

MAYA SPIRITUAL PRAXIS IN THE NEW BAKTUN:
RITUAL AND RECLAMATION IN 21ST-CENTURY CHIAPAS

BY

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This work is dedicated to my mother, Anne, who inspires my choice to live in an
animate Universe,

And to Laine, my better half—there is no one with whom I would rather journey.

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ABSTRACT

The Maya are— spiritually — the Children of the Maize. The far-reaching effects of the divorce between indigenous land-working Maya and their ability to rely on maize farming and traditional subsistence strategies on the *milpa* (a type of multi-crop, cooperative growing field) have implications for the continuity of Maya spiritual practice. In recent years, Maya communities have struggled against free trade policies and federal legislation that denies them land rights and productive autonomy. Presently, the younger generations in Chiapas are struggling to re-claim their spiritual beliefs as connected to community ecology.

The specific aim of my research is to understand the way 21st century Maya are reclaiming their cosmology and spiritual practices amid the indigenous struggle for autonomy and land rights. The broader goal is to provide venue for the Mayan voice and experience within the intellectual discourse on environmental degradation. The hope is that by connecting Maya voices to the Spiritual Ecology “Revolution” (Sponsel 2012), I might help further the social emphasis on conservation toward what Gladwell calls “*The Tipping Point*” critical for a movement to take hold in public consciousness (Gladwell 2000).

Introduction: Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth

No important change in ethics was ever accomplished without an internal change in our intellectual emphasis, loyalties, affections, and convictions. The proof that conservation has not yet touched these foundations of conduct lies in the fact that philosophy and religion have not yet heard of it. -Aldo Leopold, c. 1940s

Why are urban-dwelling Maya in Chiapas, Mexico, moving away from participation in the Catholic Church to study and reclaim indigenous Maya spiritual practices? The answer to this question requires an understanding of the complex church-state-indigenous relationship that spans the modern sociopolitical history of southern Mexico, and involves an emerging web of connectivity with the pan-Maya Movement emanating west from the highlands of Guatemala. But these *etic*¹ explanations do not account for the whole story. The Maya themselves express an ecological and spiritual explanation to the timing of this re-emergence. Throughout this work I will foment focus on the *emic* perspective of my community partners², not least because I believe that their knowledge and interpretation of their own reclamation of sacred practices should be privileged equally with outside socio-scientific analysis, but also because I believe that their voice is under-represented through the current “loyalties, affections and convictions” that belie the “intellectual emphasis” of the academic community.

As I learned from those with whom I worked, the timing of this reemergence in sacred and ritual Maya practices coincides with an era of change that has been anticipated for thousands of years in Mesoamerica—a change they believe extends well beyond the Maya world to encompass a new direction in human thought and interaction toward spiritual engagement with the natural landscape. I see clear

evidence of their theory within my own culture—academia. In higher education, increasing attention has been paid in recent years to the intersection of spirituality and human ecology, with obvious examples including the Yale Forum on Religion and Ecology, Harvard University’s Project on Religion and Ecology, and the ten academic volumes of *Religions of the World and Ecology* that were published in the aftermath of these Ivy League conferences (see series edited by Tucker and Grim 1998).

Entire academic disciplines and research centers are developing around spiritual ecologies as an emerging field of inquiry (see additional related programs and centers at the University of Florida, Vanderbilt University, University of Georgia and the University of Hawaii at Manoa, among others), and extensive efforts are being made to foster dialogue between religious interpretations of human-environmental relationships and those of the “hard” sciences, including an Emmy Award-winning documentary titled *Journey of the Universe*, which presents the most current scientific theories on the origins of life within the context of humanistic interpretations about the nature, and meaning, of the Universe. According to Mary Evelyn Tucker, Co-Director of the center at Yale, this film “will provide an integrating framework for understanding the story of the universe and the Earth from the perspectives of science and religion. This will ground environmental transformation in an evolutionary perspective regarding our profound relatedness to and dependence on the larger Earth community” (Swimme, Tucker, et. al. 2011). As I will show, socio-ecological movements such as Spiritual Ecology and the

Environmental Movement of the 1970s are predicated on indigenous belief systems and the morality and personal motivations inherent in their animate worldviews.

The specific aim of my research is to understand the way 21st century Maya are reclaiming their cosmology and spiritual practices amid the indigenous struggle for autonomy and land rights. The broader goal is to provide venue for the Mayan voice and experience within the intellectual discourse on environmental degradation. The hope is that by connecting Maya voices to the Spiritual Ecology “Revolution” (Sponsel 2012), I might help further the social emphasis on conservation toward what Gladwell calls “*The Tipping Point*” critical for a movement to take hold in public consciousness (Gladwell 2000).

While recent ethnographic work illustrates the emergence of reclaimed ancestral traditions among the Maya (Molesky-Poz 2006, Hart 2008), there is a void in the literature on the examination of these practices in the urban sphere, among practitioners whose daily subsistence does not connect them so directly to the natural landscape. In the following chapters, I will discuss several of the significant socio-cultural factors behind the recent revitalization of Maya spiritual practices and rituals in Chiapas.

The broad literature documenting the continuities of Maya Cosmovision throughout the colonial and post-colonial era provides a framework for understanding contemporary practice. Throughout this work, I rely on the research of Mayanists such as Barbara and Dennis Tedlock, David Freidel and Linda Schele, June Nash, Gary Gossen, Duncan Earle and Jeanne Simonelli, and Jean Molesky-Poz for background on elements of Maya ritual and calendar interpretation as well as

comparative reference to their fieldwork with trainees and extant practitioners alike in myriad Maya villages throughout Mesoamerica.

The first chapter of this thesis introduces my methodology, as well as engaging in an introductory discussion and cursory review of the anthropological literature on Spiritual Ecology and related concepts in academic discourse. This discussion is then linked to the modern Maya in millennial Chiapas.

Taking a holistic approach to my ethnography, I frame the second chapter within the larger voice of the pan-Maya movement as I experienced its expression during my fieldwork in San Cristobal de las Casas, during December of 2012 and the summer of 2013. A brief referential discussion of the Guatemalan Civil War, the oligarchic oppression of the Maya majority, and targeted persecution of Maya daykeepers, called *ajq'ijab*³, explicates the sudden rise in availability, or “supply” of Maya spiritual guides in Chiapas. Post-war reconciliatory efforts and government-sponsored Maya revitalization projects in Guatemala streamline the availability and content of materials used in daykeeper trainings.

In the third chapter, I continue my analysis of the underlying factors that support Maya spiritual revitalization in Chiapas. Contextualizing the role of Liberation Theology in supporting syncretic communication between the Catholic Church and rural Maya communities in the region, I highlight the role of *catequistas*⁴ as intermediaries. A crucial change in church leadership at the turn of the millennial has ended many social programs and rural health initiatives in Chiapas, alienating some *catequistas* and inspiring several of the community members with whom I worked [who I will subsequently refer to as community partners, in order to

acknowledge the symmetrical exchange of information between myself and those who have agreed to allow me to undertake this study] to seek alternative spiritual communities and advocates. I use qualitative data and narrative from interviews with Maya spiritual guides to argue that this change in church regime is an important contribution to increasing “demand” for Maya ritual training in the area.

The fourth chapter engages Maya spirituality in praxis, presenting my findings and analysis of the interplay between ecology and social resistance in the context of ritual intentions, intergroup dialogue, and planned future initiatives among my community partners. Through analysis of field transcripts, narratives and observations, I present three central topics of concern and contention. First, interviewees highlight the impacts of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on maize cultivation, and express dismay at the influx of cheaper, Genetically Modified (GMO) varieties. This issue was discussed in terms of the negative impact of GMO corn on economic, environmental and health outcomes of community members, with reference to the ontological significance of maize in the Maya story of creation. A second, closely related topic of ecological and social resistance involved recurring references to, support for, and solidarity with, the efforts of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN), who have been fighting for indigenous autonomy in the region. A third concern voiced by community partners, particularly those from Guatemala, involved destructive land development by GoldCorp of Canada, whose mining in the Guatemalan Highlands region involves catastrophic land stripping that leaves behind poisonous cyanide residues⁵.

The last chapter strives to weave together these narratives with a holistic description of an oppressive economy and the alternative healing therapies provided by Maya spiritual practitioners in Chiapas. By providing healing therapies in Maya ritual form to those in their communities, my community partners are reducing their direct participation in the mainstream economy that they consider to be so critically at fault for the environmental destruction plaguing their communities. Furthermore, the alternatives in “spiritual” and “health” guidance that they provide to others support the growing indigenous protest against the neo-liberal paradigm underlying the ecological crisis- including Western bio-medical practices. By situating Maya ritual and healing ceremonies within the underlying eco-political protests of the larger community, I hope to demonstrate the interconnectedness of Maya Cosmvision in praxis, highlighting the correspondence between exponential increase in Maya ecological ritual participation and the long-awaited changing of the *Baktun*.

Chapter One: Alternate Realities and Spiritual Ecology



Maya Ceremony in Candelaria, Chiapas. Photo by Jeanne Simonelli

I. Methodology

Arriving at tiny little Tuxtla Gutierrez airport with its singular luggage carousel and winking aduana staff, my liminal experience of fieldwork fittingly began in uncertainty. Jeanne Simonelli, my advisor, was attempting to make it back from one of the para-Zapatista communities amid ongoing social protests that sporadically close the roadways between San Cristobal and Comitán.

In this instance, federal legislation had just passed in D.F. prohibiting any commercial vehicle older than 15 or so years from being used on the road. The law, however, was not based on emissions standards, but pure vehicular age. This awkward nod at emissions regulation would take a heavy toll on the poorest drivers, many of whom spent extensive energies on the meticulous maintenance of their older vehicles. Indigenous communities in Chiapas had self-sorted into groups of protesters, utilizing loose jags of concrete from the roadside as improvised blockades. The resulting community-organized bloqueos shut down many major public transport routes, with protesting workers showing the federales that they could—and were—effectively constipating commercial traffic por todos lados—on all sides.

Jeanne did in fact make it back from la selva, cleverly bypassing the bloqueo with her usual self-made luck, and told me enough about the people waiting eagerly in Rio Blanco for my return that I was mentally exhausted for the night. Each time I travel in these contexts there is a sifting process that overwhelms my emotional body, and I have to wade through the presets and assumptions of what I've come from in order to engage where I am...

My arrival in San Cristobal de las Casas highlights the way Schele, Freidel and Parker (1993:37) talk about this sifting sentiment as a necessary precursor to engaging the alternate reality of a Maya place, noting that “the ability to successfully

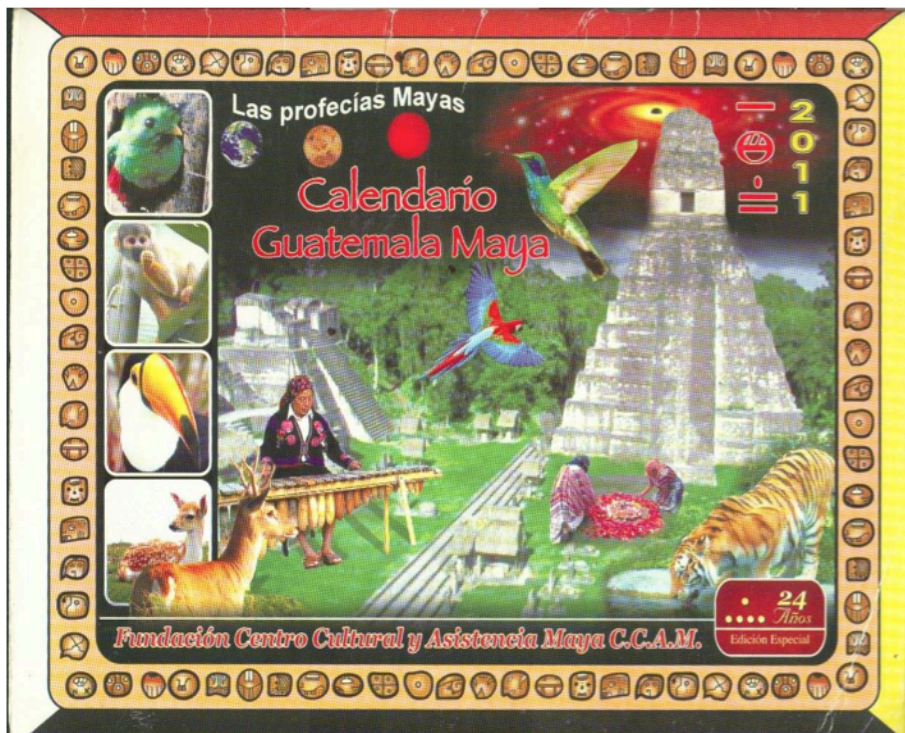
pass back and forth between alternate realities is a fundamental feature of mysticism in general, shamanism in particular, and anthropology in practice.” San Cristobal de las Casas served as my residential base while in the field. Indeed, my fortnight pilot study surrounding the Changing of the *Baktun* in December of 2012 and my subsequent eight weeks of fieldwork during the summer of 2013 were based at Dr. June Nash’s colonial home in the heart of historic San Cristobal. The two chain hotels that have grown over the past four decades to tower over her garden walls to either side serve as a testament to the globalization and international intrigue developing Chiapas from without.

Understanding the inevitable presence of cultural mediation inherent in ethnography, my research also involved exploration of the physical cultural record of Maya spiritual practices. As did art historian Linda Scheele, whose revolutionary work on the interpretation of Maya art and hieroglyphics has redefined Maya studies, I conducted trips to significant Maya archaeological and spiritual sites in order to cultivate an emic perspective of ecological experiences and Cosmovision. While at these sites I collected images for use as prompts in my ethnographic interviews, in order to gather feedback concerning the reclamation of traditions and the symbols important in modern day ritual. I consulted local experts at several important Maya archaeological sites for guidance in deconstructing the material evidences of culture to balance out the textual research that preceded my fieldwork. I took several daytrips into the Lacandón with Ajq’ijab’ guides, gathering medicinal plants with them, and learning about their uses—both ancient and modern. These applied investigation sites included Palenque, Chichén Itzá, Chincul Tik and Cobá.

In practice, my ethnographic fieldwork and qualitative data gathering techniques involved direct interviewing with an extended network of about 12 Maya Ajq'ij in varying stages of training. My community partners ranged from two young adults from urban backgrounds in their mid-twenties who were engaging in early forms of daykeeper trainings and calendar readings to four abuelas and abuelos from both urban and rural areas who were approaching their seventies. Three were Tzotzil -speaking Maya from the rural outskirts of San Cristobal, near San Juan Chamula, two of whom were older and had grown up practicing a two-layered (or *dos mundos*) cosmology represented by physical separation in altar spaces where rituals were conducted. Three had Mam-speaking roots, coming from families who practiced the ancient ways in the highlands since long before the war had caused them to seek out new and far away hilltops from which to worship.

All were affected in symbolic practice by their ritual interactions with one another and their common use of training materials produced by Guatemala's Maya Cultural Foundation (*Centro Cultural y Aisistencia Maya*, or CCCM), which created almost a set of "ground rules" used as reference in daykeeper trainings, especially for many seekers of knowledge who were supplementing their studying by using these texts from their homes in urban environments, while meeting sporadically with Ajq'ijab guides that often lived several hours' distance. About half of my community partners engaged in this sort of correspondence training. In every ceremony, client-healer appointment, and ritual that I observed, the *lingua franca* was Castilian Spanish, though often older men and women present might be monolingual in one of the Maya languages, relying on younger family for translation.

Introductions arranged by my mentor Jeanne Simonelli facilitated my access to daykeepers and Ajq'ijab rituals in the field. Borrowing and building upon the trust established by my mentor, I was quickly accepted by my field partners, and able to visit the homes of a dozen Maya Ajq'ijab, the villages of Zapatista soldiers and communities-in-resistance, and dozens of Daykeeper ceremonies held high in the hills above the city in the dark of the predawn. As I have learned, it was, in great part, the diaspora caused by the Guatemalan Civil War that allowed for such an eclectic gathering of Maya with daykeeping knowledge and common eco-political concerns to coalesce in the greater San Cristobal area of Chiapas at this particular place in time.



A daykeeper's Calendar, published annually by The Maya Cultural Foundation, a post-war peace efforts group supporting and defending indigenous cultural heritage across Guatemala.

My community partners used these and other publications for training and ritual purposes.

Though my community partners came from a variety of ethno-linguistic groups, most rituals I observed followed CCCM and other similar materials.

Image courtesy of Jeanne Simonelli

In the effort of getting most directly to what was anthropologically interesting about my fieldwork among Maya Ajq'i'ijab, I rely heavily on collected narratives and observational descriptions in the following chapters. For the purposes of this research, I have found collecting narrative to provide me the most direct source at my community partners' emic self-representation as I analyze transcripts in the post-field phase.

II. The Emergence of Spiritual Ecology

As academics publish their analyses and accounts of spiritual ecology movements, the continuous creation of new terminology often obfuscates the discussion at hand. In the following section I will define some of the terms used.

The "disenchantment of modernity" is a concept discussed by Max Weber, who theorized that modern industrialized and scientific societies would progress unilaterally toward a worldview devoid of metaphysical possibility or spiritual projection (Weber 1946). His argument was based on the Enlightenment thinking that had superseded the Christian majority of the West. This disenchantment has proven to be less unilateral than Weber assumed. Currents of social resistance toward a disenchanted modernity have been widely discussed as a contributing factor to the growing pursuit of alternative forms of knowledge and individualized spiritual practice, such as those found within spiritualized ecologies (Braun 2011, Reddekop 2010, Sponsel 2012).

In the years after Weber published his theories, renewed interest in Jung's theories on universal consciousness and the implications of eastern philosophies for

“Modern Man” helped to carve out the radical ideology that preceded the “New Age.” As Jung wrote, “The crux of the spiritual problem of today is to be found in the fascination which psychic life exerts upon modern man. If we are pessimists, we shall call it a sign of decadence; if we are optimistically inclined, we shall see it in the promise of a far-reaching spiritual change in the Western world” (Jung 1955:217). Though not sharing the cultural perspective of the Western “modern man” cited by Jung, this concept of far-reaching spiritual change was expressed by many of my Maya friends, when discussing the changing *Baktun*.

In utilizing the term *shaman*, I refer to those contemporary ritual practitioners who identify with an ability to enter into the spirit world—also referred to as an alternate energy state, non-visible realm or “non-ordinary reality”— as an agent capable of creating or directing change that affects the physical realm. By *transpersonal*, I refer to a spiritual or transcendent experience beyond the ego or personal self, as discussed by Lajoie and Shapiro (1992). I will follow the precedent set by Boekhoven who utilizes the term *shamanist* “for individuals practicing contemporary Western shamanisms”, and the term *shamanology* to discuss “the scholarly study of shamanism.” Boekhoven is among many recent scholars who recognize that within this mercurial discipline, “academic and other scholars struggle to get their conceptualization or interpretation of shamanism recognized as legitimate” (Boekhoven 2011: 23).

Two central arguments frame the authenticity debate today among anthropologists. The first relates to an under-explored emergence of “reclaiming” initiatives among globalizing indigenous groups in recent years. The second factor

concerns traditional shamanologists (Francfort & Hamayon 2001) who have expressed frustration with the Western 'New Age' appropriations of shamanism. Informed by Eliade and Jung, these western appropriations began in earnest after Carlos Castaneda published his highly contested thesis (Castaneda 1968). Castaneda's descriptions of shamanic trance through peyote rituals with his alleged community partner enthralled popular readers, many of whom sought alternative spiritual practices for themselves. As Braun notes, "His enchanted reports of accessing extra-material realities, which he calls *nonordinary reality*...fell into the open arms of a jumbled American counter-culture experimenting with psychoactive drugs, Eastern philosophies, free love, and in general acting out against the mundane materiality of modernity as manifest in US society" (Braun 2011:3). Later controversy revealed that much of Castaneda's work was creatively written without basis on empirical observation, though his influence in the field of shamanology still persists today.

The debate seems to hinge upon the question of authenticity not only among shamanist practitioners, but also within the sphere of shamanology itself. "On the one side, there are conservative anthropologists who want to fortify traditional definitions of and approaches to the phenomenon of shamanism... on the other side we find those authors who sympathetically describe shamanism as a universal tradition capable of being transformed into a modern spiritual path. For them, the conventional approaches are but a rationalistic and artificial reduction of a complex human capacity" (von Stuckrad 2005:123). The prominent paradigms in theoretical

approaches that have arisen since the latter half of the 20th century seem to center on the debate between essentialist and constructivist views of authentic ritual.

Among the first camp, several ethnographers of so-called 'classic' Shamanism, who had studied indigenous healers and spiritual practitioners among cultures as diverse as the Evenki of Siberia, The Jivaro of South America, and the Hmong of China, developed what Harner later considered to be the 'universals' of shamanism (Harner 1980). Among Harner's 'universals', it is widely recognized that 'the spirit chooses the Shaman' (Wallis 2003). While the role of agency is thereby removed from the 'calling' to Shamanism, agency remains of central importance in the control of the soul-flights, visions, or trance states that occur in all shamanic practices. It is also commonly accepted that the more skilled a shaman, the more adept he or she will be at controlling his or her soul flights. To this end, all shamans take what Jakobsen and others refer to as 'soul journeys.' The fact that the "soul", or spirit, can leave and re-enter the body is fundamental to many shamanic systems, and dreams are often seen by practitioners as proof that the soul can leave the body and return (Jakobsen 1999).

Harner's publications of his fieldwork as an ethnographer of so-called 'classic' shamanology among the Jivaro of South America garnered wide praise in anthropology. However, in conjunction with Castaneda's daring accounts, a new form of authoritative knowledge on the subject took hold in mainstream western culture, involving a constructivist approach. "The resulting interest in ontology and attention to Native spiritual traditions persisted, and is evident in Michael Harner's 1980 book *The Way of the Shaman*" (Braun 2011:4). As Harner began to learn and

practice shamanist rituals, he gradually synthesized his traditional ethnography into the aforementioned 'universals' of shamanism (Harner 1980). This academic stance, namely the idea that there are 'universal' elements of shamanism that can translate to modern spiritual practice, has become a dividing element among anthropologists.

In the 1960s, renewed interest in Jung's theories on universal consciousness and the implications of eastern philosophies for 'Modern Man' helped to carve out the radical ideology that preceded the 'New Age'. In addition to the political turbulence of the decade, a series of environmental disasters, including the oil tanker crash at Torrey Canyon in England and the oil spill at California's Santa Barbara coast, helped to catalyze the Environmental Movement. Apollo 8's iconic image *Earthrise* deeply affected the movement, as well as influencing many scientists who were working on issues of ecology. British scientist James Lovelock was one such affected, and he published his famous treatise, "*Gaia as seen through the atmosphere*", in 1972. A few years previous, James Lovelock and Lynn Margulis had developed the *Gaia Theory*, which states that the earth is in and of itself a living, breathing organism comprised of all biological life and ecological habitats on earth which function as its organs and internal systems. Native American subsistence strategies became a focus of ecological philosophy. The pool of westerners seeking alternative spiritual choices that fit with their sense of need to re-connect with the natural world also fed the growing interest in shamanist studies.

Coined by Arne Ness in 1973, the term *Deep Ecology* refers to a philosophical position that advocates the rights of all creatures regardless of species, recognizing the Earth as a systemic life form and questioning the anthropocentrism of Christian

'stewardship' (Sessions 1995). In addition to Carson and Ness, several scholars of the movement also acknowledge the philosophical influences of Thoreau, John Muir, and D. H. Lawrence, among others (*Ibid.*) Subsequent publications have coined further terminology, including *transpersonal ecology* (Fox 1995) and *dark green religion* (Taylor 2010), which are two terms that express related concepts, and have in common the tenant dissolving the mentally constructed boundaries between self and environment to experience unity and a heightened sense of wellbeing as part of the natural world. As a philosophical movement, Deep Ecology often also utilizes the framework of prophetic narrative to communicate a warning that if current ecological abuses continue, the Earth will restore balance to itself by whatever means necessary (Grim 2001, Hart 1980).

For the purposes of this discussion, I will refer to the aforementioned movements generally as Spiritual Ecology, acknowledging the rising swell of cultural research on the topic, with academic references to the term emerging in increasing numbers since the 1990s (see Sarah McFarland Taylor 2007, Sponsel 2012, Carolyn Merchant 2005). Outside of academia, manifestations of spiritual ecological practices are evidenced in social movements that often involve interaction between mainstream environmental activists and indigenous communities. Spiritual causes in common often involve expression of animate-earth concepts, whether in public rhetoric or ritual practice. These elements were present in the rituals I was able to attend during my fieldwork, and I observed myriad interactions between my community partners and "cultural tourists" concerned with the ecological crisis.

III. Native Voices, Eco-Feminists, and the Environmental Movement

What is clear from the present vantage point is that what Sponsel has labeled 'spiritual ecology' has gained adherents in a variety of cultural and religious contexts around the world. That such spirituality is a global and cross-cultural phenomenon suggests that Sponsel's hope [that Spiritual Ecology can help solve the environmental crisis] may be a real-world possibility. -Bron Taylor, 2012

In the United States, the Environmental Movement that emerged from the counter-cultural wave of the late 1960s incorporated myriad perspectives on, as well as approaches to, ecology. After the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, cultural debates abounded on the benefits of conservation versus preservation, and the messages and directives emanating from the Environmental Movement as a whole were as diverse as the members themselves. However, from the hodgepodge of environmentalist speech and writing in the late 20th century emerged a distinctly animate discourse, particularly among the Native American activists, Eco Feminists and academic proponents of spiritual ecologies.

The photographs produced from the Apollo missions gave humanity a view of Earth from space for the very first time—and the image was anthropomorphized, made maternal even, by the political voice of Native American activists and mainstream environmentalists alike. In *Mother Earth*, Gill wrestles with the implications of environmental activists' tendency to write about Mother Earth as a Goddess figure and to attribute her origins to a pan-tribal feature of Native American cultures. He unpacks the perception that "Native Americans" worship "Mother Earth" and shows this as a gross generalization of a diverse continent of distinct tribes with differing, and often opposing, cosmological views. However, in

his own work, Gill provides countless examples that point to the pan-Native American concept of Mother Earth as an organizing principle of protest, and an expression of resistance to industrial land development. I find it interesting to note that a similar organizing principle guided by an animate-earth cosmology united many of my community partners in their localized protests in Chiapas, Mexico. The “cultural tourists” and non-Maya present during the rituals I attended also expressed sympathy toward, or belief in, animate earth concepts (see Chapter five).

Among Native Americans, Gill argues that the concept of “Mother Earth” is at least as young as the 20th century. Gill’s evidence toward this sentiment is narrow, but deep- he draws upon the work of Dakota scholar, writer and Native American rights activist Charles Eastman. Eastman’s writing on the theme of Native cosmologies mentions the Sun and Earth as the poetic and metaphorical parents of all organic life, saying, “therefore our reverence and love for them was really an imaginative extension of our love for our immediate parents...the enkindling warmth of the Sun entered into the bosom of our mother, the Earth, and forwith she conceived and brought forth life, both vegetable and animal” (Gill 1987:134). These quiet beginnings of the dialogue on pan-Native American rights were to surface loudly during the Environment Movement of the 20th century.

According to Gill, there aren’t many other native cosmology statements to reference until the early 1970s, when they ‘begin to emerge with great abundance’. Grace Black Elk, writing during the ’73 oil crisis, spoke in more anthropomorphic terms, quite distinctly from the metaphorical comparisons made by Eastman: “One day soon, the white man will come to us, and say: Help us! We have used up the

energy of Mother Earth! We have wasted the energy of Father Sun!"(Gill 1987:136).

There is clear reference to an animate-earth in her writing:

Now what is this "energy crisis" the white man has? It is *his* "energy crisis". The white man created it, because he does not respect Mother Earth; he has to consume the energy of his Mother the Earth, for his electric toothbrushes... Mother Earth has no "energy crisis." Father Sun has no "energy crisis." Who does: It is the white man, who has broken the Sacred Circle of Life.

The Environmental Movement of the 1970s utilized the image of the *Noble Savage* in such a way that the resulting dialogue reified the complex natures of myriad Native American cultures into a single image that Krech critiques as an inaccurate trope in his work *The Ecological Indian* (Krech 1999). As cultural critics linked global environmental issues to industrialization, and Christianity was panned as anthropocentric, the Ecological Indian concept provided both a pre-technical and pre-Christian cultural narrative to serve as the backdrop for the *happenings*. Pop-culture surrounded the movement, and involved the re-discovery of Neillhardt's *Black Elk Speaks*, lyrical DDT pesticide and pollution protests led by music icons like Joni Mitchell and Kansas, poetry by Gary Snyder and the Earth Day activities of 1970 which involved more than 15 million people, who had heard the message coming from the indigenous communities, had seen their role in the ongoing environmental chaos, and had felt the moral call to join in demonstration. Clearly, the social protest of the Environmental Movement embodied Spiritual Ecology at its core.

The role of the native ecological voice in the Environmental Movement served as an ethical impetus, as well as a conviction-laden warning to those unwilling to join in on the paradigm shift in human-environmental interactions. According to Lakota activist Russell Means, “Mother Earth will retaliate, the whole environment will retaliate, and the abusers will be eliminated. Things will come full circle, back to where they started.” The aforementioned quote is from a speech given by Means in July 1980, before several thousand people who had assembled from all over the world for the Black Hills International Survival Gathering, in the Black Hills of South Dakota. With Means, as with my Maya community partners, reconsideration of subsistence strategies and land use practices were central themes of proffered solutions. As Means told those assembled in the Black Hills,

“There is another way. There is the traditional Lakota way and the ways of the American Indian peoples. It is the way that knows that humans do not have the right to degrade Mother Earth, *that there are forces beyond anything the European mind has conceived*, that humans must be in harmony with all relations or the relations will eventually eliminate the disharmony. A lopsided emphasis on humans by humans...can only result in a total disharmony and a readjustment which cuts arrogant humans down to size, gives them a taste of that reality beyond their grasp and restores harmony” (Means 1980).

Means’ reference to the “lopsided emphasis on humans by humans” reiterates Spiritual Ecology’s focus on correcting anthropocentric practices. (Sponsel 2012).

Since the beginning of the Ecological Revolution, the Eco-feminist perspectives on the parallels between sexist carnivorous politics in industrialized nations and agro-industrial land use for cattle ranching have added to the eclectic move away from anthropocentric assumptions in the social sciences. In *WomanSpirit Rising*, Ruether theorizes the coming time of reckoning with environmental wrongdoings. “We are seeing a new intensification... among the oppressed of the Earth” she warns. “We are now approaching the denouement of this dialectic. The ethic of competitiveness and technological mastery has created a world divided by penis-missiles and countermissiles that could destroy all humanity a hundred times over” (Christ 1979: 51). Ruether compares pagan spirituality to seasonal focus on renewal, and the practices of spiritual ecologies as attempting to restore justice. (Ruether 2005).

F. David Peat is a Quantum Physicist that has spent more than a decade in dialogue with indigenous scientists from North American first nations groups. In a similar vein to the *Journey of the Universe* project discussed in the introduction, Peat strives to foster dialogue between scientific and native spiritual interpretations of reality. In *Blackfoot Physics*, he compares the worldviews and mental frameworks of these two camps, giving particular focus to their approaches to ecology (Peat 2002). Betty Bastien of the Blood Reserve (Blackfoot Confederacy) acts as Peat’s host at the Sun Dance festival, and frames the attempt at intercultural dialogue on ecology as essential to the cultural survival of her own people:

For so long our culture has been ignored, dismissed, and laughed at;
our beliefs have been called superstitious and we have been referred to

as primitive people. In most schools our children are never taught about their own history, and for them the only truth about the world is that given by Western science. As a result the young people don't listen to the words of our Elders... But now a physicist comes along and says that he respects the way we look at the world, that he can begin to understand the reasons for some of the things we do and that he can see connections with things from the frontiers of his own science. I think it is important that people should know this (Peat 2005:18).

Echoing the sentiments I heard among my Maya community partners in Chiapas, the Blackfoot say that the monoculture farming practices of Westerners can't continue, and warn that Mother Earth will purify herself by any means necessary. This connects to Lovelock's "Gaia Theory" postulate that the Earth is a self-regulating super-organism. "Ecologists stress that we must attend to the basic interconnectedness of nature and to the sensitivity and complexity of natural systems," (Peat 2005:16).

Whether in the North or South, expressions of Spiritual Ecology often acknowledge a conflict of moral interest between capitalist production schemes and local ecological or community concerns, and commonly involve a form of social resistance against the neoliberal establishment (Sponsel 2012). This certainly rings true among my Maya community partners, as I shall discuss in the next chapter.

Chapter Two: Ecology, Indigenous Identity and Maya Knowledge Transfer



Zapatista gathering in front of a mural in Realidad. The mural shows the ancient Maya gods depicted in the moon above a modern Maya woman engaged in ritual by the river. Photo by Duncan Earle.

I. Globalization and the Maya Landscape

Among academics who write about ecology, the Scientific Revolution is often upheld as a referential point in human history, to describe the process by which ‘nature’ has become widely utilitarian, valued primarily as a commodity by the dominant paradigms of production and consumption (See Smith 2008). The commodification of *nature* follows easily from a mechanized production paradigm that isn’t subject to the same cyclical reality of growth, harvest, and crucial fallow periods that govern agrarian cycles. Industrialized production, the logic goes, need not follow the seasonal rhythms of fecundity and hibernation that govern the subsistence strategies of agrarians and foragers alike, and thus the growing swell of

Spiritual Ecology may be considered as a response to the values and socio-political structures of recent centuries (Vaughan Lee 2013).

Within this context I witnessed an emerging manifestation of Spiritual Ecology among the Maya daykeepers, spiritual healers, and urban knowledge seekers that I was fortunate to learn from during my fieldwork. The movement continues to grow. Among my community partners in Chiapas, central ecological concerns involved the growth and sale of genetically modified corn, extensive ore mining by Goldcorp of Canada that is stripping local terrain of arable and livable space, and the indigenous struggle for land rights that prompted, among other forms of resistance, the rise of the Zapatista Movement in Chiapas. There was extensive dialogue and interaction with outside seekers of knowledge, both from within Mexico and from abroad, and my Maya friends were not shy about vocalizing the collective decision-making behind this choice to go 'public' with ritual. In the wider context of Maya Cosmivision, they told me, there was expectation of a fundamental shift in human-environmental interactions. Throughout their conversations and in their ritual petitions around the ceremonial fires that illuminated daykeeping ceremonies, my community partners expressed a sense of shared responsibility to extend their ideas outward from the Maya community, into the broader sphere of collective human consciousness. But what do we mean when we speak of the Maya community? Who are the Maya today?

The question of identity in an increasingly globalized world frames the statistical analysis of Mexico's indigenous population. Due to conflicting legal definitions of who can and should identify as 'Maya' in Mexico, estimates of Mexico's

indio population vary by source. In the aftermath of the Guatemalan civil war, tens of thousands of persecuted Maya crossed the border into Chiapas, many returned home, though most became Mexican citizens later on. For the sake of this analysis, I will offer the average estimate of several sources, which indicate that the overall Maya population constitute about 15% of modern Mexico, concentrated heavily in the southern states, where an estimated one-third of the population of Chiapas identify as Maya (Schmal 2004). Regardless of the 21 distinct ethno-linguistic groups that exist among the Maya, collective struggles over land use have been an identifying feature of Maya communities in Chiapas over the last century.

During the Mexican Revolution of 1910, Emiliano Zapata led a group of landless indigenous agrarians calling themselves the *Liberation Army of the South* (Ejército Libertador del Sur). These original Zapatistas, as they were known, fought to secure collective farming rights and redistribution of agricultural land for the southern, highly indigenous states. Most of the land comprising the southern territories had been granted to large-scale haciendas, both domestic and international, by the turn of the 20th century, in an outgrowth of the Spanish *encomienda* system. After the 1917 constitution dissolved the hacienda system, and created *ejidos* and *communes*, allowing for cooperatively cultivated tracts of land to be managed by collectives of individuals who could work together over time to secure the parcel for communal ownership. In indigenous areas, some of these lands were granted based on identity—meaning identification as Maya (See Earle and Simonelli 2005:39).

Many Mayan communities were fractured and spread throughout the highlands of Chiapas and into the Lacandón jungle region during decades of struggle to secure communal plots of land (Nash 1994, Earle and Simonelli 2005). Reform was late and inadequate in most Chiapas communities, and forced migration took a heavy toll on family structures and extant cropping strategies—or *milpas*. An agrarian crisis in the 1960s was exacerbated by rapid indigenous population growth in Chiapas. In 1971, then-president Luis Escheverria Alvarez reactivated the land-distribution program, granting further fiscal resources to the *ejido* sector. This proved to be economically problematic, as financial support for the galvanized program came from foreign loans borrowed on the promise of rising oil revenues that never came (*ibid*).

These factors catalyzed tense relationships between traditional leadership by Maya *comuneros*, or those who led management of common lands in the highland municipalities, and literate indigenous *caciques* who often acted as agents of the state through the *Instituto Nacional Indigena* (INI), which had established an office in Chiapas in 1952. Over the next several decades, these underpinnings of land struggle formed the basis for the second Zapatista rebellion that was to define the 20th century in Chiapas. A sudden decline in oil prices preceded the debt crisis that rocked the region during the 1980s, bringing along economic sanctions by the International Monetary Fund that severely reduced the already skeletal social programs serving the citizens of rural Mexico. As Nash notes, “IMF conditions for regaining credibility promoted export-oriented development policies” (Nash 2001:79). One of the most influential of these policies came in the form of the North

American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which I will discuss as a rallying point of protest often cited during Maya ritual.

Maya men and women today can be found in all sectors of Mexico's economy, though agriculture, energy and mining industries, tourism services, and artisan productivity are the dominant forms of labor among the indigenous. Maya women, often operating outside of the industrial economy, continue to represent the majority of the artisans producing traditional crafts for sale in larger tourist cities, while many male *campesinos* without formal employment tend small, collectively owned plots of land. Due to increasing earning discrepancies between these "gendered" realms of work, forced immersion into the cash economy has imposed gender conflict on the Maya from without.

By the mid 1980s, artisan products of the Chiapas highlands were being sold both locally and internationally, with foreign demand increased vis-à-vis trade policies focused on export. Women and young artisans travelled increasingly into the larger towns and cities to sell wares. While providing cash market income to indigenous women of the highlands, the shifting local economy upset traditional kinship roles. As Nash notes, "As women's income from pottery and weaving, which they had traditionally produced in indigenous communities, equaled and even surpassed that of men's income from subsistence and cash crops, the gender balance that sustained a household economy was threatened. Domestic violence was on the increase, and male officials who still dominated political life subjected women in the artisan cooperatives to threats and even physical violence" (Nash 2001:xv). To make things worse, men's agricultural work was becoming increasingly difficult to come

by, and by 1990, more than 40,000 *comuneros* and *ejiditarios* had been expelled from their collective plots in the highlands (*ibid*).

During the Salinas administration of late 1980s and early 1990s, Mayan *campesinos* began to loudly and collectively protest corporatist structures of the Mexican state, including the authority of the Catholic Church (see chapter two). A series of international and domestic incidents provided ample opportunities for common protests and unifying causes to define the newly emerging voice of the Maya, including federal land reform in 1992. The original terms of Article 27 of the Constitution had allowed landless campesinos to petition for the use of uncultivated lands, or *tierras baldios*, under one of three classifications: individual smallholders (*pequeños propietarios*) with titles to plots of less than 10 hectares, indigenous collectives with land rights to ancestral lands immediately surrounding their villages (*comunidades agrarias*), or unrelated groups of peasants who jointly petitioned to manage parcels of land as *ejiditarios* (Earle and Simonelli 2005:39). The Salinas Administration's reform of Article 27 allowed for the privatization of collectively held *ejido* lands, allowing these parcels to be sold privately for the first time since the article had been passed in its original form. In effect, the agrarian reform worked out poorly for *campesinos*, who experienced a decline in their earnings from coffee and other crop cultivation (for further discussion, See Chapter Three in Nash 2001). After article 27 of the Constitution was modified, a wave of protests began in Chiapas that culminated in the Zapatista Uprising. In the years following, the signing of NAFTA and the launch of the Ejército Zapatista de

Liberación Nacional (EZLN) movement for autonomy in the region has strengthened indigenous resistance, resources, and resolve.

Across the border in Guatemala, (see II, below) post-Civil War Maya cultural revitalization projects also provide organizational capital and encourage collective action among communities with common struggles. Indeed, Maya cultural projects enacted since the signing of the Guatemalan Peace Accords in 1995 have provided a solid platform for collective indigenous action across the Mexico-Guatemala border (Nelson 2009). Many of these projects support the florescence of Maya spiritual trainings and community rituals in both Chiapas and Guatemala, and thus a cursory review of the post-conflict era might help clarify the discussion to come.

II. The Guatemalan Civil War and Persecution of Maya Spirituality

The 36 years of civil war that ravaged Guatemalan lands and peoples during the latter half of the 20th century killed an estimated 200,000 people before the signing of the Peace Accords (Castillo 2013). Hundreds of thousands of Maya peasants were displaced in the aftermath, with tens of thousands fleeing across the border to live in Chiapas in hiding. Among these was Flori, a Mam Maya from the Guatemalan highlands who fled persecution with her family as a young child. Here, she tells me of the horrors of their escape:

Flori is 35, newly divorced, quite pretty, and six months pregnant with her third child, a girl. The morning before that first ceremony that I attended in the hills above Comitán, I spoke with her in Doña Goyí's kitchen over coffee and sweetbreads in the madrugada quiet. I asked her

the name she had chosen. She smiled sleepily, having not slept the night before due to travel necessities and ceremony arrangements. "Ixchel⁴."

At this point, Doña Goyi came in with another woman attending the ceremony. This newcomer worked as masseuse and ran a Maya 'day spa' in the suburbs outside of San Cristobal. Doña Goyi's eyes smiled as she teased Flori, "Yes, and now you'll have to keep your legs bien cerrados, right?"

Flori laughed. "Si, claro. This is it for me." Turning to me, she commented, "I have always wanted three, and now I have them. I seem to always have the good fortune to receive what I have asked for in life." I noticed a few things about her. One, that she garnered a kind of respect and reverence from all the people around her, and seemed to be entirely ambiguous in age, conducting social relations with others in such a way that she always seemed to be the oldest member of a conversation, though openly casual in her tone.

Now here I was two weeks later in her kitchen, and she was telling me about her childhood in exile. She was from an indigenous Mam family from Guatemala, and they had to flee her village when she was about five. Members of the family were in armed resistance against the Guatemalan army, as she tells me, fighting for justicia. Her family was targeted for persecution, two uncles murdered, a beloved aunt gang-raped by the military, the corners of her mouth sliced open with a

knife from lip to cheek on both sides. She died from the wounds sustained.

The remaining members of Flori's family fled first to Motozintla, just across the border into Chiapas. This, she says, was her first sense of "refuge as a forced exile. There was so much discrimination... All the time we were feigning that we were Mexicans, learning to speak in the Mexican style, to dress ourselves in a Mexican way. We spoke Mam at home, but it was forbidden in the street. At first when we arrived, us smaller children were only allowed to play outside at night because our parents were afraid that we would give away our ethnicity."

In the post-war reconciliation period, spanning the decade after the accords, Guatemalan villages in the highlands experienced a dramatic increase in crime rates (Little 2009). *Campesinos* attempting to contest land claims against wealthy *ejido* owners were targets for assassination, and Ajq'ijab' rituals were regarded suspiciously by state-aligned groups, as daykeepers were seen as leading voices of resistance and socialist ideals in their communities (Molesky-Poz 2006). The spectacle of celebrations surrounding the Quincentennial remembrance of Christopher Columbus' voyages and the "*Encounter of Two Worlds*" had been widely panned by indigenous activists since 1986, when Spain's King Juan Carlos de Borbón first suggested the idea for the celebration theme. In 1992, on the eve of the quincentennial, a massive indigenous counter-protest took place in Guatemala City, organized in part by Maya activist Rigoberta Menchu (Ross 1995).

Military-aligned groups who had supported Dictator Efraín Ríos Montt during the civil war also hotly challenged Catholic reconciliatory efforts in Guatemala. Sixteen months following the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, military-sponsored assassins murdered the monsignor charged with directing the Catholic Church's Project for the Recuperation of Historical Memory (REMHI). These and other violent acts served to quell and warn anyone attempting to indict army officers for their part in the Guatemalan Genocide (Stoll 2009). Maya ethnic revitalization projects developed in tandem with resistance-quelling task forces.

The persecution of Maya spiritual leaders in Guatemala during the civil war has ebbed in recent years, and a gradual return to less-clandestine ritual is taking place (Molesky-Poz 2006). Active and organized promotion of Maya cultural practices has arisen within what some have come to call the Pan-Maya Movement, particularly since the Guatemalan government's signing of the Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 1995. Furthermore, several non-governmental organizations are working to produce educational materials that augment the spread of sacred knowledge. As Ted Fischer notes, "Pan-Mayanists often characterize their work as 'raising the consciousness' of the masses, implying that they are simply creating cognitive and social space to allow a latent cultural characteristic to come to the fore" (Fischer 2001:246).

III. Pan-Maya Daykeepers in Chiapas

My partners elected to engage in a reclaiming process that involved extensive ritual training with Maya *Ajq'ijab'*, or *daykeepers*, who are considered by their

community members to be experts in the symbolic and ritual interpretation of the ancient Maya *Tzolk'in*, or 260-day cyclical calendar (see varying interpretations of the calendars in Tedlock 1995, Hart 2008, and Cook, Offit and Taube 2013).

Almost without exception, those I engaged with during their reclaiming process have gravitated away from their former Catholic church attendance practices, though many utilize a panoply of symbols and describe religious sentiments that would classify them as syncretic Catholics. Within my research population, those spiritual guides sought for training were most often Guatemalan-born Maya, speakers of K'iche' and Mam, who had fled the Guatemalan highlands with their families as children during the years of genocidal violence that frequently targeted *Ajq'ijab'* throughout the 1980s and 90s (Molesky-Poz 2006).

In a reciprocal fashion, Maya from Chiapas are also traveling to highland Guatemala to attend trainings with extant *Ajq'ijab'* that re-introduce the notion of divination and maintenance of the ceremonial calendar. Mexican urbanites of non-Maya descent, and even non-Mexicans living in Chiapas, are also seeking training from *Ajq'ijab'*, and bringing their eclectic knowledge of myriad spiritualized ecologies with them. The flow of idea sharing has exposed many Maya to other forms of ritual expression, and I encountered cultural appropriation in elements of practice that—according to my community partners— were gleaned from indigenous groups as diverse as the Lakota of South Dakota and the Yanomami of Venezuela.

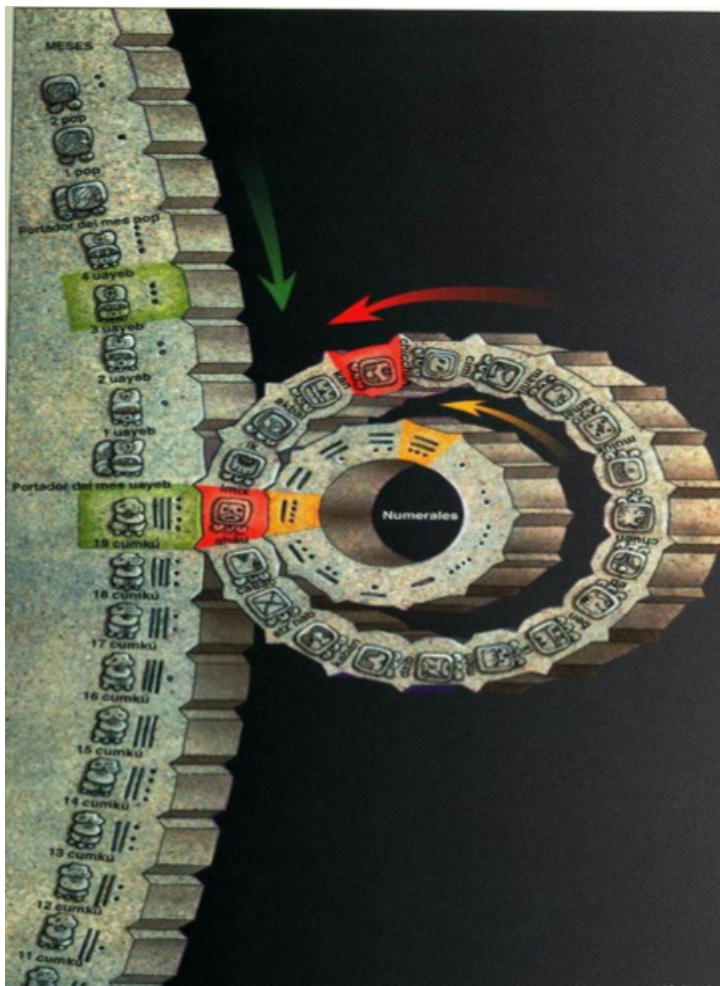
During ceremonies, the cathartic tones of traditional Native American double flutes permeated the ritual space around ceremonial fires, while shamanic use of

insufflated crushed Yopo seeds was employed by seekers attempting to ascertain a new direction in their spiritual paths. While these non-traditional elements were not ubiquitous in practice, they point toward a growing international network of idea sharing among communities, who engage in spiritual ecologies, and share common ideological struggles against damaging environmental exploitation by multi-national corporations.

In praxis, these 21st century *Ajq'ijab'* conduct healing sessions and traditional fire ceremonies, commune with the spirits of ancestors during rituals, and engage in a transcendent form of communication between non-ordinary and ordinary realities that is often regarded as a form of shamanism by Mayanists (Freidel, Schele, and Parker 1993). Trained daykeepers from Guatemala hold workshops, or *talleres*, to inform and train new healers, and the marked increase in recent years of those seeking training and initiation in rituals has been widely documented (Gossen 1999, Eber 2011, Hart 2008).

Some have suggested that modern Maya Cosmvision is a construct of colonial influence on indigenous communities—reification inconsistent with historical practices (Warren 1998, Borgstede and Yaeger 2008). My observations of ritual practice and the narratives of my community partners do not support this. I agree with the many Mayanists who acknowledge that these modern indigenous institutions and beliefs are deeply rooted and incorporate pre- and post-conquest practices (Tedlock 1982, Watanabe 1992, Gossen 1999, Molesky-Poz 2006.) The Maya are adaptable; capable of absorbing and synthesizing new ideas into their vision of the cosmos. According to Freidel, “Changes in the world of their actual

experience caused by the arrival of the Spanish have been accommodated by their capacity to transform their models of the cosmos without destroying the basic structures of the models themselves” (Freidel, Schele, & Parker 1993:38).



The 260-day sacred calendar used by daykeepers, or Ajq'ijab', is referred to as the *Tzolkin*. It can be seen here represented by the two smaller 'cogs':

- The inner-most wheel has 13 facets representing the 13 'energy lines' of time
- The second wheel has 20 facets, each representing a *nahual*, or spirit guide. Each person's date of birth corresponds with one *línea de energía* and one *nahual*.

The largest wheel represents the Great Cycle of the Maya Calendar, and together this tripartite interlocking rotation of days constitutes the 5,125-year cycle of the long-count calendar, which is said to have changed on December 21, 2012.

We are now in the time referred to as the 13th *Baktun*.

On December 21, 2012, a ceremony welcoming the new Baktun was held in Candelaria, a small community outside San Cristobal. The long-anticipated changing of the *Baktun*, or Maya Great Cycle Calendar, which occurred on or around the 21st, holds significant implications for an expectation of cultural metanoia that was expressed by almost every person I interviewed. This gradual paradigmatic 'shift in consciousness' was seen as applicable to the entire human family, without

geographic limitation, and was discussed in terms of wider cultural change that foretold an increased communication between groups of spiritually, ecologically minded people from across the globe:

21 December 2012

They started by building an earth mound in the center of Calendaria's main square—a foot or so high, the circular mound sloped upwards to a flat table. Chepita [a Maya daykeeper from Chiapas who was leading the ceremony] conducted the ceremony in Tzotzil, translating into Spanish as she went. Layers of flowers brought by the observers, who numbered several hundred, surrounded the earthen mound. Small sacks of sugars were sliced open with knives and poured over the earth, first in a wide circle within the flowers, and then in two bisecting perpendicular lines within the circle, creating the four rumbos, or quadrants, of the ceremonial space. The crowd was roughly 80% Maya and 20% 'cultural tourist'. Chepita then explained, "The rains that began last night at midnight are not typical here in this season, and we consider them to be a benediction..."

Assistants organized stick candles of various sizes into piles by color: white, yellow, black, and red for the outer ring of the circle, but also a small number of green and blue for the heart of the sky, and heart of the earth, turning the mound's focus in to a symbolic vertical portal between the two layers of the world. Piles of foot long ocote, a sort of perfumed, rapidly burning wood similar to Andean palo santo, were

crosshatched in a circular pattern just inside the perimeter of the mound. Cones of a sticky brown resin-like sugar were layered in abundance. Josefa introduced us to the 'spirit of the day': 8 Batz...

"Today is a day to meditate and relax, to reflect internally and look at our hearts. The elements are working, and our grandfathers and ancestors who have been waiting so many years for this day tell us that a time of gradual but deep change in the human spirit has come..."

Time and its interconnectivity with ritual was a theme that came to define my experiences with my community partners. For these urban Maya engaged in contemporary spiritual practice, time was both prescriptive and elastic—the chosen moment to perform a ritual was carefully guided by the 260-day *Tzolk'in*³, but the experience within a *ceremonia* existed, as my partners informed me, "*en tiempo sin tiempo*." In a time without time.

Modern Maya mesh with their urban and rural environments in a way just as elastic as these indefinable moments within ceremony (Gossen 1999). As Barbara Tedlock experienced,

[R]esistance to the replacement of old customs with new ones is based [on] conceptions of time. As in other matters, thought proceeds dialectically rather than analytically which means that no given time, whether past, present, or future, can ever be totally isolated from the segments of time that precede or follow it. This does not mean that innovations must be resisted, but that they should be added to older

things rather than replacing them... The result of this attitude is that burdens of time do not so much change as accumulate (B. Tedlock 1992).

It is perhaps because of this elasticity in custom that the essential model of Mayan ontology has endured through centuries of adaptation and syncretism.

Often, the emergence of a renewed religious direction or spiritual path coincides with a demonstrable need for reform toward social justice. The “Liberation Theology” movement that began in Latin America during the 1970s focused on social justice for the poor and agrarian classes who struggled against dictatorships and oligarchies (see Smith 1991, Farmer 2003, Moksnes 2003). In Maya communities, several ongoing environmental injustices have contributed to the renewed interest in traditional ritual and practice. In this aspect, the pan-Maya movement creates a social and public space for marginalized indigenous to proclaim the injustices against themselves and their environments, while granting agency to the community as a whole in projecting a divine image that supports their quest for socio-ecological justice.

Chapter Three: Catholicism as an Agent of the State

I. Liberation Theology and the *Catequistas*

The evolution of Liberation Theology, change in community programs and a recent conservative turn in Catholic Church leadership in Chiapas provides another regional source of motivation toward indigenous scholarship. In the following pages, I discuss these motivations as evidenced by conversations with my older community partners, who were formerly active as *catequistas* of the Catholic Church. These *catequistas* were originally charged with bringing the rites and sacraments of the Catholic Church to their rural communities. This community leadership role, held by male and female Maya, served as the most direct administrative connection between the Diocese of Chiapas and the rural Maya villages in the surrounding highlands. I will defer to my community partners to explain the connection between the decline of Liberation Theology, alienation of Maya *catequistas*, and a revitalization of Daykeeping practices in Chiapas.

Doña Goyi is 53 years old, a small and sturdy woman with a smile that always reaches her eyes. Her deep cacao skin and black eyes give her a Maya appearance, though she is unsure of her specific linguistic Maya heritage. According to Doña Goyi's *nahuales*⁷, her job is to *poner al equilibrio*, or bring to equilibrium, the energy of individuals. She does this in private ritual as well as in healer-client ceremony, lighting candles and incense toward the particular concerns and intentions of those who seek her help.

Over the weeks that I spent visiting with her and client groups in her *taller*, or workshop in urban Comitán, I observed the myriad situations of clients. A middle-aged woman who had difficulties with an alcoholic husband came to work for his healing as well as her own strength and self-protection within her domestic situation. A pregnant couple came to ask for continued health and wellbeing of their unborn. A long-time neighbor petitioned the lighting of incense as a *pago*, or apology, to the ancestors as a regular ritual of thanks and seeking forgiveness for personal imperfections. A young woman whose heart was broken by an unfaithful boyfriend came seeking recourse from her seething rage over the situation. A young *compañero* of the Zapatista army came to visit the city for alternative healing therapies on a musculoskeletal injury, and during the visit sought to learn about his *nahuales* and their guidance over his life.

Just down a major side street in central Comitán, Doña Goyi's house has been a center of localized, cooperative economic activity for more than a decade. Entering at the street level, one immediately confronts the sewing *taller*, workshop space where as many as a dozen local seamstresses cooperate in producing formal curtains, traditional *huipils* and indigenous *trajes*. A recent initiative works to produce traditional indigenous outfits in the form of doll clothes designed for the ever-popular *American Girl Doll* collection.

Across the crowded workshop space centered in the family living room is a small metal door that closes off a long, narrow room running the length of the house. Roughly four feet by 20, this concrete-floored space is Doña Goyi's altar room and consultation space, with a bench and cushions running along one length,

bookshelves and a simple school desk with chair on either side at one end, and a busy altar at the other. Colorful images of the 20 *nahuales* are painted on the walls. Atop the cement altar platform are flowers in red, white, yellow and purple, painted images of saints, a statue of Jesus, robed, with arms held wide, feathers of the *colibri*, one eagle feather, and two dried corn ears—one yellow, one white. On the wall opposite the painted *nahuales* is a poster titled *Maíz Transgénico*, discussing the ecological and health consequences of genetically modified corn. A silver-painted cross with blue and green inset stones was affixed above a cardboard *Calendario Maya* with moveable layered tabs to track the days. The calendar, poster and *nahuales* reference book were all publications of Guatemala's CCAM.

Today was 2 *Kamey*, the symbol of death and rebirth. "*Cuando una persona va a morir, ese nahual nos dice que, 'ya te toca a ti pasar.'*" When a person is going to die, this *nahual* tells us, 'it's your turn now'. Doña Goyi settled into a comfortable position on a low wooden chair, rubbing her arthritic hands and ankles as she told me of her journey toward reclaiming her indigenous identity:

"First, I am Catholic. It is what my parents taught me. But, I am also a divorced woman with two daughters and a son. And this is how I grew through the Catholic religion: I was a catequista for 15 years.

"A catequista is one who prepares the sacraments for the people. Since I was a little girl, I got to know the saints, Jesus, and Mary. Also, I had the chance to learn the hierarchy of the Catholic Church. When I was called to work for the Church it was 1988, when this church was getting to know the liberation theology of Obispo Samuel Ruíz..."

Samuel Ruíz Garcia was bishop of the diocese of San Cristobal de las Casas, Chiapas from 1959 to 1999. He was the Church's representative mediator during the conflict between the EZLN army and the Mexican Government's long-ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI). Taking part in the sweeping church reforms of Vatican II and the human rights discourse underlying the Medellín Conference, Bishop Samuel Ruíz revitalized the exchange between *catequistas* and indigenous communities, instituting programs that guided rural participants in matters of health and nutrition, and weaving the metaphors of gospel teaching into the quotidian lifeways of the village.

"It was there that I began to grow closer to God, to the saints, and to know more and more about the hierarchy of the Church. At 28, I came down with rheumatoid arthritis. At only 28. I didn't know why, because I was so young. I sought medical treatment, tried to learn more about my family medical history, but nobody had it, though the doctors told me it was hereditary.

"My condition worsened. Although I was very sick, I didn't stop my work with the Church or with social liberation. In 1994, the Zapatistas came to Comitán, along with these compañeros and compañeras we gave consultations in order to help the people achieve their goals of liberation. But I was always hampered by this arthritis, also educating and raising three children, trying to make a living as a seamstress, with an illness that cost me financially and energetically.

And also, well, doing the work of the Church, keeping a home, and being a contact for the Zapatistas. It was a very stressful time.

“We began to organize a group of women, looking at the situation of women’s rights, violence against women... there was a lot of interest in focusing on gender equality here. We talked a lot about the roots of gender and where they come from... more than anything else what seems clear to me about gender is that it is something you learn. You aren’t born with a gender. Gender is something society marks you with, religion marks you with, culture marks you with. And from this results the daily struggle that we have as women. And it does not convenience the liberal capitalist system that women wake up.

“As we talked about these things in groups, we developed a collective, called Lunatik, to talk about issues of gender and sexuality because we were many moons, and many women...”

The collective met every two weeks, a group of 15-20 women whose ability to attend varied based on their other economic and family duties.

“We didn’t want any dependence on NGOs, we wanted to learn from and teach each other, support our own community’s economic efforts. We started to make shirts, artisan products, quilts and curtains to support ourselves. Natalia and Eduardo⁸ served as our teachers, and at one of these gatherings in 2004 I met several women from Guatemala. From them, I first heard mention of the nahuales, and how important they are

to a person's life. To get to know one's nahuales is something very private and personal.

"One thing that brings me great sadness is that I don't know much about my personal ancestors and those who came before me in my family. My mother's family was all killed in 1910 in the war. She was just a baby at the time, and doesn't know where her family was from before she was sent to grow up with distant relatives in San Cristobal. We don't know if she was Tzotzil, Tzeltal, Chol... we don't know. She lived because of the good graces of neighbors, and I don't even know much about this part of her life. She married her first husband at 14 years old, had a baby not long after. She died when I was 14. It was very sad for me because I couldn't look any further into my roots. My father is from Mexico state, but so far away from where I grew up that I don't know much, or what language they spoke in Toluca.

"All these years, I grew up in the Catholic faith. And all these years, I was battling for my health, with doctors, scientific medicine, alternative medicines, and urine therapy, which helped me so much. The Catholic Church helped organize talleres on these alternative therapies, and my health got a little bit better, not completely, but a bit. I was also going to counseling, and participating in these workshops on gender issues. By 2007, our workshops were centering on issues of sexuality, self-confidence, and personal rights. And also, about religions.

“I was introduced to FOCA [an acronym for Formación y Capacitación, or ‘Education and Training’, a group active in San Cristobal, Chiapas at the turn of the millennium] and this was the group that Flori worked with in San Cristobal. In 2001, I retreated from the church, because after Bishop Samuel Ruíz retired, a conservative church leadership took over. I still went to Mass for a little while, but didn’t work for the Church. They weren’t trying to help us anymore. They didn’t do anything about health issues. And they wanted us to change the practices of the communities. And so in 2007, I met Flori...”

Many catechists I spoke with were alienated by the change in leadership in the Diocese of Chiapas, which not only ended many of the social and health programs of the Liberation Theology-era, it also brought with it a new guiding set of principles about how Maya rural masses were to be performed. Across the border, in the highlands of Guatemala, *catequistas* played a similar social role in the Catholic Action programs of the 1970s and 80s. Indeed, the role of Guatemalan catechists was almost controversial in many communities, where distrust of church-state relations was exacerbated by the escalating violence of the war. According to Little,

It was in this period that the Catholic Church responded to the intensification of Protestant missionization by enacting changes to religion practice in Mayan communities. This program, Catholic Action, was an attempt to break down Mayan communities and get Mayas to participate more fully in the national economy. It opened

many Mayan communities to internal conflict as individuals, especially Catholic Action catechists, who challenged traditional community leaders...(Little 2009).

In sum, political changes in church leadership resulted in the alienation of the catechists who served as the primary spiritual communicator between Church leadership in the more populated areas and indigenous rituals and observances taking place in the communities. Though catechists were alienated away from church participation, they continued to serve as spiritual leaders and guides in their communities, though began seeking alternative forms of ritual that addressed their concerns for community wellbeing.

II. Turn Toward Maya Spirituality

Though church-state relations in Chiapas help to elucidate the rising demand for daykeeper trainings today, it was in speaking with survivors of the Guatemalan Civil War that I began to understand the ready supply of teachers and Aj'q'ijab' practitioners in the urban areas of the region. A young daykeeper, Flori, told me about how, back in Guatemala during the early 1980s, the whole neighborhood of Mayan Mam at that point was Catholic. She described how they all went to Mass and how her parents were *catequistas*. Her parents and uncles, she told me, were all catechists in Guatemala with a "liberal life philosophy." I noticed that she doesn't use the term 'Liberation Theology'. Once in Mexico, she says, they stopped being active in the church as leaders, but Mass was still a:

“chance for them to seek peace, a respite from their horror. Así somos los indígenas que mezclamos el catolicismo y la espiritualidad indígena.. Lo vi en la forma en que rezaban ellos... (This is how we are, we indigenous who mix Catholicism with Indian faith. I saw it in the way that they prayed...) Always asking of the four rumbos, or ways, of the Universe, of the grandparents, the Mother Earth, the Universe. So I feel that my parents taught me to have two parts in my life, before they would plant the corn, they would ask permission from the earth.

“When I was 13, in 1989, they massacred part of my family, and we had to run again, this time to D.F. That planting process that was so, so spiritual for us... they didn’t do that in the capital. My parents continued going to church there, but it was never an obligation for us. When I was 17, I returned to Guatemala to be a nanny.. This cycle in my life was full of fear and depression. My parents told me to never admit that I was Guatemalteca while I was there. One time I was here in Mexico visiting my parents, and they could see that something was wrong with me, that I was not well. They brought me to a man named Victor, and he told me my nahuales. He said to return to Guatemala and look for an Ajq’ij because I needed to engage in the process of training in the daykeeper knowledge—this would save my life and my health.”

In Guatemala, Flori went to Lake Atitlan, and saw two men praying over a fire at the shore. She asked them if they would be willing to be her guides. They did a

ceremony, and consulted the beans in their *vara*⁹. The beans said that she, Flori, would at a young age receive a *vara* of her own.



Lake Atitlan, Guatemala. Photo by Duncan Earle.

The training required nine months of preparation, like the gestation period of human beings. Each 20 days brought a ceremony on a different hill, at four in the morning. Her guides were Kaq'chikel—one of 21 indigenous groups in Guatemala. First, she learned the Kaq'chikel way of knowledge, and then she sought her own Mam roots:

“There are 20 nahuales, or spirit energies, each with a name, and in order that we can understand them a bit more and make them more familiar to ourselves, we have associated each one with an animal or element. The 13 lines of energy are understood in many ways. Some way

they are like the 13 phases of the moon throughout her journey across the sky.

“For the Maya, Kellie, everything is connected. Everything, everything, everything, connects through the forces of nature, and as Aj’qij I try to understand the deeper meanings of why. The 20 nahuales multiplied by the 13 faces of the moon give us 260 days, or the gestation period of the human being. Our ancestors had babies with the permission of the moon, focusing on the phase in order to guide their knowledge of their own fertility. At the full moon was the time for conception.

“We also see these numerical symbols from our calendar played out across the landscape of the human body. The 13 major joints of the human body [implied by Flori’s self-gesticulations as the ankles, knees, groin/hips, wrists, elbows, arm sockets and neck] multiplied by the 20 digits of the human body give us the same symbolic mathematical figure. The body of man correlates to our sacred tree, la Ceiba. The canopy branches are the arms outstretched to the gods. The trunk represents the earth, and from the roots downward, our ancestors, the underworld, and the energy from the roots that reaches the center of the Earth.

“The use of a skirt during our ceremony and also during menstruation allows the energy to flow in its natural cycle, its natural direction. If wearing pants, the energy is cut off. During a temascal

[Maya sweat bath], one self-purifies by wafting the incensor beneath the skirt, where the energetic roots connect to the earth.

“La Ceiba represents ourselves, and humanity... there are three very important worlds. We as daykeepers have the responsibility of cultivating and caring for the harmony between these three worlds. Our ancestors read the constellations, because the stars are the truest ancestors. It is said that for every Ceiba that is cut, a star falls from the sky.

“The four colors of the quatrefoil drawn through the ceremonial fire represent the four skins of the human species—black, white, yellow, and red. Our ancestors are said to have always known that there were four. The green and blue that we place at the center of the fire are the heart of the sky and the heart of the earth, representing the dos mundos, the one above and the one below that are in balance and causal relationship with all that happens here.

“Don Pasqual, my guide, was very easy for me to understand. We are dueños of the earth. We always have to ask permission, because everything has its significance and its dignity. We ask before we even cut a plant. I had a clash inside myself at this point, thinking, ‘oh, but this is not Catholic, what I am doing... I’m at these strange ceremonies on the hillside in order to interfere in the energies of other people...’

“Also, it was not safe to be there. The first ones killed in the war were the Ajq’ij... so we were always hidden, doing these ceremonies in

secret. Also, at the time that I was called to learn, we were still very secretive with others. It was a journey for us to finally decide, and not so long ago, to finally decide that ladinos, hueros, non-indigenas, could come to ceremonies. We decided this because we see that they are hearts seeking, too. They are human beings. “

In the next chapters, I'll explore the intentions and themes of resistance inherent in rituals and Maya ceremonies, connecting them to the wider global concern for ecological justice and wellbeing, as witnessed during my participant observation and narrated through the voices of my community partners.

Chapter Four: Rituals in Praxis



Translation of the scroll:

We, the children of Chichicastenango, have the right to live in a country where the natural environment is not destroyed. We want you to respect our forests and our water. No one should fail to respect Nature.

Photo by Duncan Earle

I. Maize and GMOs

In their extensive *Cosmovision*, Maya are— spiritually— the children of the Maize (D. Tedlock 1985, Watanabe 1992). The far-reaching effects of the divorce between land-working Maya and their ability to rely on Maize farming and traditional subsistence strategies have implications for the continuity of Maya

spiritual practice. In parallel, academics have begun to explore aspects of “continuity” and “reclaiming” among indigenous groups in the Americas (Lopez 2011, Molesky-Poz 2006). Many excellent ethnographies have also been published regarding the Zapatista community struggles for sustainable development (Earle and Simonelli 2005, Nash 2001, Ryan 2011), and countless others on Mayan Cosmovision, (Faust 1998, Lopez 2011, B. Tedlock 1996).

My ethnographic account seeks to examine the intersection of spiritual praxis, reclaimed ritual, and political resistance in the everyday lives of my community partners. Through my interviews with urban community partners and attendance to public ritual celebrations and private ceremonies, I observed an explicit sympathy toward rural—including Zapatista— political resistance and a move away from the more heavily catholic/syncretistic forms of ritual worship toward a perceived “reclaiming” of “traditional” practice. I heard, constantly, about the connections between corn, or *maize*, and the human spirit according to Mayan creation. “A collective of Mayan scholars calls this the enchantment of reality—Mayan knowledges in the social practices of daily life, promising a great harvest of emancipatory understandings arising from the peoples of the semiosphere [meaning-space] of corn” (Instituto 2007, quoted from Nelson 2012). The following examples from my fieldwork reinforce this perspective:

Dona Goyi tells me about the Maya lifecycle—

“On the Chol’kin, there are 20 Nahuales, 13 energies, and four stages of life. We see ourselves growing gradually into our humanity as the maize grows gradually into the sky. From birth to 13 years of age, we are

forming as people. From 13 to 26, we are forming the direction our lives will take, and from 26 to 39 we are creating, whether we create children or not. From 39 to 52 we learn how to become abuelos, and refine our morals. After age 53 we begin our cosecha, that is, we harvest from the good we have planted in our lives..."

The following is a description of a ritual I was invited to attend:

I woke in a strange bed during the human hush of madrugada, when even in Comitán, organic sounds came to drown out those of a more industrial nature. "Pssst. Kellie," came Alejandra's voice from the other side of the curtain, "es la hora, compañera." It was time.

We tiptoed about brushing teeth and gathering our things for the ceremony, not wanting to wake the other members of Alej's family. "Make sure you bring a skirt," Alej whispered in Spanish, "And a cord, a red one, for your waist." She had explained these customs to me the night before. During a ritual, there would be strong lines of energy passing through the body and connecting, or 'grounding' below the spot chosen for the ceremony. Wearing pants was thought to splice this energy flowing from the root of the body and weaken it. The red cord around the waist was a protective measure, and one used by all of the Ajq'ijab, or daykeepers, that I was to encounter, as well as most other healers and participants at the rituals...

At one point during the ritual, gesturing to the four cardinal directions, Flori described the Maya perspective of the quatrefoil map:

“The four rumbos—poniente, oriente, sur, y norte—have their representative colors here. East is red, West is black, South is yellow, North is white. Each person will take a candle that relates to the place where they are standing...”

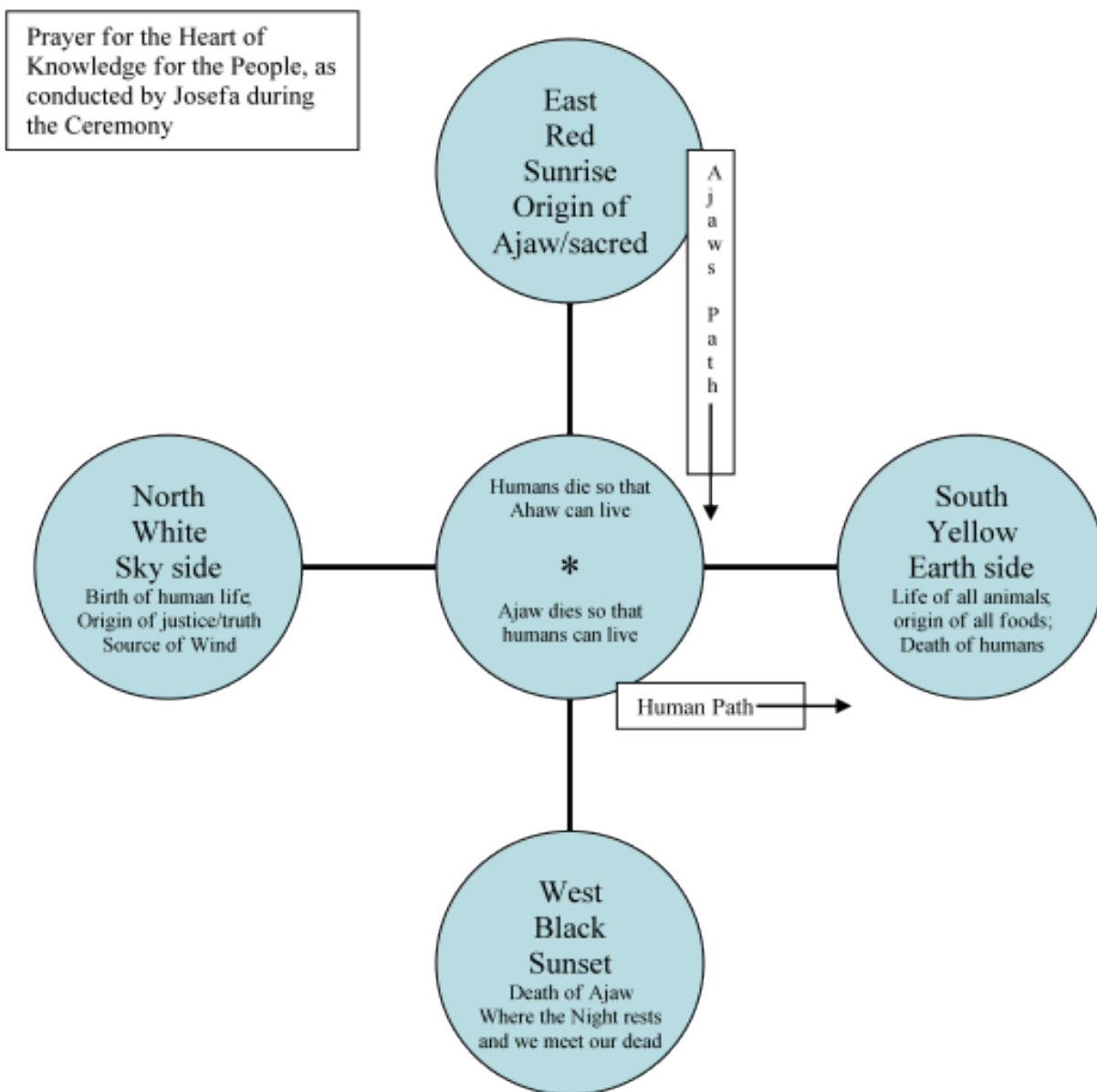


Chart made by Chepita, and given to Jeanne Simonelli, as published in Simonelli 2008

As the layers of sweet foods, incense and colored candles were added to the offering mound, the Ajq'ijab remained seated in each of the four points, directed the layering, and murmured appeals to the spirits in Tzotzil and M'am, without Spanish translation. While lighting the fire, rolled tobacco-leaf puros were passed among several of the Maya, and the air became thick with the combined smoke from the fire and the puffed-on cigars. Curiously, the cigar smoke was not inhaled, but was rather drawn into the cheeks, and then alternately puffed skyward or directed toward the East. As I later learned, the Maya utilized tobacco smoke as a communication method with their ancestors, recognizing the combination of inhaled vapor and their own breath as a carrier of transcendent message.

It was midsummer. The ritual was one of thanks before the first harvest, and from the preceding night's conversations, I knew that the family requesting this ceremony had struggled in recent years, and that there was worry about having disrupted several ancient stones during the planting season.

Throughout the ceremony, Flori and the other daykeepers murmured in a constant connection with their ancestral spirits, giving occasional Spanish translations of particular points of praise or request...

Nelson describes a similar phenomenon in her work with the post war Guatemalan diaspora, noting, “Enchantment is close by for many in the Mayan highlands...[w]orking the fields frequently turns up enigmatic ancestral stones...[t]he past hugs near. Agriculture’s risks are hedged by Monsanto products as well as careful rituals around the seeds...”(Nelson 2012:207).

I came to Chiapas seeking to engage with Maya who are reclaiming their cosmology and spiritual practices amid the indigenous struggle for autonomy and land rights. The ancient Maya creation story of Popol Vuh (Tedlock 1996) venerates maize as the root of human life. Among the indigenous Maya of Chiapas, the growing of maize, or corn, and the cooperative cultivation practices of *milpa* farming have been a continuous source of nourishment and subsistence since long before the colonial invasion (Mann 2005, Lopez 2011). As Mann notes, following the genetic hybridization of maize varieties during the Green Revolution of the 1970s, which sought to maximize food production via monocropping agricultural techniques in order to feed the world’s growing population, local farmers have had difficulty selling their crop because “despite the distances involved, US corporations can sell maize for less.”

Before the Green Revolution took hold, communities of small farmers practiced flood agriculture and planted multiple species of crops in healthy soil, using recycled organic fertilizers and relying on natural rainfall and accumulated indigenous knowledge of the lands. The single-crop production plan of the Green Revolution, which depends heavily upon chemical fertilizers and pesticides, was introduced after the Cuban Revolution as an attempt to increase overall food

production in the Third World and thus stave off communist revolutions which were thought to arise due to mass starvation. Since its implementation 40 years ago, world food production per capita rose by 11%; however, the Green Revolution has failed to reduce the rate of people living in hunger across the globe, and has resulted in catastrophic environmental and social consequences in the communities who are subject to Green Revolution agriculture (Mittal and Rosset 2001:25).

As previously noted, in 1992, the Mexican government reversed article 27 of the constitution, destroying the *ejido* system that had granted parcels of property and communal land ownership to the indigenous population. Growing tensions between the Mexican federal government and indigenous landowners in the southern states gave rise to the Zapatista movement and corresponding resistance network that is now long established in Chiapas. It is no coincidence that the Zapatista uprising coincided with the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement on January 1, 1994 (Earle and Simonelli 2005). The politics of NAFTA set the stage for government land-grabs in Chiapas, and created an international maize market in which indigenous farmers were unable to compete.

II. NAFTA and the EZLN

Free Trade, a major motivating factor of neo-liberal capitalism, is carefully designed, enforced and regulated by such corporate-influenced intergovernmental conglomerates as the World Trade Organization and the International Monetary Fund. In practice, Free Trade policies allow the tariff- and tax-free imports of developed countries to destroy the informal local industries that have to pay taxes

to market their otherwise potentially competitive product. The free flow of industrialized foreign capital marginalizes the local capital in developing nations, devaluing it and creating impossible international competition between foreign corporate producers and local small-scale producers. These macro-economic concepts are resulting in an exponential widening of the gap between the wealthy and the destitute (Haines 2001).

In Mexico, the rural agriculturalists of the southern states, and Chiapas in particular, stood to lose the most under the new trade agreement. NAFTA purposefully includes state, provincial and local governments but denies tribal governments. Indigenous Mexicans had communal lands previously protected by Article 27 under the *ejido* system, until 1992 when the Salinas administration modified the article, allowing for private purchase of lands by foreign investors, and forcing the indigenous population into further poverty.

On January 1st, 1994, The EZLN marched on the capital, declaring war on Presidente Salinas and the Mexican Army, and loudly inviting all citizens to join the resistance. Acting on orders from the Clandestine Revolutionary Indigenous Committee (CCRI, the leadership faction of the EZLN, comprising some 2 dozen-plus democratically elected Comandantes), the Zapatistas infiltrated schools, print rooms, and radio stations, broadcasting this message to everyone. Though originally highly resistant to speak on behalf of the Zapatista community, non-Maya Subcomandante Marcos' way with words and appeal to the larger global community made him an effective instrument of the EZLN's message.

The government of Mexico originally tried to quell the uprising with force. They, in turn, were forced to cease-fire due to publicity concerns and the incredibly responsive international support of the Zapatistas and their grievances. On the day of the cease-fire, 100,000 guerrilleros, campesinos, indios, mestizos, and supporters marched into the capital city, shouting chants of “First World, Ha Ha Ha!” all the way into the heart of D.F. Says one political theorist, “the ability to provoke an understanding of common struggle among diverse people was the most striking aspect of the Zapatista insurrection,” (Katzenberger 1995:ii).

Twenty years later, among my urban Maya community partners, there was frequent discussion of Zapatista themes; of localized ecological damage from large-scale mono cropping of genetically modified grains, as well as protest against gold mining’s effect on the land, and a wide panning of the term “neoliberal capitalism.” Verbal protest against these themes and spiritual discussion of nahuales, or life-guiding energies, seemed to merge fluidly, connected by my colleagues’ individual-level economic needs as related to subsistence. Though they do not subsist on *milpa*-grown foods, these urban Aj q’ijab and traditional healers with whom I worked all expressed stress over their economic conditions, and made efforts to identify with and show solidarity towards their rural Mayan friends, teachers, students and clients whose land use strategies were affected.

In Mesoamerica, land use and economic conflicts between indigenous groups and ‘big business’, including NAFTA-related growth and sale of GMO corn in Chiapas, and Canadian gold-mining efforts in the Guatemalan highlands, and barite mining in Chiapas, have created an ecological base for political resistance that provides

common ground and attracts support from non-indigenous persons with sympathetic environmental concerns.

The guerrilla movement founded by the Ejército Zapatista de Revolución Nacional (EZLN, commonly called the “Zapatistas”) began with a violent effort to overcome the oppression faced by the indigenous people of Chiapas. However, traversing the international dialogue of human rights concerns, the Zapatistas have established themselves in the non-violent sector in both their political and revolutionary aims. Critical of the *machismo* executed by the federal and municipal authorities, and traditional Maya family relations, the Zapatista leadership has made efforts to craft a gender-balanced subculture around their activities. Before the 1994 uprising, Marcos commented on the role of women in Zapatista subsistence strategies for an international audience, “Women are important ideologically in the EZLN and also socially for the EZLN’s material and spiritual sustenance. If the women are on our side, the mothers, sisters, daughters, then we are fine” (Marcos 2001).

In a testimony given to authors Paulina Hermosillo, Hortensia Sierra, and Elizabeth Luis Díaz, a young Tzeltal-Mexican woman named Isidora recounted her transition into the largely successful anti-globalization Zapatista Movement of Chiapas, México: “There were already rumors that an army was being organized in the mountains, and I found out that there were women in this army. That gave me the courage to escape...” But being only 13, and lacking parental permission for her decision, she was refused admittance to the army and returned to her village to face corporal punishment for her subversive behavior. Undeterred, she repeated her

attempt to the same result. Finally she returned a third time to the army's village in Los Altos, armed only with her determination and a spirited ultimatum:

"I spoke with Subcomandante Marcos and told him that if they didn't accept me, I would not rest until I was in the army, or else I'd die of the beatings from my uncle. Seeing how determined I was, the Committee had a meeting with my community, because they didn't want to have problems or have people saying that they were robbing young girls from the community's authorization, since the indigenous tradition obliges the woman to be dedicated to her home and to serve her husband. But my conviction was stronger, and everyone accepted my decision," (Katzenberger 1995: 37).

Over the next decades, the Zapatista movement would become characterized by its regular subversion of traditional indigenous gender roles, advocating a balance of male and female presence among their leadership.

This ethic of gendered and communal leadership has resulted in a gradual transformation of village politics, and an opportunity for women and girls to engage in what Richard Lee describes as 'complaint discourse' (Lee 2012). In my conversations with friends in the Zapatista support community of Cerro Verde, they confirmed that this discourse then translates into praxis, as exemplified by the "Declaration of the Rights of Women", a project drafting EZLN legislation to clarify the movement's gender values. This document was being updated by a coalition of women within and surrounding the *Junta de Buen Gobierno* (Zapatista Council of Good Government). As of the end of my fieldwork, the Declaration was undergoing

revision and community vote to add another 21 articles describing the “inalienable rights” of women. As one community partner shared with me, the newer articles were stemming from recent issues of domestic dispute that weren’t covered by the original bill of laws. Some of the concerns being written into community law included women’s right to decide when to have children, how many to have, and when to avoid or terminate a conception.

My friends were highly conscious that many of their Guatemalan *compañeros* in neighboring regions still bore the scars of the Civil War, and indeed I experienced evidence of these echoes during my fieldwork. The following narratives from my fieldwork illustrate the spiritual and ecological discourse of communities in resistance:

It was mere days before the changing of the Baktún. I went with Jeanne, Stephanie Palladino and a local acquaintance of theirs to visit friends in a rural Zapatista community, thinking that my time there would be unrelated to my fieldwork. It wasn't so.

We left San Cristobal in a tiny rented vehicle, stopping along the way to pick up gifts—focos (flashlights) for some of the young boys, packets of lavender seeds for the beekeepers, and tennis shoes for Jeanne's honorary granddaughter. Conscious that our presence would put a strain on their already limited food supply, we also brought ground meat, salad vegetables and avocados to contribute to the daily comida while we were there. Small bags of pistachios were a much-appreciated luxury.

Cerro Verde is a tiny but loyal community in resistance, consisting of several groups of extended family members who cooperatively manage a milpa as ejiditarios and coordinate regular trips to Comitán to sell bananas and wares made in the village. Several members of the community have served in the Buen Gobierno of the EZLN at varying levels of leadership, and many bear the scars—physical and psychological—from the violent raids conducted by the Mexican army during the 1990s.*

They bear them gracefully. Our arrival was met with hugs and happy tears, and before long we were seated in Luz's kitchen, a loose construction of boards and support poles with a corrugated tin roof, open to the air at several points. In one corner of the room was the cooking surface- an open wood fire set beneath a metal grate that supported the large comal where their daily staple— maize tortillas— were made. As we took our seats along the benches that lined the rough wooden table, steaming bowls of caldo de pollo were set before us, crimson with achiote and teeming with large chunks of chicken and potato. It was merely the first time that I would experience having a rooster killed in my honor. I suddenly wished that I had brought more with me.

After a leisurely comida with Luz filling Jeanne in on the community's current events, I felt a tap on the knee. I looked up at Luz's youngest daughter Natalia, who though she didn't yet know it, had been

lovingly adopted as an abandoned infant found on the rocks by the river. As I would learn, abandoned infants were common around the time Natalia was found, and most often they were born by young mothers who had been raped by soldiers in the army. Natalia was one of the luckiest, and here she stood laughing at me with her eyes, an innocent expression shaping her mouth at the corners. In her hand she held her extra soccer jersey. "Vamos a jugar nosotras," she told me. "Nos acompañe?" I hadn't played on a team since my High School days, but couldn't resist the invitation. An hour later, as the rain began to fall, I found myself in an offensive sprint down the left flank of the field, bearing the words "Warrior Woman Caste" in Spanish across my chest.

Traditional
Maya
blessing
of the new
Zapatista
school



Photo by Jeanne Simonelli

Later that night, we sat around the remains of the dinner meal, wet tresses dripping river water down our necks and shoulder blades. I brought out the multi-colored focos for some of the younger kids. I hopped around outside the kitchen with them, leaping over piles of green coffee beans that had spent the day drying in the sun. Now that it was dusk, the elders would begin to rake them in for the night. Suddenly and without warning, a brilliant light filled the sky, followed by an echoing boom in the distance. The kids and I shrieked, and Jeanne and Josefa and family came running from the kitchen table. We gathered together, and I listened, intrigued by their varying interpretations of the event. We later found out, of course, that this was a meteor that had struck close by to the village.

“Claro que sí-- es un signo” mentioned one of Luz’s daughters. It was clearly a sign. A sign of what, I wondered? “It’s a warning,” came the reply. I spoke with my community partners in Cerro Verde about the coming changing of the Baktún, and asked if they were doing anything to celebrate or recognize it. They weren’t, but knew of some ceremonial activities happening in neighboring communities. I asked them if they had any practices or customs that involved an acknowledgement to their abuelos, or those who had gone before them. “Claro”, mentioned Luz’s husband. Clearly. He explained to me that each planting season, there was need to ask permission to sembrar semilla, or sew the seed of the maize, at the milpa. More than a mere request for permission, the

act of planting involved a felt communication with those who had planted these lands before them, and that which embodied the land—the animate agent who looked over their crops and brought the rain and sun that sustained them. [Fuller (2001) describes this ontological drive as a ‘spiritual need of having a felt-sense of the sacred’].

So what does this all mean? Most importantly, it shows that Mexican *campesinos* and urban Maya alike are contextualizing global Climate Change within their overall perspective that Mayan Cosmology denotes this particular time in human history as meant for a major reconsideration of human practices. I observed these connections being made in everyday as well as ritual circumstances, and heard themes of desired changes being articulated in terms of environmental as well as economic wrongdoing. Most often, of course, the economic pursuits and environmental destruction being lambasted by my community partners went hand-in-hand.

III. GoldCorp and Alliances among the Maya

In 2004, Goldcorp of Vancouver, British Columbia began construction on the Marlin Mine along the Cuilco River in San Miguel Ixtahauca. San Miguel is a collection of 19 Mam Maya villages, comprising some 40,000 people, and is situated in the western Highlands of Guatemala, close to the border with Chiapas, in the departamento of San Marcos. When construction of the mine began, the local Maya were not consulted beforehand, despite the post-Civil War legislation granting such

agency to all indigenous communities under federal law (Dueholm Rasch 2012, Imai, Shin, et. al. 2007). Soon after ore mining began, the local Maya began to suffer from skin and lung maladies that were entirely foreign to them. As ore mining researcher Leire Urkidi notes, “Mining resistance in San Miguel emerged slowly over time in relation to Goldcorp’s practices. The first complaint was lodged against the land acquisition process...People were told that their lands would be orchid plantations, rather than a gold mine; so the prices that were paid did not represent the real value” (Urkidi 2011).

In 2009, the Catholic Diocese of San Marcos presented the results of their two-year study on the surface water from the mine and surrounding villages. The water samples tested came from sources used by Mam communities for human consumption as well as for crop irrigation and for herd animals. The study found the samples to be highly contaminated with heavy metals, most notably, arsenic. The levels surpassed safety standards set by the World Health Organization, the US Environmental Protection Agency, and the Guatemalan government’s own health standards and regulations (COPAE 2009). The following year, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination declared the Marlin mine illegal due to human and indigenous rights violations (Urkidi 2011). Despite this fact, ore mining continues to this day.

Flori, whose childhood experience fleeing the Guatemalan Civil War was presented in the preceding pages, has spent many years in cooperation with her home village, organizing protests and fighting against Goldcorp’s continued destruction of her community. Though situated in Chiapas, she and many of her

Aj'qijab colleagues work to raise awareness among Mexican indigenous about the ore mining in Maya communities across the border. In Chiapas, Goyi mounts similar protests against the mining of barite, a mineral used in hydraulic fracturing in the US. The reason, Flori says, is solidarity—because all Maya are fighting for the same rights to life. In her words:

“Four years ago a couple from California looking for an environmental story approached some of us about making a documentary. They asked each of us about what we would want to say, specifically, about what was happening to us. Chepita wanted to talk about the importance of maize in ceremony, the spiritual poison happening through genetic modification, and the prejudice against the indigenous in Chiapas. I chose to denounce the mining company that is killing so many people in my hometown. GoldCorp of Vancouver, Canada is poisoning my village with cyanide and arsenic.

So we made Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth [Black and Sandig 2011] and the documentary was shown all over Germany, Japan, India... but not Mexico, Canada, or the U.S. at first, and we wanted to know, why? Finally, at the Vancouver Film Festival, Amnesty International invited me to talk at a presentation of the film. The people there were touched, and they cried, many of them. There was a man at the end, who was very distraught, because in the film I call them out and I say that I expect these things from the United States by now but I didn't know that Canada was a country of assassins. The man said to me, 'But Flori, we

are not all assassins. You have to know this." And I do know this, but not taking any action makes you an accomplice.

San Miguel, my village, gets less than half of one percent of the profits from the mine there. They say they make schools, roads, it's a lie. In March of 2013, finally, we presented the film in Washington, D.C. I don't know the results yet. I think the trailer is online. I don't know what will come of that but if there are profits I want them to go to San Miguel."

Flori's motivations for taking part in the Spiritual Ecology documentary *Heart of Sky, Heart of Earth* illuminate the motivations that accompany a spiritual practice that regards all life as interconnected and codependent. The word "solidaria" is brought up often. As she notes,

"If you plant anger, hate, vengeance, and so on, you'll be sick and unhappy in old age. But if you plant good acts, if you share what you know, love others unselfishly, and are solidaria with the people around you, people will seek your wisdom and you will have blessings and health in your old age. If you have kids, grandkids, they'll love you and be very affectionate. In Maya Cosmovision, the older you are, the more you are respected, listened to, and valued. In the Capitalist system, when you are older, you no longer serve a purpose. Abuelos want to tell their stories, their sufferings, their loves and joys. In big cities, young people don't want to listen. A great sadness of our culture. I see the younger

people who are recapturing their roots now, and they change their attitudes toward los abuelos.”

The idea that a return to Maya spirituality restores focus on respect for elders and *abuelos* was mentioned by many of my community partners. As globalization continues to cause Maya communities to disperse so that younger Maya can move to urban areas to find work and other opportunities, traditional kinship practices that focus on multi-generational relationships are eroded by distance and assimilation into mainstream, youth-obsessed neo-liberal culture.

A return to Maya spirituality fosters the values of solidarity and respect that have strengthened both the pan-Maya movement and the Zapatista movement for autonomy in Chiapas. On a different occasion, another community partner and Aj’qij in training, though an urbanite, described his feelings of solidarity with the Zapatista resistance:

“Cómo luchan los Zapatistas? How do the Zapatistas fight? It is a fight without weapons. A peaceful struggle. A government [of the Zapatista movement] who governs while obeying. They believe a lot, and well, I believe too, in the idea of autonomous municipalities. It’s another way of living, another way of life. Work is done in community, it has to be collective, and it has to take into account the opinions of all men and women. It can’t happen in an individualistic manner. That is how the capitalist system works, on the individual level. That is not what we want here. We need a social revolution.”

The social revolution my community partners seek is the same being studied by spiritual ecologists in academia. As Sponsel notes, “Spiritual ecology... offers great potential...for restoring a much higher degree of ecosanity in the way many humans relate to nature individually and collectively. Numerous individuals from diverse backgrounds and persuasions are convinced that the ecocrisis will only be resolved... if there is a very fundamental rethinking, refeeling, and revisioning of the place of humans in nature” (Sponsel 2012:xiv). The recent revitalization movement in Maya spirituality provides a spiritual schema for re-ordering humanity’s place and purpose in the cosmos. Fomented by the burgeoning global ecological crisis and localized threats to Maya lands via neoliberal development, the revitalization of Aj’qij practices in Chiapas is drawing the attention of an international audience of ecologically concerned “cultural tourists” who are eager to hear what the Maya have to say about how the world could—or perhaps *should* change in the new Baktun.

Chapter Five: Spiritual Ecology as a Social Revolution

Advocates of Spiritual Ecology consider the eco-crisis to result from human alienation from nature combined with the disenchantment, objectification, and commodification of nature. –Leslie Sponsel, 2012



Mural in Chichicastenango depicting a pan-Maya ritual. Aj'q'ij wear the ceremonial red head coverings and red cords around their waists, and are seated at each of the four *rumbos*. The red, black, yellow and white symbolize the four "razas" [races] of humanity. Photo by Duncan Earle.

I. The Alternative Economy of Healing

One of the more surprising patterns of resistance that became apparent as I analyzed my field data was the conscious choice, by several who were engaged in Aj'q'ij training, to engage their new skills as a means of making a living that was less dependent on the larger "neo liberal" economy. Several of the urban Maya healers

and daykeepers I spoke with noted a desire to avoid working within the corporate economy as motivation toward developing their skills in massage, ancestor communication rituals, hands-on healing and talk therapies. These women and men engaged in both traditional and informal periods of training with Maya daykeepers as well as gaining formal licenses in other skills such as massage therapy, indigenous music, or in one instance, sexology. Most of those Aj'qijab who were fully trained and had received their *vara* by the time I engaged with them during my fieldwork performed traditional fire ceremonies and *temascal* ritual steam baths for local, rural and tourist clients.

Particularly among my younger community partners, the idea of making one's living as a community healer was discussed as a way of living one's life with meaning and purpose. Interestingly, though difficulty in obtaining work in the "neo liberal" economy was implied in conversation, it was *not* recognized as the *causal reason* why Aj'qijab training was pursued. Rather, the difficulty was interpreted as an *indication of the individual's destiny—according to their nahual—* of becoming an Aj'Qij. In this sense, the stereotypical Western temporal associations of cause preceding effect are eschewed in favor of an explanatory model more consistent with the Mayan cyclical conceptualization of time. For my community partners, the necessity of their path to becoming an Aj'Qij was the *causal reason* why formal economic employment opportunities were not forthcoming.

One of the women in my study, Alejandra, is 28 years old, and the niece of Doña Goyi. With a soft voice and large, liquid brown eyes, she tells me about her doubts in pursuing a career in business administration:

"I chose it because, not that I loved the nature of the work, but that I thought I would have a secure career and make a reliable living. But as I went looking for work, I had door after door closed in my face, and I became sick with a sense that my life had no reason to it, that my every move was empty. I felt lifeless. I gained so much weight, Kellie, that I was sick from it; you would not recognize the person I was then. One day I truly started to doubt the path, because it was not my path. I've been interested in Maya Cosmovision for maybe two years now, but I've only been studying seriously with Flori for about some months. But ah, how my life has changed so much already!"

As we spoke, Alejandra was beaming with a wide smile, she seemed calm, and her hands were steady. Her body structure was healthy to the point that I did indeed find it difficult to believe that she had weighed more than 200 pounds less than a year before. And yet, on the wall above her head hung the graduation photo taken at her University commencement ceremony. The puffy face, darkly shadowed eyes and countenance of the woman in the photograph—this earlier incarnation of Alejandra—was a striking change.

"Asi somos como Aj'qijab, Kellie. We Daykeepers are like this: we have dreams that are more lucid or vibrant than normal, and we know they must have some hidden meaning so we try and think about what they might be telling us. You walk down the street at night, with no one behind you, and you hear or feel a presence—you don't ignore it. You

acknowledge it, sometimes get scared or excited, but you interpret it. It's just that, I don't know, maybe we are very sensitive to what cannot be seen with the eyes. It seems to me, for the North Americans, they don't entertain these possibilities so much. Something strange happens, and there is always an explanation that has nothing to do with magic or the spiritual world. Here in Mexico, well wait maybe better to say, here in Chiapas, if something happens to you, and you feel an ambivalent presence, or something with an explanation more... I don't know... guided by spirits, well, this is normal.

"When I started to study with Flori, and I told her about my doubts in my career, she looked into my nahuales and helped me to learn about my purpose, about what life path is purposed for me. First she asked me about my tendencies, about my dreams, and if there were any desires I had held for so long but hadn't paid attention to. I told her that I had always felt very sensitive about people's feelings, and about how they were in their wellbeing, if they were sick, or sad. She took my birth date, and read to me about my nahuales."

Here, Alejandra explains the significance of nahuales from her perspective:

"One's date of birth touches on one of the 20 nahuales. There are only 20, and for each person there are three that influence cycles in the lifetime. The Maya believe that each 13 years in a life are a cycle of your path and your purpose, and influenced by your nahuales. When you are

conceived, that date is a second nahual of importance. She tells me her birth nahual. "It falls on me to cure with the hands. Right now, I am studying Reiki at a center here in Comitán. Do you know what that is? [I did.] "So now," she tells me, gazing intently at my eyes, "now I am so fulfilled in my heart. I have this sense of trust, because even though I don't have every answer, I am more 'close to sure' that what I am doing is right, because it feels right"—here she gestures with third and index finger to her breastbone, eyes closed—" and right now, even, I don't have a way yet to make money. I don't have the full training yet to practice the hands on healing, but I am living here with my parents and studying and I trust that I will be ok, that I will achieve it."

Alejandra's choice to look to her Maya roots for guidance about how to make a living illustrates the relationship between Maya spirituality and the idea of destiny, or purpose, as guided by ones *nahuales*. The choice to become a healer is one that "feels right" to Alejandra because it puts her in a position to be an instrument of community change in terms of the ecological and cultural crises affecting her and those in her surroundings. Though Alejandra is an urbanite, her moral and personal motivations connect her to the animate indigenous spirituality underlying the wider pan-Maya movement. As Sponsel has shown,

For most Indigenous societies, religion promotes and maintains the dynamic equilibrium within and between their social and ecological systems. When disequilibrium is detected, it is usually treated

spiritually as much if not more than in some material manner. The mediator between Indigenous people and their biophysical and spiritual environments is the shaman, a part-time religious specialist (Sponsel 2012:14).

Increasingly, western dialogues on environmental crises and possible solutions are relying more and more intimately on animate concepts and related moral arguments of biological interconnectivity and interdependence to make their case about the need for change in human consumption practices as well as spiritual practices, as I have shown in the previous chapters.

In addition to expressing a desire to work as shamanic healers, most of the participants in my research discussed an ethical hesitance toward charging a 'fee for service' beyond the cost of material supplies for their ceremonies and healing sessions, though most did ultimately earn a living on what they made engaging in these practices. After analyzing texts and speaking with Mayanists who studied earlier and rural practices of Aj'qij rituals, I have come to understand that this hesitance to charge a fee is a recent adaptation that has arisen along with resistance against neo liberal institutions. Traditional Aj'qij ceremonies always involved a 'fee-for-service', which was a payment of money, food, or other goods that was supposed to honor both the Aj'qij and the gods who were petitioned during ritual. As with so many other elements of ritual expression, pan-Mayan discourse is changing the way that Aj'qij practice and conceptualize their practice in the wider community context.

II. Cosmovision and Interconnectedness- Global Participation in Maya Ritual

While engaged in fieldwork in Chiapas, I regularly encountered non-Maya who were in the San Cristobal area to learn from Maya Aj'q'ijab and attend rituals. Many of these were cultural tourists who made arrangements for healing rituals, ceremonies involving use of hallucinogens, and *temascales* (Maya sweat baths) within the broader context of their vacation plans to Chiapas. However, I also encountered several young people in their twenties and thirties, two Argentineans and three from Mexico City, who were living in San Cristobal for the foreseeable future and who had come specifically to learn from and become daykeepers after studying Maya Cosmovision and ecology from abroad. One young woman from Buenos Aires was learning how to weave from some of the village Maya women and living in an informal work-exchange situation with rural hosts that she had found after her arrival. In order to earn money for food, she presented storytelling theater performances at a cultural center in San Cristobal each week, creating her performance tales based on her experiences studying with the weavers.

A young man from Mexico's capital city had spent several years among the Lakota in South Dakota, traveling to the United States each year to take part in the Sundance. He functioned as an informal apprentice to one of the daykeepers I worked with, and would play double-flutes and other musical accompaniment during ritual. Another young person from *Chilangolandia* (a teasing, affectionate term for Mexico City) was born to Venezuelan and Mexican parents, and said that he had learned how to prepare and conduct Yopo ceremonies from "tribal elders" of the Yanomamo. He regularly conducted Yopo ceremonies for a fee with locals, some

urban Maya in training to become daykeepers, as well as cultural tourists in the area, who heard about his services via “word of mouth” at local shops.

The following excerpt from my field notes describes the array of “cultural tourists” present at the Changing of the Baktun ceremony I attended in Candelaria, just outside of San Cristobal in Chiapas:

We left from San Cristobal in the back of Agustin's truck, a blend of young international interlopers and local Chamula women. None seemed older than 35. Some of the light-skinned faces belonged to street artisans from Argentina, two Californians had come from recent Occupy! movements and a Dutch pair of young musicians carried a new, locally made skin drum and a traditional Native American 6-hole flute between them. A French acrobat and his street-performing friend sat next to me, chatting in Spanish about the difference between international perceptions of the changing Maya Calendar process, and the local interpretations we were about to see in cultural performance...

These tourists came to hear about the changes expected by the Maya. More than any other theme, the idea of profound social change in the new Baktun was discussed, debated, and hoped for by the international crowd milling about before the ritual. Sponsel's argument for the need for a grand change in humanity's sense of place in nature is also well supported by my community partners. Indeed, it is central to what they hope to impart upon trainees who seek to become daykeepers. As Flori contextualized for me,

“The congruence between your vision, between what you do and how you think... to be with people, the earth, the cosmos, there is an essence of life that shows us we are a part of everything, that there is nothing disconnected, that when we understand that we are all connected, we change our manner of living... you’ll feel the hunger of the dog in the street, the pain of the bird drinking infested water. This is what it means to be a daykeeper, to be Aj’qij.”

Extant Maya practices are often compared to their historical forebears, as opposed to being directly related to coterminous transpersonal practices and reclaimed rituals happening in present-day cultures. Yet my Maya community partners share much in common with those in the Western world who struggle to understand their place in the ecocrisis, even as they search for moral solutions inherent in the cultural tapestry that surrounds them. Arguably, we have more to gain from understanding the modern indigenous approach to the ecocrisis than in critiquing the fact that their ritual practices have changed over time and through cultural contact with others along the way.

This thesis has presented an ethnographic case study on the reclamation of Maya spiritual practice as situated within its modern political context in Chiapas, in the hopes of laying the groundwork for future comparisons with coterminous reclaiming movements emerging among other modernizing indigenous communities in the Americas. Further exploration of the connections and commonalities between indigenous revitalization and the wider cultural exploration

of animate-Universe ecological concepts in the West will amplify the practical application of this research to current environmental policy and concerns.

Ethnographic literature is largely devoid of studies on the disambiguation and comparison of 'reclaimed' indigenous ritual with globalized transpersonal ritual and practices among shamanists and spiritual ecologists from all walks of life. Wallis gives caution for the continued neglect of this academic subject, "if avoidance of the politics and ethics of Neo-Shamanisms continues, hitherto neglected contemporary shamanistic agendas for the archaeological past and ethnographic present will compromise all voices into increasingly difficult positions" (Wallis 2003: xvi).

Part of the prejudice seems to stem from the modern empirical values of the academic institution. According to Braun, "An essential element of the tension generated by an enchanted lived experience in a society founded upon disenchanting assumptions is that in the desire for direct evidence the modern shamanic participant must navigate the prejudice for the material in the quest for the credible empirical evidence of the scientific paradigm" (Braun 2011:7). The problematic divide between the shamanist's quest for a meaningful spiritual experience and the researcher's drive to frame discussion of such experiences scientifically helps to explain the opposing positions outlined throughout. It stands to reason that those who intend to discuss empirical evidence in classic scientific terms would restrict their study populations to communities that appear to exist within *bounded* spheres of culture. However, as globalization continues to unbind and remix ethnic spheres, this approach must evolve to meet the new challenges of this cultural milieu.

The trend of moral-ecological imperatives developing around and emanating outward from indigenous revitalization movements will continue, as supported by examples of recent work on ecology and spiritual studies. In their compilation of peer-reviewed articles entitled “Eco Spirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth”, Kearns and Keller take a revolutionary approach to their advocacy for social change, beginning their collection with the warning, “We earthlings may be approaching our ecological ‘tipping point.’” (2007:xi). Following the rhetorical pattern, they provide hope for an alternative that relies on a change in human action, “Yet hope for a sustainable earthling future—for a *green shift*—may depend upon a dramatic nonlinear transition as well... Eco-social justice thrives on the hope that the achingly small beginnings of movement may precipitate a ‘butterfly effect’... a root change of human outlook, a mutation of collective philosophy, a spiritual phase transition.”

So what comes next in this transition? As an anthropologist, my way forward is to continue engaging with friends and teachers in the diverse indigenous communities of the Americas. It is vital that we learn to see the reflection of their Cosmivision against the land that remains, that which has not yet been subsumed by neoliberal development in the *cerros* of Chiapas, in the Lacandon, and beyond. Moral concern must translate into meaningful social and political change, bringing the ecological revolution to its “tipping point.” My work has just begun in learning how to engage this voice through translation and across the anger of cultural divide.

These are the first words.

Notes

¹ Etic perspectives usually describe the analysis, observations and opinions of those who are outsiders in the research community in question. Most anthropological analyses, by their very nature, are etic in perspective, though heavier emphasis on respondent's descriptions and interpretations of events help to balance perspective.

² "Emic view of my community partners"- by this, I mean that I rely on their narratives as explanatory agents, rather than engaging in liberal interpretations on their behalf.

³ Aj'qijab' is the plural form for "daykeepers". Aj'qij is the singular for "daykeeper."

⁴ *Catequistas*, or catechists, are laypersons in the Catholic Church who are trained to bring sacraments, such as communion, to parishioners.

⁵ For more about the contentions between Goldcorp and local communities, see Urkidi 2011 and Nelson 2012.

⁶ By "cultural tourist", I refer to any non-Maya who engages in, or observes, Maya spiritual practices as part of their impetus for visiting the region.

⁷ Nahuales are spirit guides, or "day energies", that correspond with Maya calendar dates. For an emic perspective on their significance, see pages 78-81.

⁸ Natalia Arias Leal and Eduardo Serrano worked tirelessly with Comitan companeras and Zapatista communities from 1994 until their passing. In 2008, they died together in a tragic accident.

⁹ A daykeeper's *vara*, or sacred bundle, contains the divination seeds and other ritual materials that they will use throughout their lifetime as an Aj'qij.

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Summary: I am a bi-lingual graduate student and educator pursuing a doctoral program in Cultural Anthropology at Vanderbilt University. My research centers on the interplay of ecology and spiritual practice, and the affect of globalization on cosmologies and worldviews in the Americas. Extended subjects of interest also include indigeneity, cognition and consciousness, anthropology of religion, phenomenology, gender dynamics and sustainability.

Education:

Ph.D. Vanderbilt University, Tennessee **In Progress**
 Cultural Anthropology with focus on Andean Studies, Ecology, and Globalization

M.A. Wake Forest University, North Carolina **2014**
 Anthropological focus with concentration in Global Studies, 3.96 GPA

B.A. Wake Forest University, North Carolina **2007**
 Spanish Major with minors in International Studies and Women, Gender & Sexuality

University of Burgos, Burgos, Spain (Study Abroad) **2006**
 Directly enrolled in the University of Burgos, took courses with native speakers within an international sphere of Erasmus scholars, achieved fluency and traveled extensively in Western Europe.

University of Salamanca, Salamanca, Spain (Study Abroad) **2005**
 Cultural exploration: Lived with a host family via Wake Forest's study abroad program, took a full course load in Spanish and traveled extensively throughout Spain on academic excursions.

Awards:

2013 *Richter Grant for International Research*, awarded by the Richter Fund
2012 *Pro Humanitate* Scholarship for Master's study, awarded by Wake Forest U.
2007 Conference Scholarship for the U.S. Social Forum, awarded by Wake Forest U.
2005 Full Year Scholarship for Study Abroad in Spain, awarded by Wake Forest U.
2003 *National Merit Scholar Award*, awarded by The National Merit Program
2002 *Student Sage Award for Character*, awarded by Russell Sage College

Professional Experience:**Graduate Research/Teaching Assistant Present****Vanderbilt University- Nashville, TN**

- Teaching Assistant of undergraduate students in introductory Anthropology courses and test proctor

Graduate Research/Teaching Assistant 2012-2014**Wake Forest University- Winston-Salem, NC**

- Engaged in grant-supported multi-site fieldwork research in Chiapas, Mexico, analyzing the interplay between traditional Mayan spiritual practice and globalized 'Neo-Shamanic' influence
- Conducted ethnographic research and proposal development, focusing on sustainability and Marcellus Shale hydraulic fracturing developments along the eastern coast of the United States
- Tutored undergraduate student athletes in introductory Anthropology courses and proctored tests
- Moderated undergraduate student symposia, including sessions on Contemporary Issues in Post-modern Feminist Critique

High School Spanish Teacher, grades 9-12 2010- 2012**Bishop Brady High School- Concord, NH**

- Taught intro, advanced and honors Spanish language and culture to High School students
- Mentored a group of student advisees and served in an advisory capacity for the Spanish Club
- Lead group to El Salvador for volunteer work and education about the Salvadoran Civil War
- Developed expertise in academic site portal management on Sakai and Blackboard
- Lead a cultural excursion to Machu Picchu, Peru to explore the Golden Age of the Incan Empire

High School Language Arts Classroom Teacher, grades 7-11 2009 - 2010**Cloud Forest School- Monteverde, Costa Rica**

- Taught English literature to bi-lingual Costa Rican students in the Monteverde Cloud Forest
- Designed and implemented curriculum for five levels of literature and philosophy study
- Developed a bi-lingual introductory philosophy course based on Gaarder's *Sophie's World* and created an ecology-themed film study unit based on James Cameron's *Avatar*

ESL Teacher, grades 6- Adult Learners **2009 - 2010**

Centro Panamericano de Idiomas- Monteverde, Costa Rica

- Worked with local Costa Rican students of all ages to develop English language proficiency
- Tutored and instructed students in English skills for the tourism trade and resume development

HS Spanish Teacher/ MS Technology Teacher **2008 - 2009**

Newport Middle High School- Newport, NH

- Taught Microsoft Office Suite and computing principles to 7th and 8th grade technology students
- Designed and implemented lesson plans for Spanish students in grades 10-12
- Attained initial NH state Teaching Certification in High School Spanish

International Projects Coordinator, Intern **2007**

Coalition Against Trafficking of Women - Mexico City, Mexico

- Designed international project proposals to increase fundraising capacity for human rights work while developing and implementing project budgets
- Facilitated multi-lingual international communications and translated projects and documents
- Coordinated conferences to promote awareness and prevention campaigns for sex trafficking

Assistant Stage Director, World Court of Women **2007**

2007 US Social Forum - Atlanta, GA

- Organized campus mini-conferences to promote social justice issues
- Engaged in global conference calls to present reports, discuss issues and organize the World Court of Women
- Presented survivor testimony to an international audience of activists

Assistant Director, Field Manager **2006**

NH Public Interest Research Group & Sierra Club - Concord, NH

- Promoted environmental awareness and education in dozens of communities across the state
- Organized a press conference concerning college funding options, presenting testimony on NPR

Professional Affiliations:

Society for Applied Anthropology, Student Member **2014**

American Anthropology Association, Student Member **2014**

Conferences and Presentations:

Society for Applied Anthropology Annual Meeting, Albuquerque, NM 2014
 Presentation of the paper, "Maya Spiritual Praxis in the New Baktun: Ritual and Reclamation in 21st Century Chiapas", based on Richter Grant-sponsored research with Maya Aj'Qijab practitioners Mexico's southern highlands.

United States Social Forum, Atlanta, GA 2007
 Acted as conference organizer for the *World Court of Women* sessions, and presented the survivor testimonies of Hurricane Katrina victims to an international audience of human rights activists.

Volunteer Experiences:

Epilogos, San Jose Villanueva, El Salvador 2011
 Served as a teacher-volunteer and chaperone of a diverse student group for project-based learning and service. Acted as Spanish translator and team-educator on US involvement in the Salvadoran Civil War, and the life and work of Bishop Oscar Romero.

Casa de Esperanza, Zacapa, Guatemala 2004
 Student volunteer for ten days of housing construction, English classes and work with orphaned children.

Languages:

English
 Native

Spanish
 Fluent, Certified Educator

French
 Reading Language, four years of coursework

Italian
 Basic, two semesters of coursework