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**Translating Shakespeare into K'iche': The Pan-Mayan Movement and  
Re-Writing Indigenous Participation in Guatemala**

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## Introduction

Guatemala recently celebrated the ten year anniversary of the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords between the government and the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity party (*Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca*, URNG). These Peace Accords, which ended a thirty-six year long war between the Guatemalan military and the Marxists rebels, have been slowly implemented through extensive collaboration between the Guatemalan government, international peace keeping organizations and representatives of the indigenous community in the form of the Pan-Mayan movement. The process has been long, arduous, and oftentimes stalled, due to the longstanding assimilationist attitudes and colonial practices that the wealthy still hold over the poor. In this paper, I will review research on the origins of the Pan-Mayan movement in Guatemala and its contributions to the bilingual intercultural education system.

While interviewing for her article, “Maya Hackers and the Cyberspatialized Nation-State: Modernity, Ethnostalgia, and a Lizard Queen in Guatemala,” Diane Nelson was asked by a former Guatemalan Finance Minister: “How is a modern nation possible if we have people speaking twenty-three different languages? How can you translate Shakespeare into K’iche’?”<sup>1</sup> The question highlights the two most important bones of contention within Guatemalan society: **assimilation** and **colonialism**. The Finance Minister infers that the indigenous people must assimilate and learn to speak Spanish while imposing the colonial Euro-centered culture by insisting on the importance of Shakespeare. This question embodies the attitudes of the Guatemalan

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<sup>1</sup> Diane M. Nelson, “Maya Hackers and the Cyberspatialized Nation-State: Modernity, Ethnostalgia, and a Lizard Queen in Guatemala,” *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (August, 1996): 298.

ladino elite who believe that the indigenous people must assimilate in order to be true citizens of the modern Guatemalan state. Nelson explains that “the assimilationist discourse of Guatemalan nationalism has proposed that the majority indigenous population is inappropriate for modern nationalism” (Nelson 1996, 288). Until recently, indigenous people were forced to give up their culture, traditional dress and, most importantly, their language, in order to be included into the national scene. The pan-Mayan movement has worked to change this way of thinking and has succeeded in incorporating the indigenous cultures and languages into the public education system.

## **BACKGROUND**

Guatemala has the highest population in Central America with over 12,000,000 people; sixty percent of whom are indigenous and the rest are ladino. There are twenty-three different Mayan languages spoken in Guatemala with Mam, K’iche’, Q’eqchi, and Kaqchikel comprising the majority.<sup>2</sup>

There has been considerable interethnic conflict between the “white” ladino elite and the indigenous peoples as a result of the disproportionate distribution of land and wealth in the ladinos’ favor.<sup>3</sup> Frundt explains that the relationship that exists between the ladinos and indigenous as being tenuous at best due to the disparities between the races: “indigenous Mayan peoples of the highlands constitute an important part of the smallholder class in particular, and a large majority of the landless class in general. Although they have developed sophisticated agricultural and marketing techniques, they

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<sup>2</sup> Personal interview with Dr. Judith Maxwell, December 3, 2006.

<sup>3</sup> Jim Handy, “A Sea of Indians’: Ethnic Conflict and the Guatemalan Revolution,” *The Americas*, Vol. 46, No. 2 (October 1989): 190.

must still wage an ongoing battle with the institutionalized vestiges of Spanish subordination and racism which permeate all levels of Guatemalan society.”<sup>4</sup>

Even without the economic inequality that exists between the two groups, they come from very different cultures and world views with the indigenous always fighting against the hegemonic assimilationist state. The racism and discriminatory colonial practices that began with the Spanish did not end when Guatemala gained its independence from Spain, but continued as internal colonialism with the wealthy, urban based ladinos, subjugating the indigenous people. Smith explains Stavenhagen’s model of internal colonialism as “a picture of ethnic relations (between Mayan Indians and Ladinos) that he believes takes the classic form of metropolitan dominance of rural satellites” (Smith 1978, 575). Smith goes on to explain that “provincial Ladino towns are the metropolises and the dispersed Indian communities are the satellites” (Smith 1978, 575). As metropolises, the ladino towns regulate the commerce that flows between the indigenous villages, the towns, and the international market.

Although Smith’s article discusses internal colonialism with a focus on economics, I believe that it also defines the country’s cultural assimilation policies. Smith examines the effects of financial polarization within the larger cities with wealth being doled out to select indigenous towns. Just as the cities maintain an economic hold, the ladino culture that exists in these cities maintains control over the indigenous culture and languages. Until recently, ladinos have forced the indigenous to assimilate to the Hispanic culture and to learn Spanish or risk being prevented from participation as full citizens.

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<sup>4</sup> Henry J. Frundt. “Guatemala in Search of Democracy,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs* Vol. 32, No. 3 (Autumn, 1990): 31.

In her article, “Language and Ethnicity: Multiple Literacies in Context, Language Education in Guatemala,” Helmberger explains the importance to a cultural group of being able to maintain their language. She says that “when the state uses language to control a group that has a strong collective sense of ethnic group identity with equally strong ties to a particular, non-official language, there is a potential for conflict. This potential conflict emerges when the strength of loyalty to the ethnic identity is more steadfast than it is to the nation/state” (Helmberger 2006, 66). This has certainly been true in Guatemala where the ruling class has not even really offered a reason for loyalty to the state. She states that Spanish linguistic and cultural hegemony has been the single strongest factor in creating conflict between the ladinos and the indigenous.

There are signs that internal colonialism is lessening in Guatemala and that the indigenous are taking control over their lives. Jonas explains that the “indigenous majority makes cultural pluralism a central issue” in the Guatemalan state.<sup>5</sup> Arturo Arias explains that today Mayas can say that they are ‘postcolonial’ in that they have finally “broken away from the epochal history of internal colonialism” (Arias 2006, 259). This “breaking away” that Arias refers to did not occur overnight, but has been the result of a thirty-six year struggle for recognition on the part of the indigenous peoples.

## **Civil War**

The civil war in Guatemala was a battle between US trained counter insurgency forces and leftist guerrillas who fought for representation on a national level. The war lasted for thirty-six years (1960 – 1996) and an estimated two hundred thousand people

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<sup>5</sup> Susanne Jonas. “Democratization Through Peace: The Difficult Case of Guatemala,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, Vol. 42, No. 4, Special Issue: Globalization and Democratization in Guatemala (Winter, 2000): 24.

were killed. The majority of the people who died were indigenous. The army conducted an atrocious “scorched-earth” campaign designed to annihilate the indigenous from the face of the earth (Fischer 2005, 83). At the height of the fighting, 1981-1983 an estimated 100,000 and 150,000 people were killed (Jonas 2000, 11). The UN Peace Commission has stated that the army wiped out over 600 villages. In February 1999 the Guatemalan Historical Clarification Committee determined that the army was responsible for ninety-three percent of the killing that was done during the war.

In his article, “The Maya Movement, Postcolonialism and Cultural Agency,” Arias explains that “the Guatemalan revolutionary crisis resulted from the modernization efforts initiated by the Ladino state” (Arias 2006, 252). These efforts were the social reforms and land redistribution programs that were started by presidents Juan Jose Arevalo and Jacobo Arbenz from 1944 – 1954 in an effort to move Guatemala away from dependency and towards modernization. This early move towards modernization “created expectations in the Maya population” that was sorely disappointed when the modernization process was cut short due to violent CIA intervention (Arias 2006, 252). The reforms remained as symbols to the Guatemalan poor, including the indigenous, as examples of what could be accomplished if more power were distributed to the people.

Smith defines dependency as being “an international division of labor, articulated by the world capitalist market, that encourages economic growth in some countries and discourages it in others (1978, 575). She explains the conflicts that existed in Guatemala on the macro and micro level and how they have marginalized Guatemala’s native peoples on two levels: nationally and internationally (Smith 1978). According to her, there were two forms of dependency that existed in Guatemala before the civil war.

In the first, Guatemala was a satellite to world markets that kept it as an underdeveloped nation from which to gather cheap goods. The second level has already been mentioned, that of the Indian towns as satellites to Ladino metropolises that dictated which towns would receive employment and/or market opportunities.

The seeds of Guatemala's civil war were sown during the 1930s when poor indigenous and *campesinos* began to protest their treatment by the United Fruit Company and the Guatemalan government as a whole. The poor were unhappy with their terrible working conditions, low salaries, and lack of representation. They demanded that the military president, Ubico, step down and allow free elections (Handy 1989, 193).

The vagrancy laws that existed in Guatemala until 1944 are examples of the extreme working conditions that the indigenous and *campesinos* endured. The laws (that were essentially a system of forced labor) required all people to carry proof of employment or run the risk of being "recruited" to work in a coffee plantation in the eastern part of the country (Smith 1978, 590). These laws worked to the advantage of wealthy landowners who oftentimes had difficulty recruiting people to work in the extreme conditions of the plantations. President Ubico ruled the country in this manner from 1930 to 1944 until he was forced to leave office after a student uprising convinced the government of the need of elections.

The first democratic elections in Guatemalan history were held in 1944 and Juan Jose Arevalo was elected president. Arevalo enacted sweeping social reforms from 1945 to 1951 including universal suffrage. In 1951, his defense minister, Jacobo Arbenz, was elected president. Arbenz continued Arevalo's reforms and added many of

his own. His most controversial reform was a program for land distribution that threatened the United Fruit Company's holding in the country (Streeter 2000, 61). Arbenz's increasing social reforms, together with the threat to American business owners, convinced the United States government that Arbenz was a communist. In response to this perceived threat, the US led a defamation campaign against the presidency with support from landowners and military who were disgruntled with Arbenz's reforms. In 1954 Arbenz was forced into exile under pressure from a CIA led opposition army (Streeter 2000, 61).

Guatemala's next president, Carlos Castillo Armas, was selected by the United States government and backed by Guatemalan military and landowners. The elite looked forward to a return to the status quo of the pre-Arbenz/Arevalo era and put their support behind Castillo Armas. The new leader revoked many of the liberties and reforms that had been established in the previous two presidencies and worked to build closer ties to the United States government and businesses.

The civil war in Guatemala officially began in 1960 when a group of army officers accused the military government of corruption and led a rebellion against it. This uprising was suppressed and the officers that were involved were forced to hide in the mountains. They were soon joined by students and communist leaders who were also fleeing from governmental oppression. Together they formed the guerilla movement FAR (Armed Rebel Force) and began a leftist campaign to oust the government and take control (Azpuru 2005, 100).

The conflict began in the eastern part of the country and extended into Guatemala City. By the late 1970s and early 1980s the army forced the guerillas to

retreat, causing them to escape into the western highlands. It was here, in the largely indigenous highland region that the war took on a more ethnic aspect. Although it was not initially a racially based conflict it became so in many appearances because of the longstanding racism that existed in the country and because the army feared that the indigenous people were aiding and abetting the communists (Azpuru 2005, 99). Azpuru explains that as “the army was especially ruthless with the Mayan population . . . this gave the conflict an ethnic dimension” (2005, 99). After years of oppression some Mayas did join the war in an attempt to end the racism that had kept them subjugated by the Ladino elite. Arias explains that “the ladino-led revolutionary process became a mere vehicle for both the defense of Maya identity, and the future constitution of their nation” (Arias 2006, 253). Today the war is considered by many, including Amnesty International, to have been an act of genocide.<sup>6</sup>

During this same period, (1970 – 1980) while the guerillas were organizing and the military was beginning its counter-insurgency tactics, the Catholic Church was gaining support in the indigenous communities with its Liberation Theology. According to the Vatican website, the “Theology of Liberation” teaches that in order for a person to be truly liberated *spiritually* he must also experience *physical* liberation; this includes freedom from oppression, poverty, illiteracy, inequality and crime.<sup>7</sup> The Catholic workers mobilized the indigenous people and created land co - operations, literacy programs, and other organizations that focused on solidarity and cultural preservation.

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<sup>6</sup> Amnesty report on Latin America, “GUATEMALA:Human Rights Community Under Siege,” <http://web.amnesty.org/library/Index/ENGAMR340222001?open&of=ENG-GTM>. (accessed November 23, 2006).

<sup>7</sup> Congregation For The Doctrine Of The Faith, “Instruction On Certain Aspects Of The ‘Theology Of Liberation,’” [Http://Www.Vatican.Va/Roman\\_Curia/Congregations/Cfaith/Documents/Rc\\_Con\\_Cfaith\\_Doc\\_19840806\\_Theology-Liberation\\_En.Html](http://www.vatican.va/Roman_Curia/Congregations/Cfaith/Documents/Rc_Con_Cfaith_Doc_19840806_Theology-Liberation_En.Html). (accessed November 23, 2006).

Organizations such as the Committee of Peasant Unity (CUC) were formed in an effort to increase wages and to improve working conditions. The organizations that developed during this era encountered extreme opposition from the government because of their alleged leftist tendencies. Jonas explains that until 1993 the military considered “virtually all civil society organizations as the guerillas allies” (Jonas 2000, 10). Because of the increased danger involved with political activity, the indigenous people of Guatemala began to organize around the struggle for cultural recognition and autonomy rather than political rights.

### **Beginnings of the Pan-Mayan Movement**

The movement towards indigenous unification began in the early 1960s under the influence of Acción Católica missions in the Guatemalan indigenous communities (Heckt 1999, 330). This progressive wing of the Catholic Church practiced Liberation Theology and provided elementary education for Mayan children in the native languages. The Church encouraged their students to continue on with their studies after grade school, oftentimes providing them with scholarships and the opportunity to study abroad or at the San Carlos University in Guatemala City (Arias 2006, 252; Rubin 2004, 137). Rubin succinctly explains that “the Pan-Mayan movement in Guatemala grew out of this history of economic struggles and religious and educational experience, on the one hand, and the establishment of linguistic study projects, on the other” (Rubin 2004, 121).

By the 1970s there was a “critical mass” of indigenous people who had been educated through this movement and were working with the people in the highlands

towards indigenous empowerment (Nelson 1996, 292). The movement expanded during the 1970s and 1980s despite the growing violence in the country. The mid 1980s saw increased mobilization among the indigenous and the identification of the Pan-Mayan movement. Although this organization coincided with the move towards democracy in Guatemala, Fischer describes the early movement as “careful to keep their focus on ‘non-political’ issues” (2005, 84).

The Pan-Mayans focused on universal rights: the right to free and public education, the right to speak their indigenous languages, the right to land. They have directed their dialogue to all indigenous people and have encouraged them to stand behind the identification of a Pan-Mayan tribe in an effort to build a unified front that included all non-ladinos.

Before the 1980s the term “Mayan” was not used to describe the indigenous people who currently live in Guatemala (Heckt 1999, 329). Rubin explains that “Pan-Mayan cultural activists literally recast the identification Maya, which had been used primarily in archeology, linguistics, and tourism, to refer to the members of Guatemala’s twenty-one distinct ethno-linguistic communities” (Rubin 2004, 122). The Pan-Mayans are now using the term that was once only used in academic circles to describe an extinct civilization to describe their modern day revitalization and unification program.

### **Transition to Democracy**

By the mid 1980s “international pressure was mounting on Guatemala’s military to hold free elections” (Azpuru 2005, 101). In response, Guatemala’s military agreed to the elections and Vincenzo Cerezo was chosen as president in 1985. The long peace

process that led to the signing of the 1996 Cease-Fire Agreement began shortly after Cerezo took office (Jonas 2000, 10). The first step towards ending the war was the signing of the Central American peace plans, Esquipulas I (1986) and Esquipulas II (1987). The Esquipulas Accords were twofold; they were designed to establish peace among the Central American countries and to begin negotiations within each country between the governments and the guerrilla factions. The Accords were especially significant in Guatemala because they initiated substantial reforms and peace negotiations between the URNG and the Guatemalan government.

The negotiations came at a time when Guatemala was classified by many as a “permanent counter-insurgency state.” Many people, both within Guatemala and throughout the international community, thought that there would be no end to the killing that was occurring. Others were more optimistic and believed that the civil society would be successful. Frundt wrote in 1990 that “the description of Guatemala as a permanent counter-insurgency state is an extension of the “corporatist” view of Latin American societies which locates the primary societal values in collective responsibilities rather than individual rights” (Frundt 1990,26). Frundt rightly denied that Guatemala was a “permanent counter-insurgency state” and instead offered the theory that the country was progressing through the efforts of the “consolidation of the working class” (Frundt 1990, 53, 55).

Jorge Serrano, Guatemala’s second civilian president, was elected in 1990. His administration formed the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) which began formal talks with the URNG in Oslo, Norway in March 1990 (Jonas 2000, 12). The peace negotiations made considerable progress over the next six years even surviving

Serrano's attempted coup in May 1993. The coup crisis was solved through the intervention of the international community and the Guatemalan civil society. Serrano was removed from office and the Human Rights Ombudsman, Ramiro de León Carpio became the president (Jonas 2000, 12). The peace process resumed in 1994, this time with considerable input from the international community, the Pan-Mayan movement and other factions of the civil society that had gained strength during the beginning of Serrano's presidency (Jonas 2000, 12-13).

The government and the URNG signed thirteen significant Peace Accords between 1991 and December 1996 when the Definite Cease Fire Accord was signed. Among the most significant are the Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples Accord and the Accord for Strengthening of Civilian Power and Role of the Armed Forces in a Democratic Society. The Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples Accord was signed in March 1995. This recognizes the indigenous population in Guatemala and redefines the country as multiethnic, multicultural, and multilingual. In September 1996, the Accord on Strengthening of Civilian Power and Role of the Armed Forces in a Democratic Society was signed – it is a demilitarization accord that reduces the army to controlling the external defense of the country and establishes a Guatemalan police force to handle internal defense.

Although Guatemala was well on its way to achieving peace negotiations with the URNG by the 1990s there is significant proof that Rigoberta Menchú's reception of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992 aided the peace process tremendously. She garnered international support for the growing indigenous movements and had the 1990s declared the Decade of Indigenous Peoples. She created the Rigoberta Menchú Tum

Foundation in Guatemala and began a campaign to mobilize the Maya people to vote (Arias 2006, 257).

The peace process was delayed from 2000-2003 during the presidency of Alfonso Portillo, of the right-wing Guatemalan Republican Front (FRG) but has been revitalized under the current presidency of Oscar Berger. He has recommitted the government to implementing the Peace Accords (Azpuru 2005, 103). In a show of good faith, he led the march, along with four Nobel Peace Prize winners, in celebration of the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Peace Accords.<sup>8</sup>

### **Since the Signing of the Accords**

International peace keeping organizations have been monitoring the human rights situation in Guatemala throughout the peace negotiations. The majority of the organizations, including the UN Verification Mission in Guatemala (MINUGUA), monitored the country during the 1990s (Azpuru 2005, 105). The organizations have been instrumental in creating the changes that have occurred in Guatemala over the past ten years. Guatemala is now determined to monitor human rights violations within the government and has received financial, political and technical support from the international community to create the Commission for Historical Clarification (CEH) (Azpuru 2005, 108).

In spite of all of the international support and attention, Azpuru explains that the Peace Accords have been very difficult to put into practice because they are “unusually broad in their identification of key national issues, but weak in terms of providing specific

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<sup>8</sup> Official release from the Government of Guatemala, “Presidente Berger Y Premios Nobel Encabezan Encuentro Con Jóvenes Guatemaltecos,” <http://www.guatemala.gob.gt/noticia.php?codigo=195&tipo=1> (accessed November 20, 2006).

measures to be implemented” (2005, 103). There is a fear that in some ways the Guatemalan government has become caught up in the small details of the process rather than understanding the end goal of peace and reconciliation.

Even without full implementation, the Peace Accords have brought tremendous change to the country. Since the signing of the landmark, Rights of Indigenous Peoples Accord, the Mayan people of Guatemala have made great strides towards incorporating Mayan culture into the political and educational systems. Jonas explains that the civil society, which is largely composed of indigenous Mayas, was “empowered” during the peace process and has subsequently grown in strength (Jonas 2000, 21). She goes on to explain that the government has expanded to include Mayas and women as the “new social protagonists” in this Guatemalan democracy (Jonas 2000, 27). For the indigenous people, democratization “opened new spaces of participation” and neoliberal reform “eliminated corporatist constraints on indigenous autonomy and accentuated economic woes” (Hale 2004, 2). The Pan-Mayan activists have taken advantage of the new spaces that are available to them and have vigorously advocated for recognition and autonomy.

The Pan-Mayan movement is an example of the types of indigenous organizations that have developed all over Latin America during the shift to democracy. Oxnorn explains the indigenous movements as the people’s desire to “create new organizations based on indigenous identity” (Oxnorn 2003, 55). Unlike some civil societies that lose some followers after democratization, (Oxnorn 2003, 54) the indigenous movements continue to gain power because they do not have a purely political agenda but rather are fighting against Western assimilation policies and for

cultural representation and preservation. Mattiace explains a very important factor of the Pan-Mayan movement: its ability to unify a broad range of people. He states that “certainly, Indian movements are not the only social movements of import in the continent, but they have become an important catalyst for social movement activity, often unifying a range of organizations around common goals” (Mattiace 2005, 237).

The indigenous movements are demanding that the right to speak their native languages, practice their religions, and maintain their culture be protected by law. Hale explains that “nearly every other country in Latin America has recently been transformed by the rise of collective indigenous voices in national politics and by shifts in state ideology toward “multiculturalism” (Hale 2004, 1). Kay Warren calls the Pan-Mayan movement a part of “the Indian awakening in Latin America” (Warren 1998, 168). She explains that the Native Americans are rediscovering their connections to ancient civilizations and are demanding the right to live as they want and teach their children about the benefits of indigenous cultures and languages.

Jonas emphasizes the importance of culture when she says that the Mayans see cultural rights as being as important as civil and human rights (Jonas 2000, 25). I would go so far as to say that the Pan-Mayans believe that being allowed to practice one’s culture and beliefs *is* a civil right. In reference to the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Accord, Jonas explains that the “redefinition of the nation as multicultural poses the possibility of transforming the collective political culture of Guatemalan society as a whole” (Jonas 2000, 26-27). This transformation has come in the form of increased indigenous representation. The new Guatemalan government opened a space for Mayan representation that had not existed before. The indigenous people now have

laws on their side that eliminate the “cultural imperialism” that had dominated them. In her thesis research on the cultural revitalization programs in Ixcán, Quiché, Guatemala, Bianca Pasquini describes cultural imperialism as being “the result of colonization, (it) tries to impose a state’s ideas over another country, destroying ancient beliefs and traditions of the conquered society” (Pasquini 2004, 4). It is the memory and beliefs of the conquered society of the ancient Maya that the modern day indigenous people in Guatemala are trying to rebuild and recuperate for their children.

The Pan-Mayan movement does not have a “single charismatic leader” but instead relies on the “Maya model of group consensus building that diffuses decision making and power” (Fischer 2004, 98). In the same way, it does not represent one particular indigenous group but includes all of them. Rubin explains that the “Pan-Mayan movement has produced widely shared beliefs about meaning and history out of fragmented experiences: the ritual practices of different Mayan communities; their particular economic histories and grassroots struggles for material improvement; and their diverse experiences with Catholic activists, leftist guerillas, the Guatemalan military, evangelical preachers, and the reconstructed villages and civil patrols mandated by the central state” (Rubin 2004, 124). Warren and Mattiace explain that the Pan-Mayans have stressed their inclusion of all indigenous people regardless of class or economic status. Warren states that the Mayans want to build a “cross-class movement” that stresses unification on a cultural rather than economic level (Warren 1998, 180). They have been inclusive of all tribes and ethnic groups and stress that they are all part of the indigenous family.

## **Mayas Meet with Resistance**

The Pan-Mayan movement has met with considerable resistance from ladinos and indigenous. Warren gives a detailed list of points of criticism against the Pan-Mayan movement in her article “Indigenous Movements as a Challenge to the Unified Social Movement Paradigm for Guatemala.” She says that opponents accuse the movement of separatism and ethnic polarization; of being culturally inauthentic by creating an arbitrary idea of what it means to be Maya; as being inappropriate in its exclusion of some inhabitants of the Mayan dominated areas; as excluding the contributions that the ladino culture has added to the indigenous culture; as putting too much emphasis on language acquisition and endogamy; and of creating a “third ethnicity” (Warren 1998, 175). Although Warren is supportive in the advancements that the Mayans have made in regards to civil rights, she is afraid that “Pan-Mayanists have internationalized and hybridized Mayan culture to intensify and repoliticize the cultural differences between indigenous and ladino communities at home” (1998, 179) and worries that this will only create more of a gap between the two groups.

Hale describes what I believe to be the most dangerous threat to the Pan-Mayan movement, that of the *indio permitido*. Hale believes that this new era has created the concept of the “*indio permitido*” in which the “governments are using cultural rights to divide and domesticate indigenous movements” (Hale 2004, 2). He explains that although more indigenous people are participating in the government, they are not truly being “empowered” (Hale 2004, 3). He points to the recent appointments of Mayans as Ministers of Education and Culture and Sports as being sort of token positions and decries the fact that, as of yet, a Mayan has not been selected as Minister of Finance

(Hale 2004, 3). He ends his discussion by explaining the need to better define the indigenous movement in a language that all Guatemalans can understand and thereby diminish the ladino population's fear of an "Indian uprising" (Hale 2004, 6). Rubin explains that the ladinos fear that the Maya's mobilization is actually "evidence of atavistic race hatreds on the part of Indians" (2004, 123). Many ladinos accuse the movement of overemphasizing and/or focusing on the differences rather than the similarities between the races. Frundt describes the conflict as a battle between the upper class Guatemalans who favor a modernization process that emphasizes "unhindered private-sector initiatives" and the indigenous who demand that "ethnic and community issues" be fairly dealt with (Frundt 1990, 42).

Hale also explains that the indigenous movement has "empowered some while marginalizing the majority" (Hale 2004, 1) explaining that those who live in urban areas have benefited the most from the movement. This problem leads to another obstacle that the movement is facing: lack of membership. One of the major problems that the Pan-Mayan movement has is its inability to appeal (or even reach) to the rural indigenous populations. The majority of its support has come from urban dwellers and the international agencies. Fischer explains that this system is a "tenuous basis for sustained reforms" (2004, 92).

### **What the Pan-Mayan Movement Is Doing**

Jeffery Rubin succinctly explains the Pan-Mayan movements accomplishments when he says that it has "brought scholarly and popular commitment to the development of Mayan languages and schools, making use of peace negotiations in the

1990s to focus attention on constitutional reform and Mayan conceptions of justice and citizenship” (Rubin 2004, 110). He later quotes Subcomandante Marcos’ in saying that the Pan-Mayan movement: “speaks of a unitary Mayan culture that forms the basis of the way Indians have experienced history, confronted the outside, and governed their villages” (Rubin 2004, 126). In essence, the Pan-Mayans are emphasizing their right to practice their culture, speak their native languages and raise their children to look at the indigenous culture as something positive that must be saved. In order to do this the Mayans are rewriting history to include themselves in the national conscience. As quoted by Hale, a slogan from a Mayan cultural activism group in Guatemala “Only when a people learns its history and affirms its identity, does it have the right to define its future” (Hale 1997, 572).

Rubin explains that the two most important contributions of the Pan-Mayan movement have been “first, this network of activism and cultural elaboration created a workable Mayan identity and set of meanings in the aftermath of great violence. Second, the Pan-Mayan movement employed a language of cultural rather than economic exclusion and reform” (2004, 122). The creation of a Mayan identity and a policy of cultural preservation have had an impact on the way that the indigenous people are looking at themselves. They are becoming braver and surer of themselves and their place in the Guatemalan state. The movement is working to take away the fear and shame that the people once had of identifying as indigenous. In one interview from her thesis research, Pasquini quotes a Mayan who says that “now our children ask to learn the Maya, our language, we don’t have to be ashamed anymore for being Maya.

We can walk fiercely in the plaza of the village and be proud of our tradition, our culture, and our language” (Pasquini 2004, 30).

Almost all of the scholars researching the Pan-Mayan movement stress its dedication to education above all other areas. One of the movement’s first successes was the creation of the Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala (ALMG) (Heckt 1999, 332). This institution was one of the first to develop a program to study, record and teach the indigenous languages. Until that point, most institutions that used the indigenous languages in instruction did so in a curriculum that was based on easing the student into learning Spanish.

The main thrust of the Pan-Mayan movement has been to create an elementary educational system that teaches all students – ladino and indigenous – about Mayan culture, religion and languages. In an effort to fulfill those parts of the Peace Accords that provided that a multicultural school system must be established President Berger created the Bilingual Intercultural Education (*Educativo Bilingüe Intercultural*, EBI) system.

### **Pan-Mayans and Education**

According to the Guatemalan Ministry of Education’s website,<sup>9</sup> the efforts towards a bilingual, intercultural education system began in the late 1960s. In its early days, bilingual education focused on using the students’ native indigenous language to facilitate the transition to Spanish. The idea was to eventually stop using the indigenous languages altogether in preference for Spanish. The program was amplified in 1979 and began using the native language for actual instruction with less of an emphasis on

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/default.asp>.

Spanish acquisition. The program has received extensive reform since the signing of the 1996 Peace Accords which called for a complete reform of the educational system – the bilingual system now includes non-indigenous students.<sup>10</sup>

The reforms have extended the bilingual system and allowed for all students to receive an intercultural education and a separate, Bilingual Intercultural Education (*Educativo Bilingüe Intercultural*, EBI) system has been created for the indigenous population.<sup>11</sup> The independent National Mayan Education Counsel (*Consejo Nacional de Educacion Maya*, CNEM) has worked closely with the EBI in creating materials and curriculum for the new schools. President Berger, in keeping with his promise to implement the Peace Accords, began a revitalization program for the bilingual schools in April 2005.

The need for an efficient bilingual intercultural education system is essential to be able to reach out to all of the citizens of Guatemala. Various Mayan organizations recognize this need and have joined in the effort to extend education beyond the reaches of the national government. One of these organizations, the Santiago Development Project, (*Proyecto de Desarrollo Santiago*, PRODESSA) offers supplemental community education. Speaking about the current Guatemalan education

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<sup>10</sup>. Acuerdo de Paz Firme y Duradera. “8. En la búsqueda del crecimiento, la política económica debe orientarse a impedir que se produzcan procesos de exclusión socioeconómica, como el desempleo y el empobrecimiento, y a optimizar los beneficios del crecimiento económico para todos los guatemaltecos. La elevación del nivel de vida, la salud, **la educación**, la seguridad social y la capacitación de los habitantes, constituyen las premisas para acceder al desarrollo sostenible de Guatemala.” “ IV. **Disposiciones finales. Primera.** El Acuerdo de Paz Firme y Duradera entra en vigencia en el momento de su suscripción. **Segunda.** Se dará la más amplia divulgación al presente Acuerdo, en especial a través de los programas oficiales de **educación**. (*my emphasis on the word “education”*).

<http://www.congreso.gob.gt/Docs/PAZ/Acuerdo%20de%20paz%20firme%20y%20duradera.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural DIGEBI. “Modelo Educativo Bilingüe Intercultural para Guatemala Resumen Ejecutivo.”

<http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/abridor.asp?go=http://www.mineduc.gob.gt/administracion/dependencias/centrales/digebi/digebi.htm> (accessed November 24, 2006).

system in an interview with Bianca Pasquini a PRODESSA teacher says that to her, as an indigenous woman, “education does not have cultural pertinence, which means that it doesn’t take into consideration all the particular characteristics of the population, even less the characteristics of women” (Pasquini 2004, 23). The teacher goes on to describe the materials that PRODESSA uses: “we had the need to create our own teaching material to give to our students the real history of our country to start re-discovering the Mayan history, strengthening history” (Pasquini 2004, 24). This is a complaint among the indigenous population who feel that the ladino education system does not address the specific needs of the native population and it does not prepare them for life in their villages.

One of the reasons why the school system has a disconnect with the students is because many of the non-Mayan school teachers are leery of the reforms. They do not see the inclusion of the indigenous languages as a good thing but rather as a hindrance to the children’s education and the stability of the country. Helmberger explains that most teachers come from a long line of educators who were taught to “solve” the language “problem” by teaching Spanish rather than see bilingualism as a good thing, “historically, agencies and theorists involved in language policy and planning have been positivist, scientifically oriented in looking at ways of solving language problems in developing countries rather than viewing the multilingual / multidialectical scenario as a positive condition” (Helmberger 2006, 68).

Arias further details the obstacles that the bilingual system has faced by explaining the teachers’ lack of support. He says that they have not supported the system because they believe that it is “a threat to their own status and hierarchy” (Arias

2006, 258). He explains how their resentment towards the funding of such programs led to the teacher's strike in January and February 2003 (Arias 2006, 258). This highlights the continued racism that the indigenous people confront constantly. It is very difficult to reform the educational system when most of the teachers do not see a reason to include bilingual education. Guatemala must continue to educate those in charge of the country of the necessity of the reforms before they can be put into place. Jonas sees the demand for cultural recognition as a chance for a new beginning: "the assertion of cultural rights in this case is not 'identity politics' but a new political framework for Maya-ladino social relations (Jonas 2000, 26).

The need to restore the real history of the country, a history that includes the indigenous people, is vital for the education system to work. If the people do not have a connection with the schools they will not send their children to them. In her article, "Mayan Education in Guatemala: A Pedagogical Model and Its Political Context," Heckt describes the difference between formal education and Mayan community education, "in an analysis of education in Guatemala, it must be borne in mind in respect of formal education that school education is something extra for the indigenous populations, especially in rural areas. They are able to handle far more clearly the concept of community education, the philosophical concept of education in which school is an extra" (Heckt).<sup>12</sup> As long as the Mayans feel ostracized or underrepresented in the schools they are less likely to send their children to them.

## **Conclusion**

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<sup>12</sup> As quoted in Heckt by an interview with Federico Figueroa, UNESCO MAYA, June 1997.

Diane Nelson quotes the ALMG in saying that the “decolonization of the Maya begins with knowing how to use technology and not being used by it.”<sup>13</sup> Her article describes the Mayan educators’ role in the cultural revitalization movement and their progress in promoting cultural survival through modern technology such as computers and desktop publishing (Nelson 1996, 292). She explains how the schools are using modern technology to create dictionaries and grammars in the indigenous languages. In her interview with the then Minister of Education, Demetrio Cojti, he explains that “modernity is not the property of anyone. It is universal; no one can lay claim to it . . . Everyone is always trying to say that we are inauthentic. But their ideas of indigenous people are very stereotypic, very rural. We are trying to mix things up” (Nelson 1996, 300).

The Pan-Mayan movement’s effort to “mix things up” as evolved into the redefinition of what it means to be indigenous today in Guatemala and throughout Latin America. It is serving as an example to various organizations, including the EZLN, of what civil society can accomplish in a democratizing state. It has brought the indigenous rights to culture and language to the forefront of governmental policy. The Pan-Mayan movement is a perfect example of what Rubin calls the “interconnectedness of culture and politics” (2004, 109).

Although Guatemala has made great strides towards democratization it still has not met all of its goals. Guatemala’s democratic transition process has created the need to redefine or categorize the type of democracy that is being practiced there. When speaking of democracy in Guatemala, Jonas calls it “restricted, pseudo, *tutelada*, façade, and *democradura*” in order to be able to “include Guatemala in the ‘democratic

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<sup>13</sup> As quoted in Diane Nelson from ALMG 1990, 42.

family” (Jonas 2000, 18). Jonas states that by categorizing the type of democracy that exists there “the definition of democracy is being stretched beyond acceptable limits” (Jonas 2000, 18). She goes on to explain that Guatemala’s progress has been a “transition toward democracy” rather than a “democratic transition” (Jonas 2000, 19). In many ways, Guatemala has won democracy but it has not yet achieved social justice and social citizenship for its people (Jonas 2000, 28-30).

Fruendt explains that “Guatemala’s search for democracy can be better understood through the ‘class analysis’ model, which assesses the nation’s popular movements as they forge alliances or class-based blocs of power within a variety of economic, political and socio-cultural contexts” (Fruendt 1990, 26). In respect to this model, the popular Pan-Mayan movement has clearly succeeded in creating blocs of power that have united large swaths of the indigenous community.

In conclusion, I believe that the models of cultural and linguistic freedom remain an important part of the Guatemalan peace process. The Mayas must maintain their freedom to decide what their children will learn in school and they must continue to be included in the history of Guatemala. The knowledge of Shakespeare must not be imposed on a people who are more concerned with retaining their culture over the European. Jonas says that the “quality of political democracy in Guatemala will be profoundly affected by issues of cultural diversity” (Jonas 2000, 9). True democracy will not exist in Guatemala until the indigenous people conquer the long held beliefs that their languages and cultures are inferior to that of the Hispanic culture. Arias explains that “Maya cultural agency can be seen as the living proof of a transculturation process

from below” (Arias 2006, 260). It is a “transculturation” process that began with the indigenous civil society and has become institutionalized with the Peace Accords.

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