillo and Cerda 2004:281). Of course, this is not to overlook that contributing to such an undercount would also be the large population of “undocumented” indigenous migrants from Latin America that choose to opt-out of the census altogether—to be less legible—most simply due to suspicion of any form of official government recordkeeping for fear that it might lead to deportation. Equally frustrating the possibility of an accurate census count of migrant “Hispanic American Indians” are low literacy levels, and a general lack of ability of the government to register an awareness of the census drive and make the forms accessible. Also at issue for indigenous peoples from Latin America is the acceptance of the characterization as “Hispanic” in any sense. It is here that I would recall Anderson’s words that “the fiction of the census is that everyone is in it and that everyone has one – and only one – extremely clear place. No fractions” (1991:166). The Census Bureau adjusts these categories, and now allows them to be combined, with the aim of including everyone to achieve this ideal fiction. But this maintains another fiction, that inclusivity can be achieved by the addition of ever more identity categories.

2010 United States Census Discussion

At a monthly board meeting in the spring of 2010 the Alianza board of directors discussed how Maya-Yucatecos in San Francisco might most successfully uniformly fill out the 2010 U.S. Census questions regarding Hispanic origin and race, Person 1 questions 8 and 9 (Figure 3.2). At stake were not only the opportunity to be recognized by the government, but also the opportunity to garner resources in the future. Because grant programs and funding at every level of government use population statistics to help determine resource allocation, census numbers are not only politicized but monetarized (Rose 1999:227). Therefore, mobilizing "hard" data to demonstrate a significant Yucatecan presence in the Bay Area would increase the efficacy of Alianza's efforts to advocate for resources for programs to specifically target the Yucatecan community.

→ NOTE: Please answer BOTH Question 8 about Hispanic origin and Question 9 about race. For this census, Hispanic origins are not races.

8. Is Person 1 of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

No, not of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin

Yes, Mexican, Mexican Am., Chicano

Yes, Puerto Rican

Yes, Cuban

Yes, another Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin — *Print origin, for example, Argentinean, Colombian, Dominican, Nicaraguan, Salvadoran, Spaniard, and so on.*

→

9. What is Person 1's race? Mark one or more boxes.

White

Black, African Am., or Negro

American Indian or Alaska Native — *Print name of enrolled or principal tribe.*

→

Asian Indian Japanese Native Hawaiian

Chinese Korean Guamanian or Chamorro

Filipino Vietnamese Samoan

Other Asian — *Print race, for example, Hmong, Laotian, Thai, Pakistani, Cambodian, and so on.*

Other Pacific Islander — *Print race, for example, Fijian, Tongan, and so on.*

→

Some other race — *Print race.*

→

8.29 x 10.27 in

→ NOTA: Por favor, conteste la Pregunta 8 sobre origen hispano Y la Pregunta 9 sobre raza. Para este censo, origen hispano no es una raza.

8. ¿Es la Persona 1 de origen hispano, latino o español?

No, no es de origen hispano, latino o español

Sí, mexicano, mexicano americano, chicano

Sí, puertorriqueño

Sí, cubano

Sí, otro origen hispano, latino o español — *Escriba el origen, por ejemplo, argentino, colombiano, dominicano, nicaragüense, salvadoreño, español, etc.*

→

9. ¿Cuál es la raza de la Persona 1? Marque una o más casillas.

Blanca

Negra o africana americana

India americana o nativa de Alaska — *Escriba el nombre de la tribu en la que está inscrita o la tribu principal.*

→

India asiática Japonesa Nativa de Hawaii

China Coreana Guameña o Chamorro

Filipina Vietnamita Samoana

Otra asiática — *Escriba la raza, por ejemplo, hmong, laosiana, tailandesa, paquistaní, camboyana, etc.*

Otra de las islas del Pacífico — *Escriba la raza, por ejemplo, fijiana, tongana, etc.*

→

Alguna otra raza — *Escriba la raza.*

→

Figure 3.2. 2010 U.S. Census Questions 8 and 9 as they appeared on the bilingual form.

What led the Alianza board to this particular discussion, however, was a campaign by Acción Latina, an organization committed to promoting civic engagement and preserving cultural traditions of Latino communities. Acción Latina formed a committee of Mission residents and organizations to create a targeted public awareness program to have Latinos counted, a population normally grossly underrepresented in census data. Alianza was invited to those meetings, which happened over a period of six months. As Tomás explained, the issue was raised that indigenous people were not being counted as indigenous people but as Latino. Various attendees sought a way for individuals to “at least write down their ethnic or racial background in that way [as indigenous]. And so we looked at the forms and there wasn’t a specific way that we could do it without making it more complicated for people because you had to mark Hispanic—or white Hispanic?” Based upon how Tomás recounts the discussion by referring to “indigenous” as an “ethnic or racial background” demonstrates the nebulosity of how individuals may think of the term in relation to how the census defines it as explicitly racial. In the end, to Tomás’ recollection, after the issue went unresolved at the Acción Latina meetings it was brought to an Alianza board meeting. Not only did Tomás and the board find questions 8 and 9 difficult to understand in general, but they also found the various permutations of potential answers complicated to follow, let alone explain to Alianza’s constituency.

An Introduction to Yucatecan Migration

Migration between Yucatán and the U.S. began in large part with the Bracero Program (1942-64), an agreement between the U.S. and Mexico that brought Mexican

laborers to the U.S. on temporary work contracts.⁴⁶ It is commonly reported that the Bracero Program was created in response to the drastic labor shortage caused by World War II but Cindy Hahamovitch (2011) offers a compelling argument suggesting that the program was, in fact, propelled by a desire for cheap labor among American farmers. Following the eruption of World War II, growers feared a labor crisis like that experienced during the First World War, when it became their patriotic duty to increase production while significantly decreasing the work force and wages. Those farmworkers who did not leave the countryside for the draft, left for better paying jobs in the new war economy. Certainly, in some regions the war economy once again brought farmworkers to cities for higher paying manufacturing jobs, to remote areas for military base construction, and answering the draft call. In fact, an entire one-third of the prewar workforce, a total of 15 million American workers, upgraded to such higher paying jobs (23). The south saw the largest reduction in rural labor with ten percent migrating to cities, and the same amount migrating to states in the north and west (*ibid.*). Yet despite losses due to the war economy and the Great Migration, the rural labor pool was not depleted. With the extreme drop in agricultural profits and wages during the Great Depression, on top of the tens of thousands of impoverished laborers fleeing to Florida and California every winter, there was an already large unemployed labor pool from which to draw—the largest in American history, in fact (*ibid.*).

What led to growers' cries of labor shortage and demand to use immigrant labor had more to do with changing racial dynamics and power relations between growers and farmworkers. As Hahamovitch explains, "Farm laborers hadn't vanished, but their

⁴⁶ *Bracero* is the Spanish word for manual laborer. With the Spanish word *brazo* as its root, *bracero* literally means "one who works with his arms."

reduced numbers gave them courage to demand more for their services. And farmworkers’—especially black farmworkers’—ability to make demands infuriated employers, who refused to admit that the ground beneath them had shifted” (*ibid.*). In Florida, especially, the price of labor increased as growers found themselves having to compete for workers. To avoid paying the wages demanded by largely African American farmworkers, growers appealed to the federal government to change immigration policy to allow them to import Caribbean migrant labor, often under the premise that black farmworkers no longer worked. A letter to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture written in 1942 by L. L. Stuckey, chairman of the Florida Farm Bureau’s Vegetable Commission, stated: “50% of the crops are wasting in the fields...1,000 farm laborers idle in the communities and a majority of those working effectively employing delaying tactics” (28). Here, we see that growers’ cries of labor scarcity revealed that the agricultural industry did not suffer from labor scarcity, the scarcity of labor without the power to negotiate for better pay and working conditions.

It comes as no surprise that the very same conversations occurring today regarding migration were occurring in the mid-20th century; guestworker programs were seen as a manageable way to curb illegal immigration. Initially contracted to work in the California agricultural industry under the 1947 agreement, Braceros later expanded minimally into a variety of labor contexts after the Poage-Ellender bill (Public Law 78) reauthorized the Bracero Program in 1951. As Hahamovitch explains, “the bill would let local rather than national authorities determine whether labor shortages existed, and it expanded the legal definition of “agricultural laborers” to include packing and canning workers, which would have the effect of bringing Braceros into competition with

unionized workers” (116).

For Hahamovitch, the Bracero Program finally came to an end by 1965 due to three major factors. The first was the very public and embittered battle between James Mitchel, President Eisenhower’s Secretary of Labor, and the grower lobby, over reforms to the program. In 1954 Mitchel sought to create a new Interagency Committee on Migrant Labor that would encourage farm labor legislation at the state-level, rather than relying on federal legislation—an attempt that failed four times in the Republican-dominated Congress until Eisenhower used his power of executive order.

Further failed attempts included bills “designed to establish minimum wage for agriculture, end child labor, require the registration of crew leaders, and provide federal assistance for migrant housing and education” (126); extending the Fair Labor Standards Act to guest workers to establish minimum wage and maximum hour standards; and even an offer of federal funds to states to create rest stops with toilets and clean water. However, as Secretary of Labor, Mitchell had two more cards to play. First, “he had the authority to regulate the rules under which the U.S. Employment Service supplied employers with domestic labor” (127). Second, under Public Law 78 Mitchell was responsible “to ensure that Mexican contract workers did not ‘adversely affect’ the wages and working conditions of domestic workers” (*ibid.*). Employers who used the U.S. Employment Service had to follow new minimum wage and transportation standards or else “would not be certified to receive Mexican Braceros” – this led to the immediate closing of 58 farm labor camps in 1957. Mitchell continued to add to these regulations, making employers pay guest workers higher wages than the minimum, so that guest workers employment would not adversely affect domestic wages. Mitchell made it

known to the press that this was done because growers had rejected minor reforms and would continue to if they knew they could rely on cheap guest worker labor. Eventually, Mitchell had to back down from his stand after Eisenhower sided with the Secretary of Agriculture, who had the ear of the growers. But his very public appeal raised awareness of Washington's preferred treatment of farm employers.

The second factor that led to the end of the Bracero Program was the increasing adoption of the cotton-picking machine, particularly in Texas. As the Bracero Program became increasingly contentious at the national level and under threat of federal government regulation more growers began switching over to the machines. "By 1962, 70 percent of all cotton was harvested by machine, causing employers to reduce their requests for Braceros by over half, to about 200 thousand. The remaining Braceros were concentrated among a tiny number of large fruit and vegetable farms in California" (128).

Finally, the Bracero Program came under fire from the National Agricultural Workers Union (NAWU) and the Agricultural Workers Organizing Committee (AWOC),⁴⁷ who referred to guestworkers as "legalized Wetbacks" (128). Throughout the 1950s, unions collected data on the "displacement of domestic workers by braceros and the use of braceros as strikebreakers" (128). Interviews of braceros revealed poor conditions: "men told of being housed in barns just vacated by cows; of windows without screens; of rancid food; of picking without knowing what the rate of pay was; and of threats made against those who complained" (128). Finally, in 1957, the U.S. Department of Labor investigated the program and found the following abuses: "payroll falsifications, hours worked but not reported, unauthorized exchanges of bracero crew among growers,

⁴⁷ On August 22, 1966 the AWOC merged with the National Farm Workers Association—led by César Chávez—to form the United Farm Workers of America. In 1972 the organization changed its name to the United Farmworkers Union.

wages set arbitrarily without determination of prevailing rates, incomplete accounting to the braceros of wages due, overcharges for meals, exorbitant charges for busing to nearby towns...filthy overcrowded camps, and braceros working after their contracts had expired” (128-129). Yet none of this was successful against the powerful grower lobby. However, after Imperial Valley lettuce farmers broke an AWOC-led strike with Braceros in December 1960, it turned into a social movement and “between 1960 and 1962, 148 strikes in California helped to raise wages, build the farmworker movement, and focus its supporters on ending the Bracero Program” (129). These actions gained the attention of the national media and American public, and in 1960 Republican and Democrat election platforms were in support of farmworkers, reform bills were being debated in states across the country.

Yucatán itself became incorporated into the Bracero Program in the 1950s and early 1960s, though the flow of migrant workers remained quite small relative to that of western and central Mexico (Fischer 2007:15). The Bracero Program created transnational social networks that spurred further migration between Mexico and the U.S. for decades to come—especially once the Reagan administration passed the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986, that, among other provisions, granted amnesty to all long-term undocumented migrants who had come to the U.S. before 1982,⁴⁸ making it easier to bring family members into the U.S.

Still, labor migration from Yucatán tapered off in the 1970s with the State development of Cancún as a major tourist destination (*ibid.*). Migration to the eastern

⁴⁸ Migrants who could establish that they had lived in the U.S. continuously for over five years, and who could afford the application fee, had to fulfill the following requirements: first be clear of any misdemeanors or felony convictions, pass a medical exam, and register for military select service. They were also required to learn English and American civics. Individuals were initially granted temporary resident status, then after 18 months, permanent residency, and after another five years, they could apply for citizenship.

coast required far less capital and allowed migrants to remain near to their families and hometowns. It was not until the 1990s that a steady tide of migration from rural Yucatán to the U.S. took off in the face of economic crisis. Movement flowed largely from northern and southwestern Yucatán where the staple industries of corn and citrus cultivation, honey production, and cattle raising waned and became concentrated in the hands of a few families. At the same time, small-scale subsistence farming—or *milpa* agriculture—no longer provided sufficient economic support; in fact, as climate change makes growing seasons around the world increasingly erratic and unpredictable, fewer and fewer families in Yucatán can safely rely on milpa as their primary food source. Further east, migration was spurred by the effects of hurricanes Gilberto (1988), Isidoro (2002), and Wilma (2005), that resulted in the significant loss of revenue for the tourism industry, affecting the prosperity of the region as a whole (14).

Migration from Yucatán is concentrated in the western and southwestern regions of the U.S., with San Francisco as the hub of Yucatecan migration from Oxkutzcab—the town in Yucatán from which the largest concentration of Alianza’s constituency originates—although the population of Portland, Oregon is rapidly growing. According to calculations by Banco de México, remittances to the state of Yucatán reached 44.5 million dollars in 2001, rising to 114 million only 5 years later (Cornelius 2007:17), and again to 119.5 million in 2012 (Banco de México 2013), although the percentage of remittances coming from San Francisco exclusively is not available. Yucatecos are most commonly employed in construction and the restaurant industry, and any visitor to Oxkutzcab will witness this influence. New concrete house constructions increasingly resemble the spacious styles found in the U.S. that migrants have expertise in building.

The concrete exteriors are molded to appear like the common horizontal siding seen on homes across the U.S. (Figure 3.3). These styles hold a particular caché back home, representing worldliness and wealth. Former line cooks become restaurateurs, opening cafes in the culinary style of their training. With Western Union, Café Albatraz (Figure 3.4), and Super California (Figure 3.5)—a grocery store with a photo of the Golden Gate Bridge on its sign—dotting the cityscape, the significance of San Francisco and its remittances to the evolving identity of the town is undeniable.



Figure 3.3. Concrete molded to look like horizontal siding (2nd floor). Oxkutzcab, Yucatán. December 2011. Photograph by Alberto Pérez Rendón. Used with kind permission from Mariel Caamal.



Figure 3.4. Restaurante Alcatraz. Oxkutzcab, Yucatán. July 2010. Author photograph.



Figure 3.5. Super California sign (upper left), Plaza California. Oxkutzcab, Yucatán. July 2010. Author photograph.

Alianza del Pueblo Maya

Alianza del Pueblo Maya crystallized out of the convergence of two parallel activities. The first began with Tomás, a young man in his early-thirties and the president of the board of Alianza when I began working with the NGO in April of 2010. As Tomás tells it, in the late 1960s, roughly a decade before he was born, his father, a medical doctor, moved the family from Yucatán to Mexico City, Distrito Federal. After practicing medicine in Mexico like his father, Tomás left for San Francisco in the late-1990s primarily to be with his girlfriend, and secondarily, to attend a masters program in Public Health. Later, he gained citizenship through a strategic short-term marriage (not with the girlfriend, though, that didn't work out).

While still in el DF, Tomás had drawn several editorial cartoons for *La Jornada*, a major newspaper in Mexico. Upon arrival to San Francisco he sought out a publication with which he could continue this work and found *El Tecolote*, a weekly bi-lingual newspaper situated in the Mission District of San Francisco. *El Tecolote* is dedicated to covering local issues, providing training to aspiring journalists, and serving as a forum to expose local talent, and is published by the afore mentioned, Acción Latina. Among his portfolio materials, it was a cartoon image of the Statue of Liberty stepping on a migrant's hand that most appealed to the small publication. Tomás and then-editor of the paper, Alfredo Canul, bonded over their Yucatán connection; having grown up in Yucatán Alfredo took Tomás' under his wing and introduced him to the Yucateco scene. Among others, Alfredo introduced Tomas to his friend and fellow Yucateco, Candela Herrera, who at that time was working with the pan-Maya organization, Grupo Maya Cuzama Hunab. Candela had been looking to form an exclusively Yucateco group, but it

was not until after Hurricane Isidoro hit the Yucatán peninsula that a group coalesced around a feeling of obligation to raise relief funds.

The group titled its efforts the Yucatán Hurricane Relief Fund and raised a modest 2,000 dollars to send to the town of Tixcocob for repairs to church towers damaged in the storm. Tomás recognized that their approach to fundraising was a bit disorganized; they had not thought out to whom donors would write their checks (Tomás? Candela?) or if donations were tax-deductible. It was understood that the group would have to find a more organized way if they were to attempt a similar project in the future. So the members of the Yucatán Hurricane Relief Fund began meeting regularly and invited Valerio Cahuich, an older Yucatecan migrant who had been living in San Francisco for a considerable amount of time. Tomás was introduced to Nic through a journalist friend who had featured him in a San Francisco Chronicle article on the new wave of Yucatecos in San Francisco (Burke 2002). However, other than meeting and discussing local issues and goings on back in Yucatán, the group had not yet defined a clear purpose. As Tomás described it: “We would talk for hours and hours about nothing. It’s a very Yucateco way.”

Parallel to the formation of the Yucatán Hurricane Relief Fund, a participatory action research study was underway led by Anne Whiteside, a UC Berkeley doctoral candidate in linguistics teaching English-as-a-Second Language classes at City College of San Francisco. Whiteside’s dissertation research explored how Yucatec speakers used multiple languages across varied social spaces in the management of actions and identities, and more specifically, how their legal status might affect “the right to speak in those spaces where it counts” (Whiteside 2006). Whiteside’s participatory research model

involved training community researchers—her Yucatec Maya-speaking ESL students—in qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis. Acción Latina told Whiteside about this “other” group of Yucatecos to contact for her project, and so it came that Whiteside, her students, Tomás, Candela, Alfredo, Valerio and several other Yucatecos who had joined along the way, sat down together and organized a day-long retreat at Whiteside’s house with the goal of fomenting a larger Yucatecan organization. A consultant friend of Candela worked pro-bono to facilitate a group discussion that resulted in the decision to become a non-profit and in a mission statement that focused on the urgent needs of the Yucatecan community in San Francisco.

The process of incorporation required a board president, vice president, treasurer, and secretary. Although Alfredo was the only member to lobby for a position, his overzealous campaigning for board president aggravated quite a few people. Meanwhile, Tomás focused his energy on making connections with the Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, who had asked the group to participate in and organize various activities related to its exhibit the Courtly Art of the Ancient Maya. Tomás believes this led the members of Alianza to view him as someone who could “make things happen.” Tomas was elected president to the embitterment of Alfredo, who then began to distance himself from the group. Once the board was finalized the group began the expensive incorporation process. They put on garage sales, delivered tamales, sold *cochinita*, and finally raised the money needed to apply for 501(c)(3) status. And so it was that Alianza del Pueblo Maya was formed.

Despite most of its founding and participating members and constituency originating from Oxkutzcab, Alianza is not a Hometown Association (HTA). The goal of

an HTA is to advance development projects in its town of origin. In the case of Mexico, this often comes in the form of *3x1*, a government program intended to channel remittances into development projects in migrants' home communities, and in which the burden of cost is divided in equal measure between the HTA, and the federal, state, and municipal governments. Alianza, however, is focused on the needs of migrants *in* San Francisco, and further, has refused to participate in *3x1*, wanting to distance itself from the partisan politics of Yucatán and Mexico.

Returning to the present, when I began working with Alianza in April 2010, the board of directors consisted of individuals of varying citizenship status, including those with U.S. citizenship, those with San Francisco residency, and those without any "official documentation." The oldest member, in both age and time spent in U.S. is the aforementioned Candela Herrera, who moved from Oxkutzcab to the U.S. in the late 1960s on a work visa sponsored by an American couple that had hired her as a nanny. Several years later in the early 1970s Candela left that job and brought her younger cousin Gloria Herrera from Oxkutzcab to replace her. Thanks to Candela's citizenship status, Gloria had residency status upon arrival and she too became a citizen as soon as possible. Both Candela and Gloria have been U.S. citizens for over 25 years and live comfortably with stable employment, Gloria an accountant, and Candela a retired teacher. In the mid-2000s Candela began building a house in Oxkutzcab, where she intends to spend her winters.

Don Alonso migrated to the U.S. in 1975; a 19-year-old wandering around Oxkutzcab with nothing much to do, his uncle suggested that Alonso join him in San Francisco where he had been living and working for many years. Once Alonso was

granted residency through the Reagan's amnesty program he had the freedom to leave his job as a farm worker and eventually found employment with MUNI—San Francisco's public transit system—where he has worked as a bus driver for many years. Alonso's love life, however, has not gone quite so smoothly. Although Alonso had an *enamorada* back in Oxkutzcab, like all long-distance romances of that time, keeping in touch was difficult; letters took months to make their way to a small town, and phones were not readily available back home, let alone computers for Skype or email. Years later Alonso married a Salvadoreña he had met in San Francisco, and through his residency secured her a visa. As he tells it, she began an affair shortly thereafter, he began drinking heavily, and they divorced. In recent years Alonso's luck has turned around. While on a visit with his family in Oxkutzcab, he met Lydia and after a few years of long-distance courtship they were married. Only recently has Alonso decided to move forward with his citizenship so that Lydia could join him in San Francisco and move away from the (literally) watchful eye of her mother-in-law who lives down the block.

After the tumultuous years of Alonso's first marriage he joined Alcoholics Anonymous where he met his best friend, Don Fidencio, who came to the U.S. via *la frontera* in 2001. Fidencio had a successful pig farm in Oxkutzcab until Walmart was introduced in Yucatán. After *carnicerias* began buying meat from Walmart at a much cheaper price and reselling it in Oxkutzcab, Fidencio fell into financial crisis. Bankruptcy was not uncommon; local producers throughout Yucatán could not compete with the cheap American products flooding the Yucatecan market after the passing of NAFTA. Fidencio has risked the return trip to Yucatán around five times to participate in major events like his daughter's quinceñera, and has quite astonishingly eluded the Immigration

and Naturalization Service on every perilous journey across la frontera and back to San Francisco.

David May also has residency and is raising two children—first generation “Yucafriscans,” the community’s clever moniker. As I was told, David and his wife, Maricely, came to the U.S. on her tourist visa over 13 years ago. Because of the money they have collectively earned working in the U.S. Maricely now owns and runs several small businesses back in Oxkutzcab including a hotel named after an ancient Mayan goddess, and a popular clothing boutique in the central mercado. David himself has become a skilled chef, even moving to Portland, Oregon to work at a new branch of a restaurant where he was then employed. Although in the end David moved his family back to San Francisco, he and Maricely still own the house in Portland where their children were born. David’s great love of baseball brought him to Alianza, who was sponsoring an intramural baseball team of Yucatecos.

Carlos Cahuil, the current president of Alianza, has mayoral ambitions in his home municipality of Santa Elena—famous for its proximity to the archaeological site of Uxmal. Uxmal is a site second only to Chichén Itzá in size and significance, but one that never materialized as a major tourist destination to the disappointment of not only the town, but the state as well. Returned migrants increasingly use past participation with Alianza as a springboard to a political career or a position in a state or local government institution more generally. That the UN’s International Migrants Day is a widely celebrated holiday in Yucatán is an obvious indication of the increasing “value” of migrants to the state. Remittances enable families to create small businesses and gain purchasing power that will significantly strengthen the economies of their pueblos. And

3x1 development programs give state and local governments a platform on which they can legitimate themselves as successful and productive. Every completed 3x1 development project has a visible plaque on its façade that displays the name of the participating hometown association along with each of the three levels of government and the peso amount that each of the four contributed.⁴⁹

Like its board, Alianza's constituency, the Yucatecan diasporic community in San Francisco, is comprised of individuals and families of varying immigration status including but not limited to: those with resident- or citizen-status who have lived in the city for decades; those with work visas; those with temporary U-visas (visas granted to individuals who aid in the prosecution of a crime, these are often women reporting instances of domestic violence); first generation Yucafriscans; and those considered "undocumented." The majority of community members actively involved in the organization and increasingly taking on leadership positions is, in fact, of the latter category. To simply say that Alianza is an NGO of, by, and for the Yucatec migrant community in San Francisco obscures this impressive heterogeneity of diasporic experiences among its board and constituency, experiences that affect their connections to Yucatán and personal aspirations, and thusly, their claims, commitments, and visions of Mayanness that they come to mobilize through their engagement with the NGO.

San Francisco, 2010

Returning to San Francisco, certainly, confusion and unfamiliarity about how the census wanted to enumerate them contributed to the board's dilemma in 2010, Tomás

⁴⁹ In actual practice, these numbers represent the peso amount that each party *would have* contributed if it were possible for such newly formed Yucatecan hometown associations to raise the exorbitant amount of money necessary to cover one-fourth of the cost of these development projects.

himself admitted that he had no idea how to answer the two questions, which he and the board saw not as a combination, but as *conflicting* for their need of expressing indigeneity. In fact, this example challenges the notion that by simply adding and combining identity terms we can be more comprehensive.

In the end, the group deliberated the following possibilities for question 9, “What is Person 1’s race?”:

1. Check the box for “some other race” and write-in “Yucateco.”
2. Check the box for “some other race” and write-in “Maya.”
3. Check the box for “American Indian” and write-in “Yucateco” as the principal tribe.
4. Check the box for “American Indian” and write-in “Maya” as the principal tribe.

Several individuals chose to check-off “Mexican, Mexican American, Chicano” in question 8, believing it the easiest option, no additional writing necessary; a perfect example of the confusion over the Bureau’s meaning of the Hispanic origin and race categories that it had attempted to solve through a reordering of the questions.

Conversation ensued about whether “Yucateco” or “Maya” was the best write-in option for the principal tribe and other race options. “Maya” alone would not offer a fine-grained distinction between the Yucatec Maya community and the various diasporic Maya communities from across Central America. But would Yucateco alone sufficiently reflect their Maya heritage? In Yucatán, Yucateco is not used to refer to an explicitly Mayan identity but to anyone born and living in Yucatán; everyone, is Yucateco. However, the term Yucateco has gained salience in San Francisco as a form of distinction from other Mexicans and Latinos. Yucatec Mayans comprise the vast majority, if not all, migrants from Yucatán. As in the rest of Latin America, indigenous communities in Yucatán are among the most poor and disenfranchised and in search of work to *salir*

adelante. In San Francisco, then, Yucateco has come to encompass both Yucatec and Maya.

Through the act of moving across national borders, migrants “enter not only a different labor market and political structure but also a new system of social stratification by class, race, ethnicity, and gender” (Duany 1998:147). Much anthropological work has been done on this reimagining of collective self-representation among diasporic communities, in particular, from Caribbean and West Indian nations. Race and color have played a key role in the reimagining of Caribbean diasporic racial, cultural, and ethnic identities, which are often, but not always, based upon white understandings of race. For example, the white establishment in the U.S. relies upon the rule of hypodescent to maintain a hierarchical division between whites and non-whites; Dominican migrants in the U.S. found themselves regarded as black, when back home they had considered themselves to be white, indio, or Hispanic (Duany 1998). The particular forms that diasporic identities take are also entangled with the larger political economy at any point in time. In Irma Watkins-Owens’ (1996) study of the role of African American migrants from the southeastern U.S. and Afro-Caribbean migrants in the co-construction of Harlem as an emerging “black metropolis” in the early 20th century; a time when African-Americans and black immigrants were, in many respects, more alike than similar. Racially segregated housing did not leave room for the kind of ethnic enclaves seen among white immigrant groups at the time, nor those characteristic of West Indian migrants in the later part of the 20th century. Watkins-Owens also found that limited job opportunities available for black men in general hindered the establish the kind of occupational niches seen among white ethnic groups in industrial cities at the time, and

“would have undoubtedly heightened the competition between immigrant and native job seekers” (167). At the turn of the 21st century, we find English-speaking migrants from the West Indies strongly collectively self-identify as West Indian despite coming from an intensely nationally fractious region (Manning 1990, Nurse 1999, Hintzen 2001). The traditionally and characteristically Trinidadian carnival has become a tool for the construction of collective identity only among West Indians abroad (Manning 1990, Nurse 1999); such public displays help the West Indian community demand recognition as a major political bloc (Kasinitz 1992). This collective identification becomes further entrenched with the realization of the significance of white America’s perception of West Indians as not African American. West Indians are labeled a “model minority” by the white mainstream because it can recognize its very particular image of achieving success “through merit, sacrifice, and hard work...[and] having overcome the obstacles of poverty and migratory” reflected back upon it by the West Indian community (Hintzen 2001:36). Returning to the case at hand, while Yucatec Maya individuals differentiate themselves from other Mexicans and Mayans through the collective identity of Yucateco, in the context of Alianza and its constituency, there remains an acceptance of various forms of collective identity even if not expressed in name; Alianza participates in the Mission’s annual pan-Latin American Carnival parade in May and a universal indigenous rights poster hangs on the door to the office. As anywhere, these positionings are in always in motion.

With the U.S. system of race and ethnicity in mind, Tomás was wary of checking the box for “American Indian” because, as he explained, he did not want to affect how the U.S. government determines funding for U.S. Native American groups, which he

believed was based on census data. He understands generally that numbers are used in decisions on the allocation of resources and recommended instead that individuals select “some other race” and write-in “Yucateco.” In this instance, allying himself with and focused on the needs of Native American NGOs and their funding concerns. However, others made the argument that they are Indians of the Americas and, therefore, American Indian and wanted to be recognized as such; recognition, here, being validation through enumeration. Because of his sensitivity to the imagined needs of another indigenous community Tomás considered this to be a “careless” position that would result in unintended consequences, in particular:

that the Native American groups would see us as opportunistic. The thought was that these people have been struggling for generations to earn rights, and they finally got them. And it’s this weird system where you have to register with your tribe, and you have to prove that you have some genetics, or relatives, or connections to the tribe to then access those resources, and so we don’t want to make those people feel that now we are trying to take advantage of this. Immigrants are already seen as opportunistic and stealing services from people and things like that. So we didn’t want to add to that and then alienate somebody who we thought were our potential allies.

The above quote begins with Tomás expressing concern over impacting the struggles for American Indian rights in the U.S. In particular, he expresses awareness of a government recognition process through which American Indian groups attain special rights, though he does not have the specialized knowledge of what, exactly, that process is. Census information, it turns out, has little to no influence upon the federal recognition process precisely because “American Indian” is presented as a *racial* category not a political one; the census “counts” all self-reported American Indians as American Indian.

The federal recognition process in the U.S. is fraught, with well over one hundred federal recognition petitions currently, each taking over a decade for the Bureau of Indian

Affairs (BIA) to review and make a verdict. The development of and politics surrounding U.S. federal and state recognition policies are beyond the scope of this chapter,⁵⁰ however, in the most basic of explanations, the seven requirements listed by the BIA (1978) that must be met for a tribe to be considered “Indian” under federal law are:

- (1) Establish that they have been identified from historical times to the present on a substantially continuous basis as “American Indian” or “aboriginal”;
- (2) Establish that a substantial portion of the group inhabits a specific area or lives in a community viewed as American Indian and distinct from other populations in the area, and that its members are descendants of an Indian tribe, which historically inhabited a specific area;
- (3) Furnish a statement of fact, which establishes that the group has maintained political influence or other authority over its members as an autonomous entity throughout history until the present;
- (4) Furnish a copy of the group’s present governing document, or in the absence of such a written document, a statement describing in full the membership criteria and the procedures through which the group currently governs its affairs and its members;
- (5) Furnish a list of all known current members of the group and a copy of each available former list of members based on the group’s own defined membership criteria. The membership must consist of individuals who have established, using evidence acceptable to the Secretary of the Interior, descendancy from a tribe which existed historically or from historical tribes which existed historically or from historical tribes which combined and functioned as a single autonomous entity;
- (6) Establish that the membership of the group is composed principally of persons who are not members of any other North American Indian tribe; and, Establish that neither the group nor its members are the subject of congressional legislation which has expressly terminated or forbidden the Federal relationship. [Miller 2003:79]

Technically, federal acknowledgement legislation does not include the blood quantum requirement that Tomás mentioned, but the requirement to prove lineal Indian ancestry through various forms of “official” documentation, is indeed biogenetic in nature (Tolley

⁵⁰ For history and analyses of federal recognition and non-recognition, and contemporary sovereignty battles see Miller (2003), Miller (2004), Tolley (2006), Klopotek (2011), Den Ouden and O’Brian (2013)

2006:168).⁵¹ State recognition is an uncodified process varying from state to state. At minimum, it merely acknowledges Indian identity without any guarantee of land rights, protection from federal or state taxes, or EPA legislation (Koenig and Stein 2013). The federal recognition process creates a particular kind of power relationship, not only between the U.S. government and Native American tribes, but also between federally and non-federally recognized tribes themselves. Recognition creates boundaries that serve to prescribe who has legitimacy to represent the needs of indigenous communities and to argue for indigenous rights, whose suffering is acknowledged, and who is deserving of sovereignty. And with the tangible benefits that result from gaming enterprises, recognition creates significant wealth disparities as well.⁵²

In his role as president of an NGO the census was not singularly and strategically about creating a demonstrable target community of Yucatec Mayans. In thinking about how to present the Yucatec Maya community to the U.S. federal government Tomás was simultaneously taking into account what he believed to be the needs and concerns of U.S. Native American groups as well as the attitude of American public toward migrants regarding citizenship and resource distribution: “Immigrants are already seen as opportunistic and stealing services from people and things like that. So we didn’t want to add to that and then alienate somebody who we thought were our potential allies.” This is more than a simple issue of strategic essentialism of the Yucatec Maya community in relation to the U.S. state in order to gain access to resources. The consequences of any particular positioning must be weighed not only in terms of how the character of the

⁵¹ It should be noted that legal Native Hawaiian status continues to have a 50-percent-or-more blood quantum due to the U.S. government’s distinction between “Indian Nations” and “foreign tribes” in the Constitution (Kauanui 2008). J. Kēhaulani Kauanui has done remarkable work on the development of the fifty-percent blood quantum regulation; see additionally (1999, 2002).

⁵² As of this writing federal recognition criteria are in the process of being modified by the Obama administration.

Maya community might be viewed by others in general, but also in terms of the material consequences for the Native American community, who are seen as potential allies through a shared indigeneity that could materialize as both political solidarity and a more general solidarity in identity.

Tomás acknowledged that the census had facilitated this conversation about the positioning of the Yucatec Maya community within the politics of race in the U.S. It is a conversation that he knew was ongoing, but one that he felt the Yucatec Maya community had never been compelled to become a part of: it “was not present in our everyday lives, as if, for example, we were African Americans.” What I think Tomás was trying to express is a belief that the Yucatec Maya community, as a very recent migrant group in the history of the U.S., is as of yet unprepared to engage in a discussion about race in the U.S. because they had never been in a situation like the census, in which such a specific articulation of race was necessary. Here, Tomás is not suggesting that only African Americans have race (in the way that only women have gender, for example), but rather, that this is how he sees race being framed in the U.S. context. “Race,” it seems to him, is imposed upon the African American community, whereas the Yucatec Maya community can choose not to be a part of it.

Discussion

Every ten years the U.S. Census Bureau asks individuals to make themselves statistically legible within a landscape of federally recognized identities. The particular issues of identity politics I have explored in this chapter have focused on how the Yucatec Maya community in San Francisco might best represent itself in order to be in a

position to acquire material and other government or private resources in the future. When funding for various health and social welfare programs necessitates a target population this would require filling out the census form as uniformly as possible to be able to produce measureable “hard data.” The nature of these categories, and Tomás’ struggle over which boxes to check, are shifting not merely because of political and economic interests, but his own personal experiences and needs and those of the Yucatec Maya community in San Francisco that he feels a responsibility to. It reflects the different and sometimes competing interests among the obligations that one feels to various communities and interest groups. He was explicitly concerned with the Yucatec Maya community alienating “potential allies.”

My feeling was that we were scared of it: “Ok, do we really want to go that route and push our agenda based on “We’re Native Americans” or “We’re indigenous” or “We’re Mayans,” or what are we, right? Are we Latinos, are we not? What are the consequences and implications of going whichever route? I think there’s also the fact that when we talk about race and try push the indigenous agenda too far there’s also a danger to alienate the Latino community against you. Because they are as much a part of us in terms of the immigrant experience, even though we see them as—“Ok, you guys weren’t very nice to us back home”...In the end it could turn out to be pretty ugly dynamics and what are the consequences of doing it, right?”

Tomás’ concern is not simply a question of self-identification—“are we” or “are we not” Latinos? Or, Native Americans? Or, Mayans? There is a politics that emerges in urban communities in which people find themselves always in the position of having to form alliances, a “slipperiness of identity” that Roger Sanjek (1998) recognized in his chronology of neighborhood activism in New York City in the second-half of the 20th century, *The Future of Us All*. He explored the processes through which collective identities form in response to government policies and local development. In San Francisco, it is the census that sets the terms for the politicking around which Alianza del

Pueblo Maya must position itself. In his work Sanjek identified “in their common culture of political struggle, [neighborhood groups] began to see each other ‘in the round,’ as persons who resided in the same place and faced the same threats to their quality of life” (330). And it is in this realization as well that Tomás finds himself trying to reckon the history of racism in Mexico and Latin America, with value of coalition in diaspora, and with what is arguably an implicit association of indigenous peoples from Latin America with the greater Latino community in the U.S. as we saw, for example, in the census meetings held by Acción Latina.

I began this chapter with numbers and the enumeration of the Yucatec Maya population in San Francisco. Numbers bring things into existence, and in very particular ways. In the end, an inability to reach a consensus caused Tomás to see this attempt as a complete failure in the effort to count Yucatecans, Mayas, Native Americans, and Latinos in the city. In the next chapter, deliberations over the use of the English word “indigenous” and the Spanish word “indígena” during the grant-writing process for a California state-funded public health grant, will offer us another window into identities are negotiated.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Anxiety of Coalition

When I began my research with Alianza del Pueblo Maya in April of 2010, the organization had recently been awarded a five-year, \$1.25 million dollar grant from the San Francisco Department of Public Health's Community Behavioral Health Services. The grant was designed for the creation of preventative and early-intervention programs to treat mental illness among underserved communities. Alianza was still in its first year of the Indígena Care Initiative, a public health initiative aimed at the indigenous Latin American migrant community. In this chapter, I will examine the grant writing process and, specifically, how the director of Alianza, Tomás, had to navigate questions of community and indigeneity. In chapter four I explored how the process of filling out the U.S. Census led the organization to discuss its place in a landscape of federally recognized identities, in which the decision about which boxes to check was open to interpretation. Tomás felt that their answer to the census' Hispanic origins and race questions would have ramifications for the alliances that Alianza could form. Chapter five begins with Alianza's "indigenous" status as a given. We will see how indigeneity was simultaneously presumed to already exist but also negotiated to leave openings for collaboration, re-defining, re-positioning in the future.

* * *

Just one year earlier Alianza's office was little more than a utility closet in the recreation center of a Presbyterian Church. Tomás knew it was in the organization's interest to find a sustainable funding source to build its infrastructure and reach more

people. At the time, these activities were limited to a jarana dance troupe that practiced regularly on Sundays and participation in the Mission's annual Carnival Parade in May, and financial support of two baseball teams for their Yucatec Maya constituency, who played in a league of other teams from Mexico.

In 2008, Alianza organized an Indigenous Interpreters program with partial funding from the Office of Minority Health in San Francisco, with the intention of facilitating access to medical and legal services of Maya speakers in San Francisco. Six members of the Maya community in San Francisco were trained and certified to provide interpreter services in their native languages, including Yucatec Maya, Tzeltal and Chol (spoken in Chiapas), and Mam (spoken in Guatemala). That the Yucatec Maya interpreter was flown to Los Angeles to act as a court interpreter is a testament to the need for this service.

With the money provided by the grant Alianza rented two offices in the Mission District, a major hub of activity amongst the Latin American and Latino communities. One office contained a large conference table and cubicles for the Indígena Care Initiative Program Manager (Tomás), Program Assistant, and Case Manager. The other held the Indígena Care Initiative's programs and supplies, as well as a mini-fridge, coffee pot, and all the usual office staples that the utility closet had no room for. This space also allowed Alianza to institutionalize *Plaza Educativa Maya*, a program in collaboration with the Mexican Consulate and the Berkeley Bi-national Educational Initiative to provide adults with the education and exams necessary to obtain primary and middle school diplomas from Mexico. This program had been all but impossible in the smaller office space.

Proposition 63

Tomás functioned as the face of Alianza—the member most involved with other Latino and Indigenous groups in San Francisco. As I explained in chapter four, he also has a very different background and journey to San Francisco than the majority of the organization’s constituency. He comes from a middle-class family in Mexico City. His father and two brothers are doctors, a third brother is an architect, and his mother recently received her doctorate in archaeology. The vast majority of Alianza’s constituents, the *promotores*, and several board members, did not have access to even secondary school education and came to the U.S. to earn money to support their families in Yucatán.

Within Alianza, the position of President is a volunteer position. Tomás’ salary came from his job as a counselor with the Fundación Chicano/Latino, an organization whose mission is “to promote and enhance the health and wellbeing of Chicanos/Latinos and multicultural/multiracial youth in San Francisco.”⁵³ It was through this connection that Alianza began addressing the health of the migrant community.

Alianza’s funding was created through the State of California Mental Health Services Act, or Proposition 63, passed in 2004. The measure was a response to the drastic cuts made to services for people with severe mental illness in California thirty years prior. The bill argues that the previous cuts led to an increase in the homeless population of the state that imposes high costs on state and local governments as a result of strain on emergency medical care, unemployment services, housing aid, law enforcement, and adult and juvenile jail and prison expenses (sec. 2c). Prop 63 was meant to provide the finances and programs necessary to identify those most affected by

⁵³ <http://ifrsf.org>

serious mental illness deserving of priority attention, which include prevention and early intervention programs, as well as appropriate medical care.

The bill sought innovative public health service programs “including culturally and linguistically competent approaches for underserved populations” (sec. 3c). Fundación Chicano/Latino and Alianza successfully proposed the Indígena Care Project, whose mission is “to improve the health and wellness of indigenous families in San Francisco.” The Indígena Care Initiative features two public health interventions. The first, *Cultura y Salud* (Culture and Health), addresses the immediate concerns of Prop 63 through services and activities that include “the delivery of traditional spiritual and other healing activities, targeted health education and early interventions, and bridging cultural and linguistic gaps that exist within public health settings.”⁵⁴ The second, Indígena Care Promotores Program, is the peer-based component of the Initiative’s intervention and outreach, which I will discuss later in this chapter.

In the proposal a distinction is made between indígena and Latino migrants. In San Francisco indigenous migrants “speak their native languages and preserve and practice in their daily lives much of their ancient culture and traditions.” The grant continues to make a case for indígena migrants as an underserved and at risk population:

Unfortunately, in their countries of origin these same differences have contributed to the exclusion of these communities and they have been misused to justify discrimination, racism, and economic and political oppression against Indígena people. In the United States, some of these same factors exist creating social isolation of this community and enhancing the mistrust of Indígena families to the social systems of support. Centuries of discrimination, isolation, poverty, political and economic oppression and more recently, civil war, immigration and family separation are contributing factors to the raising levels of stress, depression and trauma that many Indígena families suffer in San Francisco. The effects of factors in addition to the historical trauma that many Indígena families carry in part contribute to other community health issues such as alcoholism, drug addictions,

⁵⁴ To maintain anonymity all bibliographic details of the grant proposal will be excluded.

domestic violence, gang involvement and incarceration.

The argument put forth is both historically- and geopolitically-situated. The grant proposal traces racial and ethnic discrimination from indigenous migrants' countries of origin, to the U.S. A distrust of the government developed "back home" is brought to bear on the relationship between indigenous migrants and social welfare opportunities in San Francisco. The distinction between indígena and Latino migrants is further situated temporally, as carrying the baggage of centuries of discrimination and oppression from Spanish invasion to recent civil war, to contemporary migration patterns that divide families. The toll this takes on the physical and mental wellbeing of indígena migrants is presented as uniquely their own. An argument is made for a targeted public health program to respond to the needs of indígena migrants, without explicitly implicating the non-indigenous Latin American migrant and Latino communities in the traumas faced by the indígena population.

Indígena Care Initiative

Indígena Care Promotres Program

The Promotres de Salud (Health Promoters) delivered the Indígena Care Initiative's peer-based intervention and outreach to the Maya community. In 2009 Alianza put out a job announcement in search of promotores, the essential criteria being the ability to speak, or at least understand, Maya from Yucatán, Chiapas, and Guatemala. Although Spanish often serves as a lingua franca among indigenous migrants from Latin America in San Francisco, the requirement of speaking a Mayan language was still a pragmatic one. It not only provided for translation services for those in need, but allowed

for outreach to members of the migrant community who might better trust an organization that appeared to represent *them*, as language remains inseparable from larger group and individual identity (see esp. Whiteside 2004).

Tomás, Elías, a board member, and Victor, the behavioral health specialist for the Indígena Care Initiative, reviewed the 15-20 applications submitted and the most significant question influencing their decision turned out to be “Why do you want to be a promotora?” There were those respondents who had left it blank and others that wrote something akin to, “Because it would be cool.” Those who were eventually selected wrote about wanting to be a community worker or seeing the position as a career path. Tomás also admits to a bias toward a few volunteers who were already close to the organization. For example, two of the promotores, Irma and Santino, had completed the Indigenous Interpreters certification course in 2008, in Yucatec Maya and Tzeltal, respectively.

Seven promotores were hired to create and run the “cultural programs” offered by Alianza under this grant. Felipa, a Maya K’iche’ woman from highland Guatemala, was the only promotora who had a visa to move between the U.S. and home. She was also the only promotora who had received post-secondary education—she earned a bachelor’s degree in social work in Guatemala—and has a long history as an educator, activist, and researcher.

Of the remaining six promotores, four are from Yucatán. Irma, Julia, and Marta, who migrated to the U.S. with her father when she was eight years old, came from Oxkutzcab, and Briceda, from the nearby municipality of Akil. Finally, from Chiapas, Gabriela and Santino—who often spoke of one day returning home and becoming a

Zapatista. These six individuals entered the U.S. clandestinely; the five women have since started families in San Francisco. Briceda crossed the frontera with her husband and young son, but had to leave her other child with family back in Akil. Irma, Julia, Marta, Briceda, and Gabriela have all obtained U-visas since arriving in the U.S. The U-visa is given to individuals who aid in the prosecution of a crime.⁵⁵ It permits temporary legal status for four years, along with a work permit and Social Security number. All state employees are required to have a valid Social Security number, a mandate that also applied to those employed through state funded grants. To comply, Santino had been using a purchased Social Security number. One afternoon while we were making decorations for the Carnival parade, Tomás was informed that a random social security check found Santino's number to be invalid. He had to leave the Indígena Care Initiative, but remained able to work with Alianza as an Indigenous Interpreter.

The promotora model is aimed at community empowerment. Tomás had worked with promotores in San Mateo County, California for many years in a previous public health job. He believed in its ability to strengthen the community and “[get] some people started onto becoming self-sufficient and helping their fellow community members being as well self-sufficient.” He also saw the potential for the promotora model to create leaders, which he saw as one of the goals of the Indígena Care Initiative. The promotores would also bring their own connections to the community, which would help Alianza expand membership. The promotores received training in conducting research, education and outreach activities, and social services referrals.

⁵⁵ Often, these are women reporting instances of domestic violence.

Indígena Care Initiative Programs

In addition to the existing activities offered by Alianza, which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, they also created several new programs specifically for the Indígena Care Initiative. *Xúunán Cab*, a semi-weekly workshop for women largely focused on the *hilo contado* style of needlepoint in Yucatán. The program is named for the stingless bee indigenous to the Yucatán Peninsula. The workshop was designed to be a safe, therapeutic environment where women could share their difficulties and experiences. Another program, *Los miércoles son para compartir* (Wednesdays are for sharing), was a space for people to come together to talk about the issues they faced. Each week focused on a particular theme, which included natural medicine, domestic violence, migrant rights, addiction, stress, maternity and childrearing in Maya culture, *cuentos y leyendas de nuestros pueblos*, proper food storage techniques to prevent illness, and *padres y hijos*, which engaged with strategies for maintaining good communication and familial relationships.

While I was with Alianza two additional programs were introduced. The first, *Actividad Física y Nutrición* (Physical Activity and Nutrition), was presented in conjunction with *Campeones del Cambio* (Champions for Change), a program under the California Department of Public Health meant to encourage families to consider better nutrition and physical activity. This was comprised of semi-weekly sessions that included discussion about nutrition and twenty-minutes of exercise (usually Zumba). The second program was a semi-weekly workshop dedicated to teaching the hand weaving technique of hammock making.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ Due to the excessive heat, the hammock is a preferred means of sleeping for many people in Yucatán.

Finally, the Indígena Care Initiative proposal included promoting information concerning health resources during various cultural events and activities that include “Día de Los Muertos, Fiesta de Colores, Mayahuel, Año Nuevo Maya and at least one of the traditional celebrations that [Alianza del Pueblo Maya] organizes every year.” This traditional celebration materialized to be a yearly *Encuentro de Culturas de America* (Meeting of the Cultures of America), an event to celebrate “the guardians of our traditions.” The encuentro I attended included food from across Yucatán and Central America (the promotores did the cooking). It began with a kind of pan-indigenous “traditional” opening ceremony that involved candles, flowers, and praying to the four cardinal directions. This was followed by dance performances from various Native American and Mayan groups in the Bay Area, and awards given to *personas que trabajan en preservación de la cultura Maya* (people who work to preserve the Maya culture). The first went to a Kaqchikel *curandero* from Guatemala and the second to a long-time migrant from Peto, Yucatán who formed the first Jarana dance troupe in the Bay Area. An exit survey asked questions including: “Did this event bring back memories of your town or country? How did you feel during this event? Could you recognize traditions and customs from other pueblos/cultures? Is it important to hold this type of event? Would you participate in an event like this again?”

Grant Writing

Tomás recalls when the grant came to the attention of the Public Health and non-profit community in San Francisco. Various working groups were convened separately among the African American, Asian Pacific American, and Native American

communities. Tomás explained that he was brought on board when Fundación Chicano/Latino formed such a working group among the Latino community. In his words:

...basically, they brought me on board trying to represent the indígena element, which I was very resistant to accept because at the time [Alianza] was already—we were already an organization but we weren't like, as we are now. So, I was very hesitant to just step-in and say: "Yeah, we're representing all of the indigenous in San Francisco," right? But I guess I just went along with it, and it's one of those situations where it's a little bit about the politics and you kind of have not much choice, and you're sitting in there and people see you in a particular way, so even if you fight it they just insist because it is convenient for them to see you that way...

At the time Alianza operated out of the utility closet. It was a much more limited operation in terms of budget, activities, and outreach. They are a relatively recent migrant community in San Francisco, who, as discussed, are still figuring out who they are in this context, and how to create and pursue alliances. Alianza itself only solidified as an organization in 2004. "We were already an organization but we weren't like, as we are now," Meaning that they are now an organization with greater visibility and name recognition among multiple communities. A high profile grant brings with it visibility to the NGO community and the encuentros were a way to reach out to other groups.

But then again, when we wrote the proposal it was understood that the ones who were going to bring the indigeneity to the Indígena Care Initiative was, us. That was our element. If we weren't there the thing could not be called the Indígena Care Initiative, even though Anita continues to think that they are indígena because they do Aztec dance every other month and they perform some ceremonies that are beautifully staged. The reality is that given the city was under the understanding that this program was going to provide services to Maya immigrants, then if you're gonna do that then you need to have some Maya presence in the design and thinking and the delivery.

Although Tomás expressed discomfort in feeling like he was being put in the position to represent all indigenous people of Latin American descent in San Francisco, he went

along with it because he felt the politics of the situation left him no choice: People see you a certain way because it helps them to further their goals. Of course, it also helps Alianza further its goals of moving out of the utility closet. Tomás' narrative also makes clear that he did not need the Latino working group to tell him he was indigenous, or even to put him in that box, he already knew that was the role he would play. This is a different framing than we saw with the Census, when the Yucatec Maya community was not so clearly defined. Indeed at the Acción Latina meetings, some felt that indigenous groups from Latin America were being folded into the Latino community and not distinguished from it. In this instance, Tomás does not face the same conflict of “are we” or “are we not” Latino or indigenous.

I would like to focus in on the “they” whose authenticity Tomás called into question in the sentence “Anita continues to think that *they* are indígena because they do Aztec dance every other month and they perform some ceremonies that are beautifully staged” (emphasis mine). He is referring to the Mexica *danzantes* of the Aztec revivalist movement. It is an urban mestizo movement originating in Mexico City and dating back some 30 years (Job 2010:6). It began as a reaction against Mexico's domination by the U.S., as well as materialism, corruption, and moral decay (*ibid.*). *Calpullis*, dance groups, are the foot soldiers of this movement—called *guerreros* (warriors). They believe that it is only through carrying out particular movements that one can transcend the current state of the world (*ibid.*). The dance is a sacred ritual that venerates *ollin*, the Fifth Sun or Age of Aztecs, and prepares for the coming of the Sixth Sun. The beating drums represent the heartbeat of *Tonatzin*, Mother Earth, and the dance gives back energy to the Earth and the Sun; “the dance is a “sacrifice” of time, energy and “normal life” which gives back to

those—the ancestors, the plants, the animals, the water, the Earth, the Sun, the Cosmos—who gave us life” (Job 2010:7). Many dancers learn to speak Nahuatl, a language traced back to the ancient Aztecs, and give themselves Aztec names, complete with naming ceremonies. The Aztec revivalist movement is an explicitly cultural survivalist discourse; the focus is not on continuity from the past but on reclaiming it.

Tomás’ challenge is coming from a very particular critique regarding the claiming of indigeneity. Of these Aztec revivalist groups he explains, “They can choose and pick when they want to and when they do not want to be indigenous. They can afford it. And Yucatecos mostly cannot.⁵⁷ They are indigenous everywhere they go.” He argues that these groups garner resources as Latinos, while also tapping into resources for indigenous peoples, further disempowering an already disenfranchised indigenous community who can only claim the latter: “Do you guys have to tap into our only little sources of funding for our program by claiming something that you can easily not claim that you are?” he asks. For Tomás, the way in which Aztec revivalist dance groups in San Francisco take advantage of various indigenous funding opportunities ignores the history of marginalization of, and violence against, indigenous experiences back in Mexico and Latin America, as well as in the U.S.

I just think that in indigenous communities that have remained more or less closer to their ancient pre-Columbian language and culture have been historically excluded and pushed around and mistreated, or plain killed and tortured over this particular fact that they speak this language and the fact that they practice all these cultural practices.

He offered two examples to illustrate the way that indigeneity was being manipulated to garner resources. The first, a grant from The San Francisco Arts Commission’s program called Native American Cultural Arts Traditions. The initial call for applications was

⁵⁷ Here, Yucateco is being used to refer to Yucatec Mayan individuals.

exclusive to Native Americans within the United States. After realizing that only a few organizations from San Francisco were eligible, the Arts Commission extended the grant to apply to indigenous peoples from across the Americas. The major Latino organizations, he said, “have all got their token Maya person on their board of directors.” Fundación Chicano/Latino, in particular, brought on board a woman “who claims to be indígena and she’s from Guatemala, and she’s Mayan.” Not only do they forefront this person’s participation when they apply, but to Tomás “it’s evident that they just brought this lady on board so that they could access this funding,” which they succeeded in doing. Next Tomás recalled,

A long time community leader, Pedro Rodriguez, he’s from Guatemala, but if you look at him, you know he’s mestizo, he’s a Guatemalteco. They put out a proposal for some “Maya Youth 2012,” some weird thing with the calendar. And he got the money! And I’m just looking at those people and I feel like: “Gosh, you guys are tapping into this money and you’re not looking back at who you are doing this to. It’s a little bit difficult to watch that happen.

Tomás’ critique that these Latino organizations are not “looking back at who you are doing this to,” reflects the concern he had when considering the potential consequences of the Yucatec Maya community self-identifying as American Indian on the U.S. Census form: “The thought was that these people have been struggling for generations to earn rights, and they finally got them...and so we don’t want to make those people feel that now we are trying to take advantage of this.” However, what is different in the critique leveled against Latino organizations is that it is further situated within a space of unequal distribution of power and resources. He views the Latino community as already having a great deal of power and resources in hand. At the same time, Tomás struggles with how reasonable it is to level these critiques against them.

And then again, it's hard, because here we are, all of us talking about how our cultures were obliterated, right? They were just erased. The language, the culture were colonized. And part of it was this culture of colonization. And then there's this group of people who have decided "Oh, we're just going to reclaim our indigenous identity and try to reinterpret it to the best of our knowledge." And I kind of want to give them credit for that. That's a good thing! That's commendable. Yeah, I think we're in this position that's really difficult to argue with because part of what we do is actually about that; to get people to be proud of who they are and, you know, claim it.

Tomás recognizes the common culture of political struggle that exists between Yucatec Mayans and the non-indigenous Latino community. They share a history marked by the trauma of colonization. But when limited resources come into play, it can be difficult to maintain this perspective.

Indigenous, or Indígena?

Note that in the Indígena Care Initiative title, the word *indígena* remains in its Spanish-language form. Tomás explained that in considering the name of the program Anita argued that “indigenous” is a self-referential term used by Native Americans in the U.S. Although skeptical of Anita’s interpretation, he explained:

And again, we didn’t want to step on those toes and say: “We’re indigenous and not you and we’re more and so,” you know, “we’re wronging you over,” and that kind of thing. And so, we were like, “Well, maybe we can do it in Spanish? And that way we’re not calling ourselves indigenous, we’re calling ourselves indígena.” And the other part of it is, most people of indigenous descent in Spanish-speaking countries are familiar with that term, “indígena”... That was very much Anita’s own agenda.

Regardless of whether or not he agrees with Anita in this instance—that the Native American community in the U.S. commonly refers to itself as indigenous—Tomás expresses a critical awareness of not only what this term *is* but what it *could be* and what it can potentially *do*. What we see in Tomás’ narrative about the naming process is the carving out of a space to be indigenous in relation to others. But it is also an issue of self-

identification among their Spanish-speaking constituency. Here indígena acts as a chronotopic association with Latin America through the invoking of Spanish as a code. Both he and Anita are imagining future ways they may be situated in relation to other communities and diverse groups, carefully leaving openings that would allow for everyone to be indigenous. Through his position and experience in the public health sector and non-profit community, Tomás is heavily involved in interacting with other Latino-, indigenous-, and Native American-focused organizations in San Francisco and feels an obligation to work around the—however imagined—needs and concerns of these communities. If we can only make claims to rights vis-à-vis identity categories (i.e. the culturalization of politics) then we will retain this problem of how to mobilize broadly. Tomás is recognizing that problem, too.

This was also a moment when, according to Tomás, Alianza was becoming a formal institution: “we were already an organization but we weren't like, as we are now.” “As we are now,” again, meaning an organization with a budget of \$1.25 million dollars, with offices, and without the threat of imminent collapse hanging over their heads. “As we are now” also means programs that reach a broader audience and have more impact within the Yucatec Maya community.

Tomás is aware that maintaining a good relationship with Anita and the Native American community could pay off in terms of future opportunities or funding and collaboration for Alianza. For instance, months later, Alianza was asked by a local American Indian community organization to join in a multi-year implementation and evaluation of a “wraparound services” program for Native American youth, funded by

the Health and Human Services Division of the Federal Government.⁵⁸ Because the organization did not believe it had a large enough constituency to fulfill the necessary quota of participants for the study, the director invited Alianza to participate. In this instance, whether or not Alianza's constituents were Native American was never called into question.

In this instance, *indígena* is used to signal indigenous persons who are non-U.S. citizens and non-U.S. federally-recognized Native Americans who were not in competition for particular forms of government funding. "Indígena" becomes a crucial word that is being deployed to perform as conventionally used and expected symbols of "authentic indigenous culture"—such as language, dance, dress, ritual—that are mobilized to demonstrate authenticity within multicultural societies. However, within the U.S. NGO landscape *indígena* is a word that will implicitly mark them as indigenous but not Native American.

Discussion

Anthropologists have theorized different forms of constructivism and essentialism for years, yet none serve adequately to characterize this particular context of identity politics. While there is certainly a purposeful element to the ways in which Tomás and Alianza consider their position across the landscape of coalition-based political struggle in San Francisco, strategic essentialism tends to theorize a one-to-one correlation between self-representation and political solidarity or desired outcome, and presents claims of indigenous identity as calculating and inauthentic. Eric Hobsbawm's (1983) "invention of

⁵⁸ The wraparound services model attempts to integrate all services a family is receiving such as those pertaining to physical health, mental health, food assistance, financial support, after school programs, and so on, to improve communication and coordination among all providers.

tradition” suggests a similar elaboration and implication of inauthenticity. Edward Fischer (1999) attempts to bridge the gap between constructivism and essentialism with his concept of cultural logic, “the essential continuity underlying cultural forms” (488). Maya culture, here, is “a historically continuous construction that adapts to changing circumstances while remaining true to a perceived essence of Mayaness” (488). Joannes Fabian criticizes this concept as “faith in the explanatory power of ‘logic’” (1999: 490). It relies on a static notion of authenticity that describes an underlying condition, not the responses to the changing political conditions Fischer references. What we see in San Francisco, I would argue, is savvier and more self-aware than any of these previous interpretations of identity politics allows. These concepts are also unable to take into account the multiple, simultaneous, constantly shifting fields of power in which these actors are embedded.

Tania Li (2000) draws on Stuart Hall’s framing of positioning and articulation in order to understand why certain groups in Indonesia—who no one would argue were not the original inhabitants of the land—come to mobilize a collective “indigenous” or “tribal” identity while others do not. She argues,

A group’s self-identification as tribal or indigenous is not natural or inevitable, but neither is it simply invented, adopted, or imposed. It is, rather, a *positioning* which draws upon historically sedimented practices, landscapes, and repertoires of meaning, and emerges through particular patterns of engagement and struggle. The conjunctures at which (some) people come to identify themselves as indigenous, realigning the ways they connect to the nation, the government, and their own, unique tribal place, are the contingent products of agency and the cultural and political work of *articulation*. [151]

I find Li’s approach most suited to helping us move toward an understanding of how and why anxieties arise at various, and shifting, moments of recognition in this particular context. In this chapter, the Latino working group had already prescribed the role of

“indigenous” to Alianza, which is also how the organization self-identifies. However, there is a contentious history of the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples in Latin America that is brought to bear on this collaboration as well. Tomás does not see the Aztec revivalist movement and the danzantes as indigenous, as they see themselves. That some of the funding will likely go to develop programs for such groups is a reflection of the power imbalance being replicated in their use of indigenous people as tokens to encroach upon resources intended for indigenous groups.

In choosing the name “Indígena Care Initiative,” language and political geography were considered important factors to work around. The word “indígena” worked to signal that the program was not taking funding away from Native American groups. Indígena would also signal to the indigenous migrants from Latin America that this program was for them to utilize.

In the inter-group discussions about the options for filling out the U.S. Census, Alianza was again thinking about the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people from Latin America who were not sure they wanted to be enumerated as a part of the Hispanic/Latino community. In choosing which boxes to check or names to fill in on the census form, consideration was also made about the fact that migrants in the U.S. are often presented to the public as “opportunistic and stealing resources,” as Tomás expressed in chapter four. There is nothing necessary, determined, absolute, or permanent about how Alianza was positioning the Yucatec Maya community in relation to different populations within San Francisco. Each instance of legibility was informed by what their relationship is, has been, and could be with the Latino and Native American communities in both Latin American and the U.S., problematizing the essentialist

readings of the mobilization of culture to make claims to resources. It is in having to document and formalize one's indigeneity, that individuals negotiate the boundaries of what that means not only in the moment, but also to leave open the possibility for collaboration and re-defining and re-positioning themselves in an imagined future.

CHAPTER SIX

Conclusion

This dissertation has tracked the mobilization of Yucatec Maya culture and identity across Yucatán, Mexico and San Francisco, California. I explored the efforts of Tuch Mukuy, U Najil Xook, and Alianza del Pueblo Maya to position themselves to be seen as Maya or indigenous by state and non-state actors across shifting fields of power and authority in Mexico and the United States.

I sought to answer the question, *what does the transnational do to culture*, by examining how the current Yucatec Maya cultural revitalization movement is situated historically and geopolitically within Yucatán and Mexico, and the ways in which certain mobilizations of Maya culture are foreclosed upon. I then explored how migration between Yucatán and San Francisco opens up possibilities for alternative visions and mobilizations of culture and identity, and thusly, for the creation of alternative social projects built around coalition.

Within Yucatán, in the space of the national, Tuch Mukuy and U Najil Xook have been trapped into particular configurations of culture that will always be past-oriented. We have seen how Maya culture becomes framed through terms such as revitalization and preservation, and packaged in forms of easily legible Mayaness, such as language and dress. Chapter two traced how the particular forms of Mayaness that Tuch Mukuy has cultivated are rooted in decades of state-sponsored theater in Mexico and state projects of cultural promotion and preservation. However, as Tuch Mukuy becomes more representative of “the community” from which it comes, it strays further from the state’s

vision of Maya culture and the distinction it bestowed upon Tuch Mukuy. The state's recognition leaves no room for alternative visions of a Maya community theater troupe, visions that include Ana's rejection of the ipile or Marisol's inability to speak Maya.

Chapter three explored the history of intensified attention to language that informs the current Maya language revitalization movement in Yucatán. I situated Antonia and U Najil Xook within the contemporary landscape of language revitalization in Yucatán. In this context, being a native Maya speaker (i.e. having spoken Maya since birth) has become the standard through which one's identity as Maya is proven. Although seemingly exclusionary, linguistic unity is viewed by many in the movement as one of the only avenues of decolonization that the Maya have left.

Chapters four and five shifted focus to San Francisco, California, where Alianza del Pueblo Maya becomes untethered from the future anterior temporality characteristic of recognition claims within the Mexican nation-state. Chapter four examined the many considerations made during the 2010 Census drive concerning how the organization's constituency might answer the questions regarding Hispanic Ethnicity and Race in a way that would result in a statistically legible Yucatec Maya population. I found Tomás trying to reckon the history of racism in Mexico with the value of coalition in diaspora, while trying not to become constrained by what he sees as an implicit association of indigenous people from Latin America with the greater Latino community.

Finally, chapter five examined the grant writing process for Alianza's public health initiative the Indígena Care Initiative. I discussed how the word "indígena" was strategically deployed to leave room for potential future collaborations with Latino and Native American groups. Alianza cannot make the recognition claims based upon how

Chan Dznunu'un and U Najil Xook would make such claims "back home," because there is a different history of rights and recognition in the U.S. context. Chapters four and five illustrated the way in which the *potential* for coalition, generates imagined obligations and commitment to other civil society organizations, and in particular, a commitment to not foreclose the possibility of future claims to indigeneity by other groups. The concerns related to resources are about this new context and how these groups can co-exist in this new place. In the space of the transnational, Alianza is not simply mobilizing culture toward a particular, tangible end as we see in practices of strategic essentialism, but leaving space for an unknown future of claim-making.

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