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The struggle for livelihoods through community in North Izabal, Guatemala (1970-2002)

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ABSTRACT

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THE STRUGGLE FOR LIVELIHOODS THROUGH COMMUNITY IN
NORTH IZABAL, GUATEMALA 1970-2002.

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This study addresses the question of what it means to be indigenous in Guatemala. I examine whether the assertion of shared cultural traits resonates with and represents the Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal, Guatemala. In particular my study examines convergences and divergences within Q'eqchi' communities, within the Maya Movement, and between the Maya Movement and Q'eqchi' communities on the issue of land tenure. The assertion of rights based on ethnicity has focused attention first on the nature of the differences, and second on the objectives of intellectuals and leaders who assert and construct those differences. However, much less attention has been given to asking whether the differences are meaningful to the people that they represent.

The detailed ethnographies of four Q'eqchi' communities on which the study is based compliment existing studies of other regions of Guatemala. At the theoretical level, the analysis of the construction and purpose of ethnicity which underpins this study is of great relevance to other contexts where ethnicity is asserted by intellectuals for wider groups.
  My hypothesis is that the selection of certain cultural traits which can narrow culture and abstract it from material reality needs to be interrogated.
  At the heart of the discussion is my analysis of Maya intellectuals' promotion of particular cultural traits which separates the material from the symbolic dimensions of peoples' experiences. I argue that the indigenous identity based on that separation obscures the struggles of Q'eqchi' communities for land and livelihoods, and ignores the ways that tradition is both the grounding and the result of those struggles.
  In the conclusion I discuss the political use of culture by the Maya Movement and contrast the Maya construction of a mythological community with communities in North Izabal where symbolic and material dimensions are integrated through the dynamics of community. Furthermore I argue that the Guatemalan case brings out in sharp relief the ways that cultural activism is encouraged by the state as a strategy to dampen calls for structural changes.
  Members of indigenous groups are no less immune to the exercise of power and the impact of class difference than other individuals. This study has major implications for policy makers and funders who support cultural activism and may assume that the interests of all members are met through ethnic organising.

Contents

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Introduction

This thesis, based on fieldwork carried out between 2000 and 2002, is the result of my hypothesis that the uniting of indigenous people in Guatemala as Mayas could not be taken for granted by Maya intellectuals. It was an idea which nagged me throughout the 1990s as I attempted to follow developments in post-war Guatemala from a distance.

During the late 1980s I had worked on a project to set up primary schools in Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal, Guatemala and on returning to England I followed with interest through the publications of Maya intellectuals, the emergence of the Maya movement. Between 1987 and 1990 I worked as an education promoter under the auspices of Catholic priests in the Parish of Rio Dulce. The majority of the Q'eqchi' communities in the parish area did not have schools, and after many failed attempts to secure the services of a teacher funded by the State, they asked the priests for assistance in setting up their own schools. I liaised with the communities and their committees as they constructed their own school buildings and then interviewed teachers to work in the new schools. My follow up work involved the supervision of the teachers and administration of the schools. During many visits to the communities in North Izabal, I participated in community events and members told me about their experience of the civil war, threats to their community land, the exploitation by ladino traders and their hopes for the young people.

The Maya Movement came to national and international prominence during the 1990s. The peace process culminating in the signing of the firm and lasting peace in 1996, and the focusing of international attention on post-war Guatemala provided space for increased public organising by a range of groups albeit with the implicit proviso that those groups do not challenge entrenched powers within the country. Prominent amongst the groups and individuals who came to the fore during the 1990s, were indigenous academics and professionals commonly referred to as Maya intellectuals. In conjunction with Mayan cultural organisations, they engaged in promoting Maya languages and other cultural traits as part of their wider project to build Maya identity across communities.

As I read the publications of Maya intellectuals and the foreign anthropologists who documented the growth of the Maya Movement, I wondered whether the Maya identity being promoted would be meaningful to the communities in North Izabal and whether the movement would further their aims. Based on my knowledge of the communities, their organisations and material struggles, I questioned whether Maya

identity as it was conceived by Maya intellectuals from western Guatemala represented the experience of the Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal.

In her book, "Indigenous Movements and their critics: Pan-Maya activism in Guatemala"(1997), Kay Warren cites various criticisms of the Maya Movement which struck a chord with my as yet undeveloped thoughts on Maya identity and indigenous communities. Warren writes that the Movement is accused of violating "the local grounding of indigenous identity in place and community" and that the movement focuses on cultural issues in spite of the urgency of material issues (Warren 1997:41). Warren registers the criticisms but leaves them hanging.

I analyse those criticisms in my investigation of the salience of Maya identity for Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal, Guatemala. My study addresses the question of what it means to be indigenous in Guatemala. I examine whether the assertion of indigenous identity based on shared cultural traits resonates with and represents the Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal. In particular my study examines convergences and divergences within Q'eqchi' communities, within the Maya Movement and between the Maya Movement and Q'eqchi' communities on the issue of land tenure.

Structure of the thesis

In Chapter one I analyse some different approaches to indigenous identity and ethnicity. The analytical approach to identity which emphasised the cataloguing of cultural traits was superseded by an understanding of the ongoing construction of identities. I argue that notwithstanding the existence of shared cultural traits Maya identity is constructed.

The research methodology that I employed in my study is outlined in Chapter 2. I explain my use of the case studies of four communities in the context of a broader, more general study of the North Izabal region. My choice of methodology was very much influenced by my knowledge of the communities from the 1980s. By using photos of the communities which I had taken then, I was able to build a historical perspective into my research using the photo elicitation methodology.

In Chapter 3, I analyse the Maya Movement and Maya intellectuals' promotion of Maya identity based on language and other common cultural traits. I show how the construction of indigenous identity in terms of Mayaness reflects the particular interests of urban educated *indígenas*. I emphasise the way that cultural elements are abstracted, reified and detached from material struggles in order to construct an "imagined community" which transcends class, gender, and religious differences.

Chapter 4 is an ethnographic study of the four communities. In Chapter 5 I analyse how changes brought about by the civil war, the work of the churches and competition for land have affected communities. I emphasise the dynamic nature of communities and show how as they adapt and change. Tradition is not lost but renewed as communities engage in struggles for livelihoods. I argue that the imagining of a Maya community which involves the lifting of cultural traits from their material contexts contrasts with the way that tradition is bound up with and embedded in communities' struggles for land in North Izabal.

In Chapter 6 I analyse communities' struggles for land in local and national contexts. I argue that the space which has been opened up by the state for the promotion of Maya languages and culture, and state mechanisms set up to legalise some lands do not constitute a radical change in the old order in Guatemala. Such developments should rather be seen as concessions granted by the old order in order to secure its survival, now that it is under greater international scrutiny. In North Izabal the concession has affirmed community organisations' role in the control of land. At national level, the old order permits the cultural activism of Maya intellectuals, which unlike class-based organisations, does not directly challenge the existing economic order.

In the conclusion I discuss the political use of culture by the Maya Movement and contrast the Maya construction of a mythological community with communities in North Izabal where symbolic and material dimensions are integrated through the dynamics of community.

Chapter One: Indlgenousness and inequality

Introduction

In order to understand current debates about identity and indigenousness[1] it is important to examine the evolution of the perspectives which make up that debate by identifying positions taken by earlier social theorists, politicians and ordinary people. Terms such as race and ethnicity, with their history of uses, are recycled and used anew. Just as past writers struggled to achieve a partial understanding of the activity which is human identity, so present theoreticians will be frustrated by identity's refusal to be easily encapsulated. In this chapter I will show how theoreticians from different traditions have highlighted specific features of indigenousness which in fact reflect the different trends within social theory as well as the particular contexts. It is important to establish from the outset that the usage and meaning of terms is not fixed but contextual, and that our understanding of the salience of terms is to a great extent determined by the ideological positions adopted by intellectuals. I argue that approaches to indigenousness have swung from an emphasis on cultural markers to an emphasis on the structural position of *indígenas* and finally to the current emphasis on cultural traits once again. The swings reflect the difficulties that theories of ethnicity have had in understanding the relations between culture and inequality as well as indigenous activism. The present emphasis on continuities of tradition and essential traits which enables activists to talk about "a culture", isolates ethnic identities from material struggles and reflects the wider trend away from an analysis of classes. Ethnic identity becomes explicit in conditions where individuals and groups exercise power both within groups towards other members, and against other groups. In order to understand the exercise of power and the grounding of identities in material struggles, a theoretical approach which examines the way that tradition is integrated into the construction of identity is required.

There are two main theoretical approaches to indigenousness identifiable in studies of Latin America. The earlier "essentialist" approach stresses the resilience and survival of authentic indigenous identity in the face of colonialism (Wilson1995: 7). The later "relational" approach is more concerned with historical context and the boundaries between groups.

The Cultural survival school

Studies of ethnicity in Latin America during the first half of the 20th century were concerned with the extent of modernization in Latin America and the survival of vestiges of the traditional way of life in isolated indigenous communities and communities which were perceived as moving from tradition to modernity(Redfield 1930, Lewis 1951, Foster 1967). Studies such as that begun in 1948 by Foster in Tzintzuntzan, Mexico focused on indigenous culture in individual communities of Mexico and Guatemala and failed to engage in discussion of ethnic relations (Foster 1967). The studies tended to emphasise harmony, reciprocity and communal solidarity in indigenous communities which were isolated from more modern urban areas. Studies of Mexico in particular set up extremely static pictures of national life where *indígenas* were associated with poverty and isolation, and contact with ladinos would facilitate development whilst holding on to some of the noble achievements of the indigenous past. Amongst the researchers during the first half of the 20th century were *Indígenistas* whose concern was to record traditional ways of life but with a view to elaborating programmes to overcome such traditions which were seen as an obstacle to progress (Wade 1997:42).

The approach of writers from this perspective, such as George Foster, are characterised by their lack of attention to the context of communities within national society and the failure to explore ethnic identification. There is little attempt to address the question of why and how ethnic boundaries are present. The assumption is that indigenous identity is most intact in communities and that communities can form part of a continuum that will inexorably lead to modern *mestizo* identity which whilst implying a mixture of the two identities, was in practice the domination of indigenous identity by Spanish identity. An identity which incorporates individualism and modernity is not conceived of. More recently, Urban and Scherzer (1992) attempted to accommodate the continuum pattern in their analysis of indigenousness. Their presentation of continuum is no less problematic than that of Foster. Jonathon Hill points out that "a typologizing model that starts out from the assumption of a basic dichotomy between isolated indigenous

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[1] Throughout this study I have used the term indigenous to refer to indigenous people rather than the term Indian with its negative connotations. Where a noun is required I use indígena.

populations and ethnic groups cannot be transformed at a later stage into a fully historical understanding of cultural identities" (Hill1996:9).

Historical contextualism

During the 1970's anthropologists sought to relate ethnic identity to the Marxist analysis of exploitation, placing great emphasis on how exploitation relates to ethnic identity (Julio de la Fuente 1965, Aguirre Beltran 1979). Writers built on the work of Barth and Cohen, who viewed ethnicity not as enduring forms with specific cultural attributes but in terms of the relationship between groups and the need to establish boundaries between groups (Barth 1969, Cohen 1974). Barth's stress on boundaries contrasts with earlier albeit flawed attempts to study the cultural content of ethnic groups. This relational approach was more flexible and required some contextualizing within the wider society to establish these ethnic groups. Writers concluded that boundaries were constructed for the purpose of exploitation or resistance of groups to each other. In the case of the term *indio* Wade writes that "it was a tool used by *mestizos* to ascribe inferior status and legitimate exploitation"(Wade 1997:48). Based on fieldwork in Hueyapan Mexico, Friedlander asserts that *indio* is an adjective used pejoratively to designate those people whose experience is dominated by poverty, illiteracy and a lack of sophistication (Warren 1978:5). In focusing on these class-like relations the writers tended to pursue an instrumentalist approach with economic position dictating ethnicity. Furthermore Wade identifies a tendency on the part of scholars to "create two static homogeneous groups of colonisers and colonised" (Wade 1997: 48).

Whereas survival school writers were a-historical in their approach, historical contextualists tended to stress the construction of identity during the colonial period and the formation of nation states. Stavenhagen's study of Chiapas revealed however that there was no neat correlation between exploited group and ethnic group (Wade 1997:62).

A synthesis

Contemporary studies of ethnicity in Latin America stress the value of a synthetic approach which draws on the essentialist and historical contextual traditions (Wilson 1995,Wade 1997). Both writers highlight Comaroff and Comaroff's formulation of what they see as the crux of the debate which is to show "how realities become real, how essences become essential." (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992:2). Such an approach seeks to transcend claims about ethnicity which stress either its form or content (Wilson 1995:7).

The danger for future theoretical approaches is that they can be overly influenced by the Post modernist emphasis on the construction of, and relations between identities, so questioning definitive understandings of ethnicity and dissolving it into a multitude of hybrids. If we take identities to be "mixed relational and inventive" (Clifford 1988:9), the claims of indigenous groups for authenticity based on direct links with earlier groups or peoples can be seen to be undermined. The challenge of how to understand sameness and change without jettisoning either, is grasped by Jonathon Hill and other contributors to his edited volume (Hill 1996). Rather than identifying surviving traits and projecting those traits back, Hill traces histories within change.

For groups engaged in challenges over land and territorial rights, claims often rest on their being able to demonstrate continuity with tradition and indissoluble identity. What some writers have identified as the construction of identity is seen by indigenous people themselves as the recovery of identity (Warren 1997:69-79). Identity is increasingly reified by the people themselves and we need to pay more attention to the kind of claims made by indigenous people and the ramifications for other groups. There is an awkward relationship between indigenous groups and contemporary theoretical approaches to identity. For so long the objects of the construction perspective of non-indigenous academics and politicians, indigenous people are now challenging the authority of that representation. It is the prerogative of indigenous people to speak for themselves and yet those voices are still exposed to the same theoretical scrutiny as non-indigenous representations. The self asserting political discourse of indigenous people which is strategically essentialist is no less constructivist than the work of non-indigenous, it is a different analysis of history. Furthermore, that discourse is not elaborated by all indigenous people, but by indigenous intellectuals for particular reasons in certain contexts.

Understanding indigenousness in the 21st Century

Notwithstanding their limitations, earlier theoretical approaches continue to generate important debates about indigenousness, culture loss and historicity and inequality. Based on my reading of the debates I suggest that there are four interlinked theoretical issues which are critical for the understanding of Latin American mixed societies. Presented in simple terms they assert that indígenas are not a homogeneous group, that indigenousness is a construct, that indigenousness can change or be lost, depending on how it is

constructed, and that indigenousness is the product of the enmeshing of cultural difference and inequality.

The term *indígena* is a general one which refers to a wide range of people. Rather than beginning with a definition, it is more illuminating to examine the use of the term in particular contexts by different people over the course of the past 500 years. The notion of indigenousness is a construct which is not fixed but constantly negotiated within communities, discussed by politicians and academics and inscribed in state legislation. Kay Warren and Jean Jackson write that the term *indigena* is a single term which is used to cover "enormous variations in history, culture, community and relations with non-indigenous" (Warren and Jackson 2003:11).

The Colonial powers persisted with the term *indio* because it aided the institutionalisation of exploitation. *"Indios"* were required to pay tribute and supply labour power and they were registered as indigenous communities in the census. Wade argues that such daily practice reinforced the category *indio* (Wade 1997:28). Furthermore resistance and non-compliance with colonial policy marked out *indios*. Identities whether local, regional or national need to be historicized and can be understood only in terms of how and why they are reconstituted.

Loss and change

The first anthropological studies carried out in Latin America in the early 20th century had as their objective the recording of lives, practices and beliefs which would soon it was assumed be immersed in the rising flood of modernisation. Their objectives were questionable and the anthropologists' assumptions were wrong. In locating isolated indigenous communities with different ways of life, anthropologists adopted an a-historical perspective which ascribed pre-conquest status to some communities whilst condemning others to absorption by national cultures. The progression from traditional to modern societies assumed by early academics such as Foster (1967), and Tax (1959) who anticipated a linear progression from indigenous communities to Latin American societies is not borne out by the evidence in countries such as Mexico, Ecuador and Guatemala where indigenousness is resurgent. Fischer makes the case for a dynamic Maya identity in the urban centre of Tecpan, Guatemala which is beginning to thrive in the context of the mixing of traditional and capitalist economic forms. Fischer argues that Mayaness makes sense to people who are engaged in non-traditional agricultural production for the global market but who wish to maintain some subsistence production of corn (Fischer 2001:239).

However the stakes have been raised by some indigenous activists who stress the importance of particular traits such as language and dress (Fischer/McKenna Brown 1996). Seen in such terms, the domination of Spanish over indigenous languages amounts to culture loss. Gould's study of indigenousness in northern Nicaragua, which I will go on to discuss, finds the existence of indigenous identity not in such common essential traits but in the struggles for land waged by communities which feature prominently in the memories of some Nicaraguans (Gould 1998:290). Academics' understanding of indigenousness which was limited by their lack of knowledge of indigenous self-ascription, and a dependence on the constructions of elites, has been challenged by indigenous agency. Indigenousness is not fixed indeterminately but constantly negotiated and ascribed by state legislation, politicians, academics and *indígenas* themselves.

The cultural and material qualities of indigenousness

An understanding of the different contexts in which indigenousness is constructed is crucial to our understanding of indigenousness. Understandings of indigenousness which privilege either cultural or economic elements place limits on it and distort history. The current preoccupation of academics and activists with recovering the ethnic history of Latin America follows closely on the heels of materialist approaches to history which privileged class. During the 1970s approaches to indigenousness were heavily influenced by Marxist debates. *Indígenas* were of interest less because of any cultural difference than because of the structural position that they filled within national and international systems of exploitation. What has become apparent, is that the class analysis of the 1970's could not disguise, and did not fully account for the significant cultural differences and the memory of those differences which still exist. The revitalisation of indigenous groups since the 1990s contradicts assumptions about the assimilation of indígenas and the emphasis on a purely economic analysis of exploitation in Latin America. Although it had been considered that for the most part property and labour relations closely followed lines of ethnic division, current studies advocate a more nuanced approach which deals with the more complex picture of inter-community competition and the role of indigenous elites (Grandin 2000:15). The promotion of Maya identity in Guatemala in the context of inequality and exploitation challenges earlier conceptions of indigenousness and raises questions about the privileging of ethnic identities. Pan-indigenous organising can not disguise the real structural differences that exist among indígenas. Class differences give

rise to different understandings of indigenousness. My research addresses the contrast between middle class Maya intellectuals' understanding of indigenousness as abstracted, reified traits, and community organisations in North Izabal where indigenous identity is indissoluble from struggles for land.

Indigenousness and Nation States

In spite of the homogenizing promise of capitalism and the spread of individualism, some regions of the globalized world continue to be characterised by the organising of indigenous groups in multi-ethnic states.

The establishment of Latin American nations in the 19th century as distinct entities with unique identities was a critical period in the rethinking of attitudes towards difference in Latin America. The founding of new nations based on the ideals of Europe was problematic for Latin American elites not least because Latin American populations were black and indigenous and not white. The contradictory processes of continuing oppression of indigenous groups and the glorification of indigenous past as well as the assertion of Latin Americaness and immigration programmes are evidence of the struggle to make sense of ideas about race in the Latin American context.

The aspiration of elites and intellectuals in Latin America was to replicate the modern developed nations. Central to their thinking was that the ways of indigenous people was backward and held back development. In the making of Nation States both the construction and reconciliation of differences was understood in scientific terms which drew upon but did not exactly replicate the eugenics movement present in Europe since the end of the 19th century (Stepan 1990:7). Whilst European eugenics was based on phenotype and the working principle that the mixing of biology improves race, for Latin Americans nation building took the form of the improvement of race through improvements of culture and living conditions, what Stepan has called "environmental reforms" (Stepan 1990:199).

Throughout Latin America, elites and intellectuals promoted the ideology of *indigenismo* in a bid to assimilate populations into a new *mestizaje* identity. *Mestizaje* assumes the mixing of identities in such a way that those identities are themselves transformed, indigenous identity is subdued and individuals become more integrated into national societies. Variations across the region were however very apparent where state formation accompanied intensified efforts at extracting labour power for export production. In various nations and particularly Mexico, the idea of *mestizaje* was

promoted through national indigenous institutes whose logic of *indigenismo* promoted the affirmation of some aspects of indigenous culture which could be carried forward as the heritage of the new Latin American identity. In Guatemala the promotion of *mestizaje* included the establishment of "Ligas pro-matrimonio entre indígenas and ladinos" under the General Ydígoras Fuentes 1959-1966(Gonzalez Ponciano 1999:31), and an education system, albeit limited in scope, whose aim was to civilise and castellanicize *indígenas*. However, unlike countries such as Mexico and Nicaragua, *mestizaje* did not become the myth for nation building in Guatemala.

Guatemala is a case apart, because, whilst some elements of the ideology of *mestizaje* were evident in the first half of the 20th century, bi-polar identities fuelled by the racist attitudes of a "white" elite formed the dominant template for Guatemalan society. Guatemala is the most striking example of the persistence of exclusive categories separating indigenous and non-indigenous people, in spite of the general trend towards and recognition of the mixing of populations. In Guatemala, and to a lesser degree other regions of Central America, people of mixed Spanish and indigenous descent were termed *Ladinos* differentiating them from the indigenous majority and a self-ascribing white elite minority.

Whilst the possibility of improvement was evident in the policies of Brazil and Mexico, in Guatemala a harder intolerant construct of race was promoted. Marta Elena Casaus has highlighted the case of Guatemalan elite "white" families who identify themselves in terms of *limpieza de sangre,* purity of blood, which they claim to have preserved through group endogamy (Warren 1998:64). The identity "Ladino" is not the Guatemalan version of *mestizo* but is a category which in a contradictory way established the possibility of improvement through being more Latin American and less indigenous whilst at the same time limiting the extent of the improvement because of the existence of a separate category who consider themselves white. At a theoretical level academics favour the view that identities are constructed. However that should not obscure the experience on the ground where difference is still informed by physical markers so that an indígena fluent in Spanish may not pass as a *mestizo/ladino* because of his/her stature or phenotype.

The construct race continues to play an important role in influencing social relations in Guatemala. During the propaganda campaigns leading up to the vote on changes to the Guatemalan Constitution in 1999, opponents of the change were vehement in their attacks on Maya agency. The proposed reforms, which would have recognised the

rights of *indígenas* in Guatemala, were attacked by *ladino* activists in the Liga Pro-Patria because the reforms would, it was claimed, "convert Guatemala into an indigenous state" (Jonas 2000:196). There is a latent racism which bubbles to the surface when people's fears are provoked by the perceived threat of indigenous power. Race is a primitive force which goes beyond the stating of difference because it carries notions of superiority.

Indigenous communities in Guatemala

It has become increasingly common for non-Guatemalan academics to collaborate with Mayan intellectuals as they promote Maya identity (Warren:1998:68). Whilst working from a constructivist understanding of ethnicity which treats Maya culture as, "strategic self-expressions of Maya identity…motivated by Maya propensities and possibilities in the present rather than by pre-Hispanic primordialism", academics nevertheless focus on the enduring traits which Mayan activists are keen to foster (Watanabe 1999:228).

The promotion of certain distinctive traits above others is evident in the collection entitled Maya Cultural Activism which includes essays on dress and language (Fischer, Mckenna Brown 1995). In focusing on language and other traits, which are shared across communities, Maya intellectuals are constructing an identity which depends upon but is detached from those communities. I will distinguish between the abstract reified traits as they are presented by Maya intellectuals and communities where traits are embedded in material culture and struggles for livelihood. Communities present a quandary for Maya activists who treat them as receptacles of Maya culture. On the one hand it is the cradle of Mayaness but on the other hand the intense localism of community can thwart attempts to promote identification at national level. In an attempt to bridge that gap between abstract and engaged culture, Maya activists are at pains to demonstrate their continuing links to their communities of birth (Warren 1998:38). This is more than a politician's ploy to show solidarity with his or her constituency. At least implicitly, Maya activists' maintenance of links with rural communities demonstrate the belief that indigenous identity in the Guatemalan context is inextricably bound up with community. Smith's assertion that "indian identity is rooted in community rather than in any general sense of indianness", continues to be the baseline for studies of indigenousness in Guatemala. Therefore analysis of the Maya movement needs to adopt the continuing salience of community identity as its point of departure rather than assuming an unproblematic emerging sense of Mayaness (Smith 1990:18). However in questioning the importance of local community for Guatemalan *indígenas*, I am not making a case for the primacy of

community for indígenas. The understanding of community should be contextualised and may be understood differently across the region. Secondly, because there is a relatively high degree of cultural raw material such as language and ritual in the receptacle which is local community, the significance of the receptacle itself is underplayed. The contrast that I am making here is between the traits embedded in community organisation and trans-community features of Mayaness which are abstracted and reified. Maya activists who are more concerned to promote shared traits tend to avoid direct analysis of community except in so far as it is where Mayaness is nurtured. To ascribe a more dynamic role to community would undermine the construction of a dynamic role for Mayaness. After briefly outlining the two main understandings of community in Guatemala I will present a theoretical approach based on the work of Gould which ascribes a dynamic role to local community (Gould 1998).

Community as tradition or constructed

Consistent with the two main approaches to indigenousness in the literature, there is a "cultural survival" and a "historical relational" approach to understanding communities.

Scholars of the historical contextual school stress that *indígenas* were not a united group but were scattered and divided along linguistic and ethnic lines. They argue that both the location and the culture of indigenous communities is in fact evidence of Spanish methods of control and exploitation during the 16th century. The "indios" persistent idolatrous acts and resistance to conversion fuelled Spanish frustration. However equally important according to the criteria of the Spanish authorities and indeed subsequent generations of large estate owners, was the so-called laziness of the *indígenas*. What is clear is that the colonial powers needed labour to work the mines and to service the colonial settlements. The Catholic Church, whilst on the one hand preaching Christianity, also stood to benefit financially as it organised the rural populations. The resulting legislation following interventions by prominent religious such as Las Casa dictated that the "indios" were to be protected and exploited (Estrada Monroy 1979:44). The protection of the "indios" had as much to do with the dramatic fall in population due to disease and forced labour as it did to any more humanitarian concerns on the part of the Spanish. It was the Spanish who created the "Pueblos de Indios" (Handy 1984:23) and the Dominican religious who reduced "the scattered population into more centralized towns" *reducciones* (Handy 1984:23). The Colonial powers persisted with the term "indio" to institutionalise

political domination, economic subjugation and social hierarchy in Latin America. Wade points out that the "daily practice" of demanding tribute and labour power from people who were registered in indigenous communities in the census reinforced the category "indio" (Wade 1997:28). Being "indio" also enabled communities to establish rights over land and their own political authorities. Furthermore resistance and non-compliance with colonial policy marked out "indios".

According to the cultural survival approach there is continuity between both internal organisation and location of present day indigenous communities and pre-Hispanic communities. Rather than being seen as historically constructed, the *reducciones* of the colonial era are understood as legal representations of what already existed before the Spanish conquest of Latin America. This stress on adherence to pre-conquest locations is evident both in the a-historical writings of earlier anthropologists such as Redfield (1930) as well as in the more historically grounded work of Hill and Monaghan (1987). There is also a degree of support for this view in McCreery's analysis of the coffee economy where he notes that it was not in the interests of the Guatemala elite to dislocate *indígenas* whose labour power was needed (McCreery 1994:250). However McCreery's treatment of the coffee era in the late 19th century also emphasises dispossession of some indigenous lands in the prime coffee growing belt of western Guatemala as well as the escape of groups of *indígenas* from the reaches of the state into eastern Guatemala and Belize (McCreery 1994:286).

Scholars have tended to adopt one or other of these approaches or a combination of the two. Writing about communities in colonial Peru, Steve Stern identifies the different approaches. Communities may be the "the stubborn survival of older life-ways in the face of externally imposed pressures", "an institution designed to provide a reservoir of labour" and the "reconstituting" of peasants onto often marginal lands after the initial colonial reorganisation of populations or a combination of the three (Stern 1983:23).

Wolf's presentation of what he terms the "closed corporate peasant community" is the classic rebuttal of a-historical essentialist treatments of *indígenas*. Wolf challenges the approach of anthropologists in the 1950s who, he claims, "tended to short-circuit four centuries of history to draw a direct line from the pre-Columban past to the indigenous present" (Wolf 1986:326). Communities, writes Wolf, were formed as a reaction to the expansion of large estates in the 17th century. They were defensive, placed limits on membership and controlled economic production. Crucial to the functioning of the communities and the flow of goods and ideas into communities was he argued, the civil-

religious cargo system, which was strictly regulated by indigenous elites (Wolf 1957:2).
Despite the limitations of Wolf's approach it continues to provide a useful framework by
drawing our attention to particular aspects of community. Subsequent research has
clarified that communities have always been economically differentiated. Whilst the cargo
system may have reduced the economic excesses, it did not even out the differences
between members (Wolf 1957:12). Communities are not the products of one period of
colonial history and neither are they fixed institutions which are beyond transformation
(Siebers 1996:295). Finally we should be aware of over-extending the idea of communities
as being "closed". Smith writes,

> "The corporate Indian Community (together with a powerful sense of indigenous
> identity) is not a historical survival, it is a constantly formed and reformed political
> response to real existing conditions, most political but also cultural and ideological
> ...furthermore Guatemala may have the strongest "peasant" communities in the
> world, but they have rarely if ever been closed."

(Smith 1990: 281)

Whilst not depending on an essentialist approach to communities which makes claims for
the pre-conquest location of present day indigenous communities, I do acknowledge the
construction of a deep sense of community and rootedness for indigenous communities,
which is perceived by *indígenas* themselves as tradition rather than construction (Warren
1998:78).

Community lands

The formation, struggles and dissolution of communities can be traced through the history
of the contestation of land rights. Although dress and language constitute visible markers
of difference it is land rights which have been the primary focus of community identity
and mobilization (Handy 1984:7). Sol Tax's assertion that the municipality is the basic
unit of indigenousness may have reflected the experience in communities near Lake
Atitlán but it is not an accurate reading of the national picture (Handy 1994:144). The
disputes between different factions, barrios, *cofradías*[2] and aldeas and the fact that ladinos
were sometimes in positions of power meant that municipality was not the same as
community (Handy 1994:145). The perception that municipality did not represent
community was evident to the reformist president Arévalo who gave legal recognition in

1946 to what were called "*communidades indígenas*". The conflict within municipalities was also evident in the use by aldeas of decree 900 (1952) to establish title to lands which had been in dispute (Handy 1994:154). The archival research of Handy (1994) and McCreery (1994) provides much evidence to support the assertion that communities defined themselves in terms of their struggle for and access to land and the memories of those struggles (Handy 1994:167). Grandin's research on Quetzaltenango further supports the analysis that whilst internal differences existed they were subordinated to community aims at least until the coffee economy gathered force. With the exploitation of indigenous land and labour as well as increased differentiation within communities, collective interests were eroded (Grandin 2001:126). Metz's study (1998) of eastern Guatemala entitled "Without community without nation" reveals significant regional variation in the experience of *indígenas*. Unlike the western Highlands of Guatemala where many indígenas retained their land, the Chorti people in the east of Guatemala were "immersed in "a sea of non-Mayas" (Metz 1998:326). Whereas indigenous elites were employed to harness indigenous labour in the west, it was *ladinos* who directly coerced *indígenas* during the Ubico regime in the Jocotan region of Eastern Guatemala (Metz 1998:327). Although Metz does not elaborate on the "communal solidarity" that was disrupted, it would be consistent with other regions that the solidarity was based on community control of land (Metz 1998:327). Communities' experience of being dispossessed of land is central to the history of ethnogenesis in Guatemala.

Struggles over land are intrinsically linked to identity in some other regions of Latin America. Larson claims that the seizure of lands by capitalist forces from communities in northern Colombia and southern Bolivia, "threatened more than their material means of survival; it threatened their whole claim to a collective existence, grounded in the shared symbolic and material space that formed their sacred historic territorial domain." (Larson 1999:567). This notion of land as both material and symbolic space is relevant to my analysis of Q'eqchi' communities and their relationship with land which I will address later in this chapter and in chapters four and five.

The defence of communities and indigenous identities

In this section I analyse the importance of community organisation for indigenous identity. A focus on community organisation requires that we examine the context and purpose for

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[2] *Cofradías* are fraternities dedicated to the veneration of a particular saint.

which the organisation was created. It also requires that we examine the internal dynamics of community. I argue that it is important not to idealise community. Community is a dynamic entity, continually constructed, which has different meanings for its members.

The incorporation of submerged elements and the recuperation of lost voices into the writing of histories of Latin America is at once illuminating and problematic. That something is submerged or in need of recuperation can help to highlight the extent to which official versions of history have suppressed alternative readings. However the danger is that in recuperating the lost and submerged, writers ascribe undue importance to those elements that are being treated. Furthermore the intentions of writers and their political projects always come into play in the process of writing. In the case of ethnicity, the writing of histories is as much about possibilities in the present and future as it is about interpreting the past. Much is at stake both financially and politically for indigenous groups real or imagined.

Gould acknowledges just such a problem in writing about what he terms the "myth of mestizaje" in the history of Nicaragua. That there is a myth presumes a reality of indigenousness and the deconstruction of the myth necessarily draws the writer into ascribing a definitiveness of identity to different groups. In those Latin American countries where indigenous populations have long since ceased to exist at least officially, the current trend in academic circles for writing local histories in the context of the highly charged political atmosphere of indigenous activism runs the risk of identifying indígenas where they do not exist and romanticising the past. Whilst the approaches of the first anthropologists in Mexico who attempted to discover "natives" have been rejected, the difficulties associated with describing indigenousness still remain (Redfield 1930, Cancian 1965). The writing of histories can not be isolated from the political work of indigenous activists for whom the persistence of indigenous identity is vital. Indeed the word *recuperar* as used by both indigenous activists and foreign academics can mean both constructing identity in the present and drawing attention to what has always been present. With that in mind, Gould's writing of ethnicity back into Nicaraguan history needs to be carefully approached. As important as the deconstruction of the myth of *mestizaje* is the recognition of the possibility of the need to break through the romantic veneer of collective memory.

Gould's analysis of the mechanisms which suppressed indigenous culture without, he claims, ever having completely destroyed the memory of indigenous activism is contextually specific. Whilst our understanding of the process of myth building in

Nicaragua entails analysis of land expropriation, labour coercion and state formation, the particular local characteristics of the struggles give rise to identities and strategies which are useful in the examination of other cases.

Current research on indígenas in Central America is influenced by indigenous movements working on the revitalisation of indigenous languages and beliefs, some of which is influenced by non-indigenous models of nationality. Gould's stress on the importance of indigenous organisation and community in Nicaragua is important because it contrasts so sharply with Maya intellectuals' approach to indigenousness which is based on objectified cultural traits. That focus on objectified traits is also evident in the collection of essays by both Maya and non-Maya writers which does not address the links between communities, resources and traditions (Fischer/Mckenna Brown 1996).

At a time when academics are increasingly attracted by the Maya intellectuals and the notion of Maya community, Gould's study reminds us of the importance of indigenous communities as sites of conflict and struggle for resources, and of the enduring salience of the collective memory of community membership for some *indígenas* today. Studies of indigenous communities have tended to emphasise either the enduring nature of community from pre-conquest origins or the formation of community as the product of contact between native peoples and colonial powers.

Gould finds elements of defence, exploitation and reproduction in his analysis of Nicaraguan indigenous communities which were, he argues, "the last ethnic marker" for many indígenas (Gould 1998:18). In fact Gould makes high claims for indigenous communities which were, he says, "the equivalent of a trade union, a powerful local government-cum-political party and a church rolled into one" (Gould 1998:15). Given the attention paid to language preservation by current indigenous activists Gould's assertion that cultural survival "has far less to do with essentialist representations of ethnicity and more to do with the destruction of communities, communal organizations and identity" is important (Gould 1998:14).

Although Carol Smith maintains that Gould's analysis does not require an "essentialist reading of indigenous culture" in asserting the importance of community Gould is actually essentializing indigenous identity (Gould 1998:cover notes). It is therefore not so much a question of which approach Gould has adopted but rather what is the basis for his choice of essences over others and why those essences became essences. Gould's analysis of the roles played by different indigenous communities in Nicaragua and their subsequent demise under pressure particularly from agrarian capitalism is

contingent. Gould does not argue for the recognition per se of community and identity. Rather he sees ethnic distinction being brought into sharp relief by social and political processes at a particular period in the history of Nicaragua. Struggles over land and labour bring groups and individuals into the kind of interaction which, for Vincent, are often the circumstances in which ethnic difference is employed (Vincent 1974:377). It is, as Comaroff notes, the "asymmetric incorporation of structurally dissimilar groupings into a single political economy" that prompts the employment of ethnic differences (Comaroff 1987:307). Consistent with Vincent's approach, Gould does not attempt to isolate ethnic identity from the conditions which have made that identity salient to both groups and individuals. Central to Gould's argument is the detailing of eight abortive attempts between 1877 and 1923 to wrest land and labour control from local groups through the attempted abolition of indigenous community (Gould 1998:18). Similarly the utterances of local intellectuals and national elites discussed by Gould are only intelligible in terms of their references to the confrontations (Gould 1998: 177-199). Stated more simply, ethnicity is "not a mystic force in itself" but rather it is "a mask of confrontation" (Vincent 1977:377). Whilst Vincent does not go on to elaborate on this image it is clear that masks used in carnivals, for example are employed both to conceal and to reveal identity. The identities concealed are the differences and boundaries that exist between individuals and groups within the ethnic group. On wearing masks people's commonality is released. Community as analysed by Gould is this commonality which is employed for particular purposes and obscures the differences which would otherwise limit the possibility of defence.

The danger is that in seeking to establish the ethnic dimension to Nicaraguan history there is a tendency towards reifying indigenous communities in such a way that *ladinos* and the state are portrayed as tyrannical forces and communities are egalitarian institutions. Whereas Grandin's analysis of stratification within communities in Guatemala reveals the employment of ethnicity for sometimes contradictory purposes by different groups, Gould's representation of community stresses unity of purpose. (Grandin 2000:229) It is important to question the harmony of community and to recognise that community has different meaning for its members and is constantly under construction.

The Maya: an "imagined community"

The community currently being constructed in Guatemala is an indigenous identity beyond community. Once confined to archaeological texts or general histories of pre-conquest

Central America, the term "Maya" has become the standard term in academic circles to refer to Indians in present day Guatemala. Wilson's study of Q'eqchi' speakers is entitled "Maya Resurgence", Watanabe's study of a Mam town is called "Maya saints and Souls in a changing world" (Wilson 1995, Watanabe 1992). The term Maya is a familiar one for readers of Mesoamerican history and archaeology, but its use by academics does not coincide with the self-understanding of indigenous communities in Watanabe and Wilson's studies for whom identity is still expressed in terms of linguistic group and local town. Accepted by many as the appropriate term for referring to the civilisation of Mesoamerica which had its apogee in the first century and powerfully promoted by some for whom it is an "imagined community" today, Maya has all too easily slipped into the consciousness of writers who uncritically see post-conquest communities as Maya communities.

Originally designed to explain the rise of nation-states Anderson's notion of "imagined community" is equally useful in highlighting the dynamics of ethnic group formation. Anderson explains that "a fundamental change was taking place in modes of apprehending the world which more than anything else, made it possible to think the nation" (Anderson 1991:22). It is not just the change in models of apprehending but also socio-economic change which prompts the sharpening of some identities and the diminution of others. Just as the emergence of nation states in Europe hinged on the breakdown of older relations, so in Guatemala Mayan identity is conceived of in terms of the weakening of local community relations. According to Wilson the demise of Christendom and the dynastic realm in Europe has been paralleled in the Q'eqchi' speaking region of Guatemala by the transforming influences of "religious conversions, armed insurrection and state repression" (Wilson 1995:12). The traditional Q'eqchi' community has been changed in such a way that it is possible for Q'eqchi's to imagine another wider Maya community (Wilson 1995:12). Although all communities are imagined, some communities are more imagined than others. Whilst it would be impossible for someone to be in physical contact with all other would-be Mayas, for Q'eqchi's, local communities can not only be imagined but also made real by kinship and reciprocity. More significantly if there are actions at local level which are spurred by basic issues of survival but those actions do not have the same gravity for the "imagined community" it may be that local community will continue to be the pre-eminent marker of identity.

In order to understand the uses of ethnicity in Guatemala it is important to be aware of the implicit assumption that although people are divided by language difference and municipality, they are all Maya really. To ignore the particular local histories of different groups and to underplay the political uses of ethnic identity is uncritically to accept the motivations of Maya activists and ignore the real differences that exist. The tension between local and national perspective is evident amongst those who are prompting the imagining, Maya activists. Warren identifies competing definitions of community for those whose objective appears to be the same. She contrasts the perspective of university academics who look beyond old community based on municipality, with applied linguists who have a heightened awareness of the importance of *ancianos*[3] and the rootedness of identity in local places (Warren 1992: 209).

Community in Northern Izabal

My research analyses the nature of community dynamics in north Izabal and what community means to local people. It is important from the outset to distinguish between the existence of shared traits such as language and religion and the recognition and objectifying of those traits by the people themselves as markers of a group. At a superficial level the region bears the hallmarks of Mayaness as described by Mayan activists in the west The people are predominantly Q'eqchi' speakers, the women wear indigenous dress and there are elements of non-Christian ritual evident in the region. The question of whether such cultural raw material translates into a specific Maya identity will be at the heart of my research. In short I ask - what is indigenous community in north Izabal?

The use of the term Q'eqchi' to refer to communities in eastern Guatemala needs to be critically analysed. Although Q'eqchi' is the common language of communities in a defined region, the assumption that a common language should be seen as evidence of a common shared identity should be analysed. Whilst anthropologists have identified cultural traits shared by Q'eqchi' speakers, the Q'eqchi' are not an ethnic group. Siebers asserts that, "the conclusion that the Q'eqchi' may be characterised as an ethnic group which assumes that their identification with the Q'eqchi' as such plays a dominant role in

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[3] In Q'eqchi' communities, *ancianos* are men whose history of service to the community, and seniority in terms of age means that they have a position of respect within the community.

the construction of their identity, remains unfounded" (Siebers 1996:293). Furthermore Siebers notes that there is hardly any evidence of common economic activity beyond that of a single community (Siebers 1996:293).

A cautious approach which desists from making claims for the Q'eqchi' without lapsing into relativism is important. Researching and writing in violence-torn Alta Verapaz during the early 1990s Wilson allows his contact with people who most directly experienced the violence to overshadow the experiences of other Q'eqchi' communities (Siebers 1996:32). As well as inter-community difference I will examine differentiation within communities. Grandin's analysis of Quetzaltenango reveals evidence of exploitation and divisions within communities, and the emergence of an identity which extended beyond and subdued local identity (Grandin 2000:229). Heeding Smith's characterisation of indigenous identity as being based on community, my research seeks to understand the basis of organization and identity for Q'eqchi's in North Izabal (Smith 1990:18).

Communities and land

In the following section I analyse the history of Q'eqchi' speakers from the Spanish invasion of Guatemala until 1900 when some of the present day North Izabal communities were founded. Throughout that period Q'eqchi' speakers tended to associate with and act as communities rather than as an ethnic group the Q'eqchi'.

At the time of the conquest, Q'eqchi' speakers were concentrated in the area known today as Alta Verapaz. Unlike the rest of Guatemala which was militarily conquered, the dispersed groups in Alta Verapaz resisted violently and frustrated Spanish attempts to subdue them. The Dominican Friar *Bartolomé* de las Casas was granted the authority from the crown to attempt a peaceful conquest of the region which he began in 1537. Q'eqchi' speakers are the product of the assimilation of various groups including the Manche Chols, Acalas, Mopanes, Lacandones, and Poqomchi's during the 16th century reduction of dispersed groups in the east of Guatemala (Wilson 1995:59).

Q'eqchi's co-operated with Spain in tracking down indigenous groups which remained outside the reach of colonial control. That is not to say however that there is evidence of a coherent organisation amongst the Q'eqchi'. Furthermore the integration of the different indigenous groups into the Q'eqchi' underlines the heterogeneous nature of

the Q'eqchi', and would have placed limits on the capacity of Q'eqchi' speakers to act as an ethnic group. Whilst we do know that the protection of Q'eqchi' elites by the colonial powers was an important element of control in the colonial period we have little information on the social organisation of the Q'eqchi' and the nature of community. The present day dispersed pattern of settlement of the Q'eqchi's reflects a pattern which was in evidence in pre-colonial times. There is little evidence of major urban centres beyond those established by the Dominicans in the 16th century. Rossignon, a French landowner writing in 1861 before the advent of coffee cultivation, emphasises the dispersal of the Q'eqchi' population whom he describes as essentially nomad (Estrada Monroy 1979:380). With reference to the town of San Pedro Carcha Rossignon notes that for most of the year only about one tenth of the population actually reside in the town, "the majority live in their corn fields" (Rossignon 1979:380). The absence of export agriculture and the relative autonomy to which the Q'eqchi' were accustomed contrasts with the experience of indígenas in the west where greater control was exercised by the state.

That the region was administered by the religious orders during the colonial period is significant. Colonization took a particular form in Alta Verapaz which allowed Q'eqchi's access to most of their communal lands and had a limited impact on cultural practices. Unlike Western Guatemala, although the Crown and religious orders possessed land, individual Spaniards were not granted land, nor were they entitled to collect tribute from indígenas under the *encomienda* system. (Van Oss 1986:77) The system of *reducciones* whereby the Crown concentrated the population was of limited success. It was a constant gripe of the religious orders that the Q'eqchi' continued with their non-Christian rituals (Van Oss 1986:89).

The coffee economy

During the liberal era state legislation relating to land and labour and the removal of Catholic religious groups from the country threatened Q'eqchi' independence.
Between 1871 and 1883 liberal governments threatened indigenous autonomy and access to land in a way that far outstripped attacks on indigenous groups during the colonial period. Cambranes estimates that in the mid 19th century more than 70 per cent of the best cultivable land was controlled and farmed by peasant farmers who were mostly indígenas (Cambranes 1985:88). That picture changed dramatically when President Barrios

effectively freed up a large proportion of the land by declaring it *baldio*[4] and available for purchase. Such legislation affected the Q'eqchi' population most directly when wealthy German entrepreneurs with the necessary skills were encouraged by the Guatemalan government to set up business in Alta Verapaz. The German planters effectively controlled an enclave in Alta Verapaz where they established an export route to the coast which linked the railroad which they built with a steamship service to the coastal ports of Livingston and Santo Tomas (Wagner 1991: 173). A map produced by the German Karl Sapper in 1900 shows that the skewed pattern of land ownership characteristic of Guatemala as a whole was established in Alta Verapaz during the late 19th century (Wagner 1991:205).

There is some debate over the impact on Q'eqchi's of the expansion of the coffee economy. Although as McCreery (1994) has shown, it was in the interests of the coffee planters to guarantee a labour supply by maintaining Q'eqchi' communities on coffee *fincas*, the severity of labour legislation and Q'eqchi' insubordination contributed to a significant stream of migrants out of the coffee growing region. Under a system which amounted to debt peonage *indígenas* received advance payment and paid off their debts by working on the coffee *fincas*. Adult indígenas were effectively trapped in a cycle of debt which was inherited by their children (Adams 1990:141). Under the regime of General Ubico (1933-1944) the debt peonage system was replaced by a Vagrancy law by which the state maintained a system of coerced labour into the mid 20th century. According to the vagrancy law male indígenas were required to carry a booklet where work on coffee *fincas* or state building projects could be recorded. Indígenas who could not demonstrate the required level of productivity were gaoled or forced to work (Adams 1990:142). The Highways law asserted that all who did not pay the highways stamp would have to work for two weeks a year on road building projects.

Q'eqchi' responses to the exigencies of coffee production were varied but never amounted to a concerted opposition as an ethnic group. Where open resistance did occur it was at the level of individual municipality or *finca*. The most prominent protests were carried out by Q'eqchi's from San Pedro Carcha in 1864, 1878 and 1879. For the most part however Q'eqchi' responses were consistent with Scott's thesis that peasants find ways to play the system to their least disadvantage (Scott 1989). The scale of migration from coffee estates in Alta Verapaz was a concern for coffee planters and the state.

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[4] A *baldio* is an area of land that is not registered by the state as having a private owner.

McCreery cites the case where the *Jefe Político* of Alta Verapaz claimed that Izabal had been encouraging migration out of Alta Verapaz and into Izabal. The Jefe responded to the accusation that he had encouraged the migration, declaring that it was more a matter of the people themselves wanting to escape the labour demands in Alta Verapaz (McCreery 1994:286).

Migration patterns researched by Richard Adams attest to the Q'eqchi's preference for reproduction as peasants rather than life in an urban setting (Adams 1965). Adams traces the migration routes of Q'eqchi's out of Alta Verapaz towards the Petén, Izabal and Belize. North Izabal was a staging post for flows of migrants who passed a few years in the region before moving further north and east. However Izabal was also the destination for many Q'eqchi's leaving Alta Verapaz. Municipal archive records in Livingston date the foundation of villages in North Izabal from 1900 onwards. This settlement of North Izabal coincides with the expansion of the coffee economy, the forced labour during the Ubico regime and generalized competition for land during the latter half of the 20th century. A sparsely populated area exploited mainly by British loggers at the beginning of the 20th century, North Izabal in 2002 is the site of intense competition between Q'eqchi' communities, environmental agencies and finca owners. Q'eqchi community and autonomy continues to be intrinsically linked to the struggle for land.

Localism in North Izabal

Both Richard Wilson and Hans Siebers emphasise the special relationship that Q'eqchi's have with the local landscape in Alta Verapaz (Wilson 1995, Siebers1996).

Wilson maintains that location is the "cornerstone" of community identities. "For traditionalists the ongoing portrait of the community is the local mountain spirit, the tzuultaq'a…this is not a generalized earth cult such as that of Pacha Mama in the Andes, the elements of which can be taken from one area to another. Villagers interact primarily with the mountain spirits who dwell in the caves around their communities" (Wilson 1997:123). My research will investigate evidence that Q'eqchi' who live far from the 13 great mountains traditionally venerated by the Q'eqchi' have named hills local to their communities and established rituals to these hills. The relationship between Indians and land is well documented by anthropologists (Wearne 1996:23). For the people of the Andes, earth is the Pacha Mama (Wearne 1996:23). Writing about western Guatemala, Watanabe states that "the worldview embedded in the Maya conventions of community…implies that being Maya involves not just viewing the world in particular

Maya ways but doing so from particular Maya places in the company of particular Maya neighbours" (Watanabe 1995:16). However whilst Watanabe sees this dimension of local grounding as constitutive of Maya culture, I will argue that it tends to accentuate local identity. This localism is accentuated when the only people who take up the struggle for the retention of that land in community hands is the community itself.

Conclusions

The theoretical approaches which I have outlined in this chapter are useful to draw attention to the contexts in which ethnicity becomes prominent, the nature of ethnic differences that are expressed, and the people who construct and promote identities. Ethnicity is constructed for a purpose and the nature of the identity which is constructed is related to the position of individuals who promote that identity. By emphasising continuity (cultural survival) and change (historical contextual) the theoretical approaches address important aspects of identity which inform the questions that I ask in order to understand the political uses of identity. The cultural survival approach, which identifies certain essential traits, is important because it directs attention to the way that the inclusion or omission of practices and experiences conditions the kind of "we" that is formed. I understand culture and inequality to be dimensions of ethnicity which are not separate, but are separable by people seeking to construct an identity which overrides competition and material differences between indígenas. The construction of identity based on claims of cultural survival without reference to historical formation is revealing of the political position of the people who promote ethnic differences. The historical contextual/boundary approach directs attention to the reasons why people promote ethnic differences, and where they stand structurally in relation to other members of their ethnic group and society as a whole. In my analysis of the Maya Movement and Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal, I emphasise the conditions under which identities become important, the nature of those identities and the people who promote the identities.

Chapter 2: Methodological issues

Introduction

In this chapter I explain the methodological issues arising from my research, with a particular emphasis on the key role that photo elicitation came to play. As I weighed up the advantages and disadvantages of different research methodologies I was influenced by two major issues. The first issue, which I have explained in the introduction to the dissertation, was the fact that I was not new to the communities and neither were they new to me. Although in my mind I was now going to visit the communities as a researcher, for the communities I was still the Antonio who had organised community schools in the 1980s. The second issue was how to get at the substance and meaning of community. On earlier visits to the region when I was working, I had been aware of the strong sense of community, but it was a different matter to try and demonstrate that and show that it constituted an important identity. Community is difficult to get to grips with because it is not an a-historical fixed form, but a dynamic entity cross-cut by gender, age, religion and so forth. There are different understandings of the value and role of community within the community itself and so community is continually remade in a process of negotiation. In order to understand community I would need to adopt a historical perspective which would encompass memories of what community has been, more recent experiences of threats to community and perspectives on what community might mean in the future. In addressing the two issues, my history of working with the communities and the challenge of getting to grips with what community means, I decided to play to my strengths. In short I took the first issue to be the solution to the second issue. Because I was familiar with the communities I was in a good position to explore their dynamics. Furthermore, as I will explain in this chapter, the full significance of my familiarity with the communities was not apparent to me as I planned my research. It was only on reacquainting myself with the communities that I realised that the photos which I had taken of the communities in the 1980s could be used as a tool to understand community.

My research extended over a three-year period between 2000 and 2002 during which I made three trips and spent a total of seven months in the communities of North Izabal. Whilst I visited twenty communities in the region, my research focuses on four. The selection of the four communities was based on my closer familiarity with certain communities and the need to recognise the different characteristics of and factors affecting communities.

People in the communities afforded me a degree of confidence and trust because, as explained in the introduction to the dissertation, I had spent time in the region during the 1980s. Particularly important to many people was their knowledge of my family and the fact that we had lived as a family unit in one of the communities. Whilst interviews were largely conducted in Spanish, my ability to engage in everyday conversation in Q'eqchi' and my efforts to learn the Q'eqchi' language were appreciated. Visiting the villages in the company of trusted local people facilitated my entry.

In order to re-familiarise myself with the North Izabal area before focusing on particular communities, I met with various people who told me about changes which had taken place in the region during the 1990s. In the course of the meetings it became apparent to me that there was another quality to their regional perspective which I hadn't considered. Because I met the people in their places of work and during visits that they were making to communities, our conversations were punctuated by interactions with community members. In listening to the interactions I realised that the people and their roles as local intellectuals were as important as their regional perspective. During the course of the three periods of research in North Izabal I met with each of the four people on dozens of occasions during which I was able to construct the biographies which appear in chapter 6.

In my research I employed a combination of methods which included oral histories, participant observation, analysis of documents, semi-structured interviews and photo elicitation. Bearing in mind that research in the communities was a continual process of negotiation the combining of complimentary methodologies provided me with the necessary flexibility and allowed me to triangulate the information. There is no single way of doing research in Q'eqchi' communities. The lessons which I have learnt about doing research in the North Izabal context and the modifications which I would make to my approach on future visits are as important as my research findings.

Through participant observation I was able to build contacts in many villages and gain a general understanding of the region. My participation in everyday work activities such as planting maize provided opportunities to discuss agricultural practice and land ownership. My engagement in everyday activities with community members as well the use of semi-structured interviews enabled me to establish the different positions, tendencies and perspectives that exist within communities. Because I spent extended periods in villages I was often present when community meetings were being held and I

was able to observe and record the proceedings directly related to my research without having raised the subject myself.

In the following section I provide an introduction to my use of semi-structured interviews, collective interviews, analysis of documents and oral histories. These are well-established methods and so my treatment of them is rather brief in order to focus on my innovative use of photo elicitation method.

Semi-structured interviews

Through conversations with community leaders and ordinary people during May 2000 it became clear to me that local organising around issues of land tenure and productivity were prioritised by people. The semi-structured interview approach allowed me to raise the recurring themes of land, community and livelihood in a flexible way and so allowed me to explore people's understandings of the issues whilst at the same time being open to other issues.

I combined one to one semi-structured interviews with community meetings because it became apparent that people in the communities wanted, and expected there to be, a general meeting with everybody present so that no individual could exploit my presence for whatever gain. It was common practice when outsiders visited the communities for he whole community to gather in order to discuss whatever proposal the outsider might have. In my experience the community meeting was an important tool for the negotiation of my presence within villages and for ensuring that my presence in communities was not divisive. Community meetings were also convened by the *alcalde auxiliar* when an issue arose which affected all community members. Most commonly, community meetings were convened to address issues related to the management of the school, control of land and future development projects. Thompson calls the use of community gatherings to elicit information the "community interview", and notes that it provides an opportunity "for gathering a wide cross-section of people together at one time" (Thompson 1988:69). I found the meetings useful for obtaining a sense of the main points of contention within communities as well as for observing the different degrees of engagement by different community members, and the way that community members related to each other. I was able to follow up both the points which were raised in meetings and the silent responses of other community members through semi-structured interviews. The advantage of semi-structured interviews lies in the flexibility which they afford (Robson 1993:229). Rather than having a fixed collection of questions, I was,

without loosing sight of my main line of enquiry, able to follow up different responses and be led by the agenda of informants (Schensul and Schensul 1999:121).

The documents of both local and national organisations were an important source of information for me on how the agrarian sector was analysed by different groups. At local level, the unpublished project proposals and reports of organisations working on land legalisation were revealing of how local intellectuals understood communities. Most of the paper records relating to the communities in North Izabal, held by the local mayor's office in Livingston, had been destroyed by animals and the climate. The paper records that survived were being computerised by one of the clerks under a Spanish government funded project. Those records provided me with another source with which to cross check basic information on the histories, populations, and projects within different communities. After comparing the data that from the mayor's office with similar data collected by local organisations, I was then able to corroborate that data through semi-structured interviews in the communities. The incomplete nature of the information from one source was usually complimented by fuller information for another source information, and my presentation of the data acknowledges the different sources.

Oral History

The dynamic, multi-vocal nature of communities was evident from my initial visits to villages throughout North Izabal. I assumed that a range of opinions and attitudes existed within villages and that the interaction of people in the context of threats to livelihoods was the dynamism that constructed community. I understood communities not as fixed human organisations, but as complex multi-dimensional entities which needed to be understood in terms both of collectivity, differences and historical context (Gould 1998:291).

I paid careful attention both to collective memory as well as to the accounts of individuals and the extent to which such narratives were generated and moulded by particular events (Wilson 1995:6). Experts on the oral history approach point to the tension that exists between subjectivity and objectivity. (Tonkin 1989:140) The risk is that we become over-influenced by the subjective nature of oral history and that history itself becomes a matter of opinions. Portelli argues that oral histories are often more enlightening in what they reveal about "what people think they did or would have liked to have done than about the event itself" (Portelli 2001:54). Notwithstanding the subjective nature of oral histories I maintain that through the gathering of viewpoints from a range of

people and the corroboration of those views through ethnographic evidence, memory can reveal something of the past as well as shedding light on present exigencies.

Although researchers are counselled to guard against interference, my presence within communities inevitably impinged on communities. However as Portelli notes, such interference is not necessarily an obstacle to research. Portelli claims that interference can be positive in urging a "higher degree of self-scrutiny and self-awareness" (Portelli 2001:44). Many people in the villages welcome the opportunity to talk about their lives, their communities and the issues which are of most immediate concern to them. It is important to be alert to the possibility that in talking about their lives people engage in self-justificatory reflections. The oral history approach enables me to approach a range of people within communities whilst acknowledging the authority ascribed to senior men who were regarded by community members as the bearers of tradition within communities.

Photo elicitation

At the planning stage my intention had been to use a multi-method approach which combined participant observation, oral histories and some study of documents. However, having lived in North Izabal in the late 1980s I also took with me on my first fieldwork trip various photos of the communities taken in the 1980s as well as photos of my family. The discussions which these photos prompted in the communities convinced me that the photos could augment and/or replace some of the questions which I intended to use. The photos jogged memories and prompted discussions on a whole range of issues such as local market systems, the importance of education, attitudes of young people to *ancianos*, and the changes that had taken place in the region. On some occasions my photos prompted people to show me the photos that they possessed of their family, their community or a community event. I was able to sit back and listen to the ensuing conversations between community members as well as asking questions about the photos. In an unanticipated way the photos guided and focused my research. Most importantly my use of the photos had the effect of diverting attention from me the researcher and onto the local reality and individuals' reflections on that reality. I had fallen accidentally into an effective strategy for research.

Although I had planned to photograph the communities with a view to illustrating my dissertation I was unaware that the use of photos as a methodology was a little used but accepted approach. That I had not considered using photos is hardly surprising given

the general paucity of photos in works on Latin American history, a notable exception being Robert Williams' work on coffee and state formation in Central America in which Eadweard Muybridge's photos of workers on plantations are prominent (Williams 1994). However the photographs of coffee pickers and port facilities taken by Muybridge were not used as part of a research methodology but are used by Williams to illustrate the text.

The Status of Photographs

Before discussing the appropriateness of the use of photos as one element of a multi-method approach to my research, I examine theoretical approaches to the status of photos in research before looking at the innovative use of photos within the method known as "photo elicitation". Cameras have been available to researchers since their invention in the 19th century. Although cameras were initially mostly in the hands of experts such as Muybridge, with the invention of the first SLR Leica in 1923 and the instamatic camera in 1963 non-specialists increasingly took advantage of the technology. Notwithstanding the making of ethnographic films where the moving image constituted the central element of the research findings, most research uses photography in a limited way. Photos are incorporated into text as decorations to support the findings and are presented in an unproblematic way with little or no discussion of the context in which photos they were taken, the purpose of the photographer or the intended viewers of the photos

In the following section I examine the assumption of objectivity which has to a greater or lesser extent underpinned the non-critical use of photos in research. Although with the development of digital cameras and the capacity to manipulate images we are increasingly aware of the subjectivity of photography there is still a residual trace of the assumption of objectivity which must be addressed. From their invention in the 19th century cameras were regarded as marvels of science. Photos, it was believed, could not only capture reality as it was, but could see more than the human eye could see. Furthermore the act of taking a photo was in essence a chemical process which overcame people's artistic limitations; photos captured the detail of reality in a way that artists had struggled to do. Into the 20th century people continued to regard photos as accurate, authentic and objective. The Los Angeles Times recently sacked one of its news photographers who was covering the US/British invasion of Iraq when it was revealed that he had combined elements from two photos, to as he described it, "improve the composition" (Guardian 2003).

In fact photos are not mirrors of reality but the product of human intention, created in certain ways for particular purposes. Photographers choose who or what is photographed, what light is employed and the angle of view. Furthermore as Douglas Harper argues, photos are socially constructed because they are a product of the ideology of the photographer (Denzin and Lincoln eds. 2000:727). In her collection of essays on early British anthropology Edwards discusses the ways in which anthropologists used the tool of photography to confirm the unequal relations between colonizer and colonised (Edwards 1992:46). She notes that there are, for example, no photos taken by colonized people of colonial officials. Harper highlights the use of power in a collection of photos of the development of dairy farming in the north-eastern US after World War 1. The photos taken by men of production on the farm paid no attention to the work of women in maintaining the house.

One of the most disturbing and striking examples of where photos taken subjectively are received as objective fact is in the *National Geographic's* presentation of the Maya of Central America. Peter Hervik points out that this mass circulation periodical which sponsors dozens of archaeological sites and claims to be a scientific and educational institution, has been the subject of a comprehensive analysis by Lutz and Collins (Hervik 1999:63). The two writers examine both the production and consumption of photographs and texts contained in the periodical and conclude that the periodical intentionally avoids presenting subject matter in ways that might contradict the commonly accepted views of many middle class Americans, that Guatemalan indígenas are undeveloped and un-westernised (Hervik 1999: 65). Lutz and Collins argue that readers are disproportionately influenced by the simplistic presentation of Mayas. It is the glossy colour photographs in *National Geographical* that capture the attention; 53 % of readers do not read the complete articles but only the captions which accompany each photo (Hervik 1999:65). Lutz and Collins charge that photos are carefully chosen by a team of picture editors and writers to convey a particular image of Mayas as exotic, remote, isolated, people.

The photo carried on the first page of the 1989 issue entitled "La Ruta Maya" shows a young man with wet skin standing before a Maya ruin. No name is provided and we are left to speculate as to whether he is sweating having just completed strenuous work. The accompanying caption reads:

> "Stepping out of time, a young Maya bears the classic features of his forefathers. Though decimated by war and disease, Maya still outnumber European descendants in much of their homeland"

(National Geographical 1989)

Hervik comments that by transforming the man into a photograph he becomes "abstracted from family, work, reflexivity and agency" (Hervik 1999:67). Wet and naked and devoid as far as we can see of any cultural traits such as clothing, the man serves the purpose of personifying a past age in the present. Maya are observed but not heard, and the combined effect of photograph and text is to collapse past and present. Such extreme examples of subjectivity masquerading as objectivity are helpful in drawing our attention to the issue of unequal power relations. We must ask whose eye has framed the photo, how photos are taken, and whose voice sets the photos in context.

Photo elicitation as a method

As Ball and Smith have shown, there is a range of contemporary uses of photography in research (Atkinson and Coffey eds. 2001). However in most cases the use of photos or film constitutes part of the final product of the research, be it film, documentary, or research paper. The use of photos as a method to generate data stands apart from other uses of photography. Calling the method "photo elicitation", Collier describes how photos taken by the interviewer could be incorporated into the interview process as reference markers (Harper 1986). In other words photographs stand in place of those general prompting questions such as "can you tell me about your work?" According to Collier, photo elicitation enables the interview to move beyond the level where people, objects and activities are described, to a level of abstraction where the person interviewed begins to reflect on the history, significance and value of the people, objects and activities. Through photo elicitation, the subject is encouraged to teach the researcher in a spirit of collaboration, and the method is much less like a mining of the subject for information (Harper 1986:25).

Whilst the use of photos to illustrate and accompany research findings is quite common, the use of cameras as research tools is still relatively unknown. However since the pioneering use of photo elicitation by Douglas Harper in 1986 to explore work in a small mechanical and welding shop in New York, there has been a growing recognition of its value as a method. Harper analyses how using old photos of mining work Margolis was able to elicit memories and reflections in interviews with elderly coal miners. It was the use of photos of actions and events which had been experienced by the miners which stimulated reflection and allowed Margolis to study the miners' political consciousness (Harper 2000: 729). In an example of photo elicitation from the Latin American context,

Harper describes how booklets of photographs were prepared and used to stimulate interviews with mothers in Lima Peru (Harper 1986:25).

Photo elicitation in North Izabal, Guatemala

In the first few weeks of research in the communities, although I was constantly showing the photographs to people, I considered the photo showing to be part of my socialising in the communities rather than my research. However, such was the interest of people in the photos and the discussions generated by them that I came to the realisation that photos were at least as effective in eliciting information as my interviews had been. Furthermore, during various interviews people asked if they could look at the photos, and before I knew it the photos were part of the interviews and I was using the photos as a tool to prompt people to talk about their communities. Anticipating that this demand for the photos would be repeated I began to consider how I could better manage what had been hitherto a productive but rather haphazard approach. I reviewed the photos and a made a selection from them according to two main criteria. Firstly, I picked the photos which had already worked best, that is those which had already prompted responses and would allow me to pursue my interest in community identity. Although the innovative quality of photo elicitation lies in its capacity to generate responses which I had not anticipated I did select the photos. Secondly, I tried to ensure that men and women, young and old, leaders and ordinary community members appeared in the photos. I was aware that whilst I was endeavouring objectively to include a range of people in the photos, my selection of the photos and the photos themselves were still highly subjective. Just as the smiles on photographs in family albums which are the product of a selection process may belie the quality of life in a family, so the photos which I selected could limit the scope for discussion and guide the responses in particular directions.

The ethical implications of taking and using photographs were of great concern to me. Gaining consent to take photographs was a prerequisite for my research, and a sensitivity to the moments when photography was inappropriate was with me throughout the research period. The photos which I used had been taken during the late 1980s when I was working in the region. At the time I had asked for permission to take photos for use in social development project reports. In all the communities where I took photos there were education and health projects whose continuing funding depended upon the submission of written reports accompanied by photos to the funding agencies. The photographs included mundane images of work and daily tasks as well as images of fiestas and religious

ceremonies. Since I was using one set of ten photos which carried images from all four of the communities which I visited it was imperative that I checked with people who appeared in the photos before showing them in other communities. I gave copies of the photos to many of the people they featured but because of the humid conditions in the region it was difficult for people to preserve them.

How the photos were used

The ten photos which I selected to elicit discussion of agricultural production, community gatherings and the attitudes of different people to community are included in appendix 4. I carried these photos with me at all times because I found that apart from the moments when I had planned to use the photos, there were other moments when people would approach me wanting to see the photos. These impromptu encounters were often just as productive as more premeditated ones for my research. The planned sessions in which I introduced the photos were with community leaders and representatives responsible for land, health, education and religion as well as teachers and pupils. The underlying influence in the selection that I made was my interest in examining commonalities and differences within communities as to control of land and economic and social development.

I was frequently asked to lend the photos for an hour at a time by people who wanted to show them to the rest of their family. Sometimes I lent the photos out in this way and on other occasions I took the opportunity to go with the person to their house in order to listen to the response which the photos generated in different family groups.

My use of photos enabled me to overcome the awkwardness of the researcher/informant interview dynamic. Moreover whilst people grew tired when I seemed to be going over the same ground with my questions, they never tired of "reading" the photos. As mnemonic devices, my photos were invaluable in examining change and continuity in communities in North Izabal where little appears to have changed. At times people in the communities asked me to take photos of events in the community such as a religious ritual or a sowing party. I was then able to use these photos to ask questions about the visit and what role it served in relation to the community.

In the following section I explain in greater detail how the methodologies which I have outlined were used to examine (1) local and national contexts of communities, (2) threats to communities' land and (3) communities' strategies to defend against the threats.

The communities in local and national contexts

Communities are not accidental social organisations but are purposive dynamic units with histories. It is important to ask how the past and those traditions which underscored and "anchored" communities in the past relate to community as it is created in the present.[5] Community consensus rests on the capacity of current constructions of community to resonate with tradition as well as appeal to more recent understandings of community. Using an oral history approach I talked to two *ancianos* in each of the four communities about their memories of communities, how the communities were founded, and whether community has changed. During my participation in eight sowing sessions carried out during 2000 and 2001 I asked the men who were assembled in groups of between fifteen and twenty about the norms and beliefs which underpinned community production. I asked community leaders about the impact of the Catholic and Protestant churches on community unity and integrity. I asked whether challenges by the churches to the tradition of reciprocal relations with the earth deities undermined the capacity of communities to achieve consensus. I asked senior men and catechists in the four communities about what catholic priests have said about community traditions and the offerings made to the mountain deities, the *Tzuultaq'as*. I spoke to three Catholic priests and two Protestant pastors about their attitudes to community beliefs and observed the extent of continuing beliefs in a sacred landscape through evidence of planting rituals at both household and community levels.

In order to understand identity in North Izabal I analysed in some depth the internal dynamics within four villages, which I refer to as communities, as well as the activities of local organisations and individuals operating at supra-community level in the region. The internal dynamics of communities became evident to me through the semi-structured interviews which I held with the various political, economic and religious leaders in each of the four communities. These include the health promoter, the chair of the school committee, the land committee representative, the community promoter of *Fondo de Inversion Social*, FIS (a government quango), a Roman Catholic catechist, a Protestant church activist, a senior man, and the mayor. Initially I talked to community leaders and two senior men in each of the four communities. The senior men were able to

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[5] Writing about Q'eqchi' communities in Alta Verapaz, Richard Wilson argued that the communities' reciprocal relations with the earth deities anchored them to the land. "Anchored Communities: Identity and History of the Maya-Q'eqchi'" in Man Vol. 28, No.1 March 1993. pp.121-138

tell me about the founding and development of the communities I asked how land is distributed in the community and how labour power is organised. I asked the leaders about community norms beliefs and forms of organisation particularly in relation to land and work and whether there are community obligations and whether those obligations have changed. By participating in agricultural work such as sowing I was be able to demonstrate my interest in the work and readiness to learn from people whilst raising the same questions in a more informal way.

In order to understand how communities relate to outside institutions, I conducted interviews with four people who have a region-wide perspective and could provide information on community organisation beyond that of the four communities which are the focus of the study. I also interviewed representatives of the local council and representatives of FIS which engage with communities in the region on a regular basis. I asked community leaders how they dealt with institutions exogenous to communities.

Threats to community

The second stage of my research was to establish whether communities' livelihoods, beliefs and organisational structure were threatened. My research focused on the impact of religious groups and large landowners on traditional forms of community. Using maps and photographs of the region from the 1980s, which showed the communities and their land, I asked community leaders about the accuracy of the maps and whether there was competition for land in the region. I asked community leaders and five households in each of the four communities about the causes of the competition and the effects of competition on communities. I also asked two senior men in each of the four villages about community membership and whether competition for land has impacted and is impacting on communities' organisation of land and labour.

During conversations with a range of people during my initial visit to North Izabal in 2000, it became apparent that communities perceived the main source of threats to be *finqueros*, other Q'eqchi' communities and the environmental organisation FUNDAECO (*Fundación para el Ecodesarrollo y la Conservación*). In order to understand the aims and intentions of local *ladino* landowners and the relations between communities and large landowners, I interviewed three local landowners about their dealings with communities in relation to land and labour and the way that communities are organised. I also spoke to

people from outside the communities who came into the region to extract valuable hardwoods. I interviewed directors of FUNDAECO, an environmental organisation founded in the 1980s which controls large tracts of land which have been declared protected zones. I asked local representatives of FUNDAECO about the aims of the institution and whether they have encountered any resistance from the communities in the region. I attended six meetings at which boundary disputes between communities were addressed.

Defence of community

In order to examine the responses to threats in North Izabal I interviewed the leaders within the four communities as well as the directors of *Pastoral de la Tierra* and *Asociación Aj Awinel*, two local organisations which are addressing issues of land tenure and rural development. Both through interviews and through an analysis of the reports and project proposals made by those organisations I saw how local threats were perceived and how strategies were being formulated. I examined how intellectuals understand and represent the needs of people and communities. I observed the formulation of strategies at the various meetings that are held between intellectuals and members of the communities.

As well as interviewing the land committee representatives from each community I also interviewed the adult members of five households within each of the four communities and attended land meetings in the communities where consensus for action was discussed. Since all adults had been, or were serving in positions of responsibility in the community, I selected the adults to reflect the range of interests for which they were responsible. I interviewed the catechist, an *anciano*, the *alcalde auxiliar*, FIS promoter, and a school committee member in each of the four communities. In analysing how people defended their land my main aim was to examine whether there was community consensus on strategies to resist threats. I asked how land was related to community membership, whether consensus was achieved and what role local intellectuals played in the construction of communities. In particular I was interested in how individuals or communities attempted to procure land titles and what their intentions were once they had legal proof of ownership. In other words, I was asking whether the legalization of land and the establishing of market values for land were perceived as a threat to community. I asked the same five adults in each community whether the legal document took precedence over community norms of land control which existed prior to legalization. I also asked them

whether there were controls that might prevent individuals from selling their land thus effectively disbanding the community.

In order to address the question of community consensus on responses to threats, I interviewed the chairpersons of the land and education committees in each of the four communities. I investigated the extent of membership and support in communities for organisations working locally on issues of land and economy. Local organisations usually collect the signatures of those who are committed to particular actions and require the contribution of a nominal amount of money to support the organisation. By examining the written records of meetings I was able to gain some indication of the spread and level of interest in resistance to threats. At community meetings in the four communities, I listened to the debates provoked by threats to land and gauged the level of support for community initiatives.

As well as analysing local experiences relating to land I examined the ways in which issues relating to land and identity were conceptualised at national level by a range of intellectuals and organisations. I examined what the response strategies of intellectuals and analysts at national level were to the agrarian situation in North Izabal. In particular I looked at the most widely available analyses of land in Guatemala which have been produced by *CONIC (Coordinadora Nacional Indígena y Campesina)*, CNOC *(Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas)* and the Catholic bishops. I interviewed community leaders who participated in a meeting related to the Catholic Church document on land, *"El Clamor por la Tierra"*, which was held locally in 1988. I interviewed Pedro Esquina, a national leader of CONIC and asked him about local level strategies for securing access to land. In order to understand the activists' construction of Maya identity I interviewed activists in Maya cultural organisations such as *Consejo Nacional de Educación Maya* (CNEM), *Academia de las lenguas Mayas de Guatemala* (ALMG) and *Proyecto Movilizador de la Educación Maya* (PROMEM).

My role as researcher

In the context of the activism of indigenous people throughout Latin America my commitment and the usefulness of my work as a researcher to indigenous struggles is being challenged. Where indigenous people have a growing sense of being in control of their own identity and history, foreign researchers are expected to provide written work

which supports and furthers the aims of indigenous people (Warren 1998:82). Wilson writes that "the time is past when privileged authorities could routinely give voice (or history) to others without fear of contradiction" (Wilson 1995:7). Reservations about the motives of foreign researchers raised by indigenous activists at academic conferences were echoed at local level when a group of church leaders asked me "Why do you want to know about our traditions ...are you going to destroy them like people did before?" (Sem/15.5.00). My role as researcher also needs to be seen in the context of the proliferation of non-governmental organisations and a growing awareness at local level of international sources of funding. People in North Izabal ask me about funding for projects and I am viewed by some as a potential source of knowledge about donors in Europe. My knowledge and understanding of the region allowed me to discern those people who are good sources of information on the region. For me to be able to ask about people's past, they needed to trust me, understand my motives and to some extent see that I share their motives.

As a researcher I am not completely detached from the struggles of people in North Izabal. Whilst people in North Izabal notice that my interests coincide with the preoccupations of some people within the communities and I am made welcome in communities, I am considered to be an outsider albeit with a close familiarity with the people and the places where they live. The familiarity which I established with individuals and communities in North Izabal over a three-year period transcended the research relationship. Having lived in people's homes, participated in the sowing of their maize and so forth, I was not a community member but neither was I a passer-by. During one meal after sowing maize, an *anciano* told me "many people come through here and ask questions but they don't stay and eat with us like you" (Sep/anc/ 10.07.02). My familiarity with the communities also exposed me to difficult points of negotiation. Various people asked whether I would be a *compadre* and I was left to weigh up the responsibilities of such a commitment, whether I wanted to take it on and what the effect of saying "no" might have on relationships. In what is probably a common experience for outsiders given the current climate of increasing poverty and people's increasing awareness of international funding for Guatemalan projects, I was asked to help some local organisations to look for European funding. In responding to these requests I distinguished between actions which might benefit individuals and actions which could benefit communities. For the most part people were accepting of the fact that I did not want to

give preference to any one person, particularly since they had experienced the quarrels caused within communities by a US based child sponsorship programme. I did on the other hand agree to translate some community project proposals and submit them to European based agencies.

Chapter 3: The Maya Movement

Introduction

When Simon James wrote of the term "celtic" that it "has accumulated so much baggage, so many confusing meanings and associations, that it is too compromised even to be useful as a more general label", he could have been referring to the term "maya" (James 1999:136). Nevertheless the term is being used and the task must be to understand the attached baggage and associations in order to historicize the Maya. The term "maya" is problematic, particularly since those who advocate its use do not see it as problematic. Maya is a "factoid", "an unproven idea or assumption that is repeated so often that it becomes accepted as factual truth" (James 1999:145). Since the earliest "discoveries" made by John L. Stephens, who drew a direct link between the ruins that he observed and the people living in their shadow in the 1880s, archaeologists and linguists have used the term "maya" to refer to peoples who occupied Mesoamerica and had their zenith in the first century A.D (Stephens 1949). Subsequently scholars and indigenous activists have picked up the term and used it to analyse identity in Guatemala. Research reveals, however, that there is a major discrepancy between scholarly ascription of the term and its use by Mesoamerican people themselves.

Furthermore, "maya" conveys a sense of coherence, unity and shared sense of identity which did not exist in pre-conquest Mesoamerica. That people display similar ways of living, talking and thinking does not mean that they are united. The use of the term "maya" to refer to pre-conquest Mesoamerica as if there were some "common origin" may actually obscure the real histories of different groups. The authenticity and effectiveness of indigenous activists' use of the term "maya" in 2002 rests on claims that the pre-conquest Maya were a people with a common shared culture and identity and that Guatemalan indigenous people today are the heirs of that people.

In the context of deep socio-economic inequality and the failure to comply with many of the agreements signed in the mid 1990s after decades of civil war, a diverse range of indigenous academics, activists and organisations have mobilised in what has become known as "the Maya movement" (Cojt Cuxil 1997). Whether we choose to call the phenomenon Maya Resurgence (Wilson 1995), Maya Nationalism (Smith 1991) or the Maya Movement, the central point is that some indigenous people are referring to themselves in terms of an identity called "maya". There is nothing unusual about this development. Indeed many people assume that if Guatemalan indigenous peoples were to

identify in broader terms it would be as Mayas. Such an uncritical accommodating approach ignores history and assumes that the implications of Maya identity for indigenous people are positive and welcomed by indigenous people themselves. My approach is no less accommodating of indigenous agency but more critical of the form that it takes. I will historicize the emergence of Maya identity, and analyse the salience of Maya identity for different groups. In its widest sense *"el pueblo maya"* encompasses indigenous groups in Mexico and Belize as well as groups in the US and so Guatemala is in that sense an artificial boundary. My study focuses on "the Maya Movement" within Guatemala which organises indigenous people within Guatemala and attempts to reconfigure the Guatemalan state.

Adopting Vincent's understanding of ethnicity I will examine the way that Maya identity is being constructed as a mask which could both unite Guatemalan indígenas and obscure the differences which exist (Vincent 1974:377). Whilst my approach emphasises the construction of Maya identity, it does not deny the existence of traditional elements, but as I will show in Chapters 4,5 and 6 where I analyse communities, those elements are undergoing change as they are brought forward from the past. In the present chapter I emphasise that those traditional elements are understood by Maya intellectuals as essential aspects of Maya identity. They are essential in two ways. First Maya activists look back to the ancient "maya" and fix upon what they identify as shared traits; secondly they stress the intactness of those traits in the 21st century.

In this chapter I proceed by substantiating my claim that "maya" is a construct and that the nature of Maya identity and how it is forged needs to be clarified. I ask why Maya identity is emerging now, who has been promoting it, and for what purposes? Through my responses to these questions I develop the underlying theme of the chapter which emphasises the abstracted, reified nature of indigenousness as expressed in Maya identity by educated, urban-based Maya activists. In the chapters that follow I will compare that analysis of the abstracted nature of Maya identity with my findings about community identity in North Izabal.

"The ancient Maya"

The tendency of Maya intellectuals, anthropologists and historians to write indigenous history as Maya history is misleading. According to Quetzil Castañeda the term maya originates in Yucatan where it was used by the conquering Itza to refer to people whose political system and way of life was based around the calendric system in which the "may"

("hoof" in Yucatec language) was a unit. Maya subsequently came to be applied by archaeologists to the settlements centred upon the major sites of Yucatan because Maya was spoken in that region (Castañeda 1996:13). Wolfgang Gabbert concurs that at the time of the conquest, Maya referred to the north of Yucatan and particularly the zone of influence of the city of Mayapan. However Gabbert points out that the term "maya" was not used to refer to all people but was a "prestigious self-identification" by the ruling elite (Gabbert 2000:8).

The assumption of an ethnic consciousness encompassing all speakers of Yucatec Maya is then, unfounded. The conquest did not fracture a people with an intact self-conscious political identity. Our limited knowledge of pre-conquest Mesoamerica reveals instead that Mesoamerica was divided between city-states which were not in themselves homogeneous units but strategic political groupings (Schele and Mathews 1998:18). Furthermore the elites in city-states were differentiated from the majority of people through their adoption of Toltec and Nahuatl culture and in particular the intermarriage of elites. Included in and central to the differentiation of elites from the majority were Maya priests and cultural practitioners such as time-keepers. What is not clear or at least not available to us is the non-elite account of pre-conquest Mesoamerica. Our incomplete understanding of pre-conquest societies nevertheless tells us that exploitation existed both within and between city-states. Robert Carmack outlines the existence of greater and lesser states and the internal differentiation within states between elite and the population. At the time of the conquest the population of what is now Guatemala was split between various political groupings including the Kaqchikels centred on Iximche, the K'iche' on Utatlan and the Mam at Zaculeu (Carmack 1981:43-70).

It is highly doubtful whether people in Mesoamerica during the first century or indigenous people at the time of the Spanish conquest identified themselves as Maya. The existence of a self-identifying social unit called the Maya in the pre-conquest period is open to question, as is the salience of Maya identity for *indígenas* in Guatemala today. According to Peter Hervik the tendency to make uncritical assumptions about Maya identity is evident in the work of Wilson and Watanabe (Hervik 2001:243). Hervik claims that they use ethnographic data from Chiapas and Yucatan to understand communities that they are studying in Guatemala and by doing so they bring together activities which were sometimes centuries apart without taking into consideration local context and history. This use of what Peter Hervik terms "cross regional, cross temporal sources" amounts to the essentialising of mayanness "across time and space" (Hervik 2001:245).

In order accurately to analyse contemporary Guatemalan history I will restrict the use of the term "maya" to those people who define themselves in those terms. I will use the term Q'eqchi' to denote Q'eqchi' language speakers, and the term indigenous to refer more generally to people from any of the 21 so called "mayan" language groups. To use the term "maya" indiscriminately to refer to all Guatemalan *indígenas* implies that all indigenous people regard themselves as being part of a politically self-conscious group, which is not the case. Whereas Maya intellectuals such as Demetrio Cojti Cuxil assume a latent "maya" identity in all Guatemalan indigenous people, I will interrogate the construction of mayaness. Whilst not wanting to deny the existence of enduring traditions, it is important to expose the way that the fields of linguistics and anthropology have thrived on a self-produced image which presents "a deep cultural continuity between the ancient Maya and contemporary speakers of Maya languages" (Schackt 2000:13). The tendency of different academic disciplines to uncritically adopt the term Maya suits the purpose of Maya activists working to forge a single national ethnic identity.

The context in which the Maya Movement emerged

In the following section I address the question of why the Maya Movement has come to the fore during the past fifteen years. A range of different explanations has been proposed to account for the emergence of the Maya movement. The Maya Movement can be understood as a recent phenomenon whose emergence is explained in terms of various factors including the failure of armed struggle to produce change and the emergence of identity politics globally. Kay Warren draws our attention to four distinct yet complimentary approaches which have emphasised the different aspects of recent national and global politics. Sometimes referred to as the "Maya holocaust", Beatriz Manz and others assert that in the counterinsurgency war of the early 1980s in which indigenous villages were targeted Maya identity became politicised (Manz 1988). Santiago Bastos and Manuela Camus are amongst those analysts who relate the Maya Movement to the decline of the left and the employment of a discourse of rights in challenging undemocratic governments (Bastos and Camus 1993). Deborah Yashar links the emergence of the Maya Movement to the democratic opening which, however problematic contrasts with the shut down of civil society under earlier military governments (Yashar 1997). Michael Kearney's approach places the emergence of the Maya Movement within the wider context of flows of people where dislocation and migration brings people from a range of ethnicities into contact with each other (Kearney 1996). These different explanations

which I have outlined are valid for different groups in different contexts point to the heterogeneity of indigenous experience in Guatemala.

Rather than viewing indigenous people as one homogeneous unit it is important to differentiate indigenous people in terms of their experience of civil war, democratic opening, migration and economic development. Greg Grandin argues that rather than being understood as a purely contemporary phenomenon the Maya Movement needs to be understood in the context of state formation, "the very processes that spawned the project the movement now seeks to displace" (Grandin 2000:9).

My view is that the Maya Movement should be understood in the wider context of alliances and divisions in Mesoamerica. In other words our understanding of the Maya as a people needs to be questioned. The Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification documents an appalling period in Guatemalan history when of the approximately 200,000 Guatemalans killed or disappeared, 83% of the victims were indigenous people (CEH 1998:17). Notwithstanding the catastrophic impact of the counterinsurgency campaigns on indigenous communities it is my view that viewing the recent Guatemalan civil war as the watershed event before which class was the dominant paradigm and after which identity has taken precedence obscures the longer history of ethnic organising. My approach sets the contemporary Maya movement within the longer history of the formation of ethnic identities whose basic concerns are "resources, power, livelihood, autonomy, interdependence, knowledge of oneself and others and a sense of the past and the future" (Wade 1994: 113).

The long run of history reveals much ethnic organizing and political alliances in Guatemala of which the Maya Movement is the latest twist. There are some common threads to the emergence of identities in Guatemala. The existence of city states points to significant ideological and political differences within what is idealized as a people by many contemporary Maya activists. Mirroring the dominance of certain sectors of the Maya population today, namely the K'iche' and Kaqchikel, pre-conquest Mesoamerica was the site of competition between different groups resulting in the sidelining or subordination of others" (Levenson 1997:195). Centeno reflects that the movement could be a "thinly disguised strategy of subhegemony" which amounts to "K'iche' imperialism" (Centeno 1997:193). It is therefore important to examine the implications of such a development for people outside the K'iche'/Kaqchikel speaking regions, such as Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal.

The promoters of Maya identity

In this section I focus on the people who promote Maya identity. In particular I examine how urban educated Mayas are addressing their skills and experience to the task of fashioning an identity which is sufficiently general to cover indigenous particularities. I argue that the nature of Maya identity has been greatly influenced by Maya activists with backgrounds in the fields of linguistics and education, and as a consequence it is an abstract, reified identity. Since Kay Warren has already provided detailed analysis of the work of Maya intellectuals (Warren 1998), and various writers have examined the nature of Maya organisations (Bastos and Camus 1996,Borrell 1997), my treatment of the promoters of Maya identity will be sparing in order to examine in greater depth convergences and divergences between Q'eqchi' communities and the Maya Movement.

The possibility of uniting all indigenous people in Guatemala as Mayas rests on the successful construction and wearing of a mask which at once obscures differences and emphasises shared elements. During the mid 1990s Maya identity was a mask worn for strategic purposes. In 1994 more than 140 Maya organisations combined to form COPMAGUA (Coalition of the Organizations of Maya People of Guatemala) in order to press for the inclusion of indigenous concerns in the negotiations between the government and the guerrilla forces (Otzoy 1996:33). Antonio Otzoy has argued that the formation of COPMAGUA represented "a process of consensus building in which indigenous groups have sought to overcome their individual interests"(Otzoy 1996:33). However, whilst the organisation COPMAGUA was useful in bringing disparate Maya groups together for the peace accords, in the longer term the competing differences between those organisations on leadership, strategy and emphasis came to the fore (ibid). The most prominent intellectuals at the time of the peace accords including Sam Colop and Demetrio Cojti, became the spokespersons for Maya movement and so also became its unofficial leaders. However these intellectuals had not been selected in any way by the Maya masses and their status owed as much to their high public profile, academic publications and links to international organisations as it did to support from the grass roots. The crisis of Maya leadership came to a head in 2000 when the quality and authority of Maya leaders was challenged by both Mayas and non-Mayas in a series of critiques in the newspapers *Prensa Libre* and *Siglo Veintiuno*. The Maya mask, which had been worn to ensure that a wide range of indigenous issues figured in the peace accords, soon slipped to reveal major differences on culture and economics, leadership, strategy and objectives. Furthermore, whilst more than 140 Maya organisations participated in COPMAGUA, the input to the

peace accords did not reflect the position of those indigenous groups that were less politicised, or those people who did not neatly fit into the increasingly bi-polar identification of Guatemalans as either *ladino* or *indígena*. Maya identity presented in the form of COPMAGUA, was not lasting and meaningful. Although the process of promoting Maya identity is clearly construction, the mask itself is made up of essential elements – or at least it is a prerequisite that the elements are perceived as being essential. What Kearney calls the "intentional strategic essentialism" of Maya activists who purposefully elaborate Maya identity is manifested in their promotion of Maya languages, Maya education and a Maya version of history (Kearney 1999:494).

The term Maya Movement is the term most commonly used by Maya activists themselves to refer to a range of organisations, individuals and coalitions which reflect sometimes conflicting perspectives on issues of indigenous identity (Fischer/Mckenna Brown 1996:1). The maintenance of distinctive positions and organizations within the movement is evidence of competing agendas and interests based on class gender and ethnicity. Benjamin Son Turnil noted the existence of more than 400 organisations of different types affiliated to the Maya Movement (Son Turnil 2000:285), and a research team directed by Victor Borrell distinguished between four levels of Maya organisation (Borrell 1997:78). Organisations of the first level are primarily local or community level organisations. Second level organisations consist of more than one of the first level group and often operate at regional level. Organisations such as the Academy of Maya Languages of Guatemala, which was founded in the 1970s, belong to the third level of Maya organisations which pushed the state on issues such as Maya education, cultural rights and so forth. The fourth level is the level at which there is maximum coordination and coalition building for strategic purposes. For example COPMAGUA (The Coordination of Organizations of the Mayan people of Guatemala) represented Mayas at the Civil Society Assembly and thus influenced the formulation of the Peace Accord dealing with indigenous rights. However there is no single Maya organisation which can claim to represent the interests of all Mayas. Indigenous organisations work from a position of power when they are based on agreed interests, however problems can arise if, in the process of establishing the common ground, differences are ignored or glossed over.

In reality the aims of the movement are the aims of certain educated Maya. Thus Maya intellectuals such as Raxche have a clear focus in stressing the recovery and development of the languages as the main initial objective (Raxche 1996:76). Maya intellectuals perceive language loss to be an issue, drawing a clear connection between

Maya language loss and loss of Maya identity. The consolidation of the use of Maya languages, the pursuit of constitutional reform and the official recognition of international legislation on indigenous rights are oft-repeated short-term aims. In the long term Maya activists envisage addressing the overall structural inequalities in Guatemala through culturally appropriate sustainable development (Raxche 1996:70).

Proponents of Maya identity are influenced by two factors, (1) their own position as urban based experts in the field of bilingual education and linguistics and (2) their need to fashion an identity which will fit all indigenous people. Much of the work of activists is focused on the imagining of "*el pueblo maya*" entailing the stress of commonalities in language and cultural practices. The construction of Maya identity is propelled by numerous workshops and conferences, the distribution of Maya publications, and the polemic of both Maya and ladino intellectuals in the national newspapers. The role of university-educated Mayas is central in the promotion of Mayaness, as I will discuss below. Whilst there is evidence of Maya activism throughout Guatemala, the Movement is most strongly established in the urban centres and region traversed by the Pan American Highway in western Guatemala. The majority of high-level activists belong to the K'iche' and Kaqchikel groups. Yet, as Adams highlights, regional variations are also important to understanding ethnicity. Towns in the western highlands have a different history of regional trade, dislocation from the land and alliances between the state and Indian elites. According to Adams the evolution of ethnic relations in Alta Verapaz and Izabal is different (Adams 1996:55).

In order to appeal to all indigenous people Maya activists need to produce an identity which transcends class differences because indigenous people are multi-class. Maya intellectuals downplay differences within the ancient "maya" and class differences within present day indigenous people. Recent research by Greg Grandin reveals, however, that exploitation by indigenous of other indigenous impacts upon identity. Grandin analyses how the attempts of K'iche' elites in Quetzaltenango to construct a national identity were thwarted during the reformist governments when the struggle for access to land placed K'iche' elite in direct opposition to poor K'iche's (Grandin 2000:212).

Demetrio Cojti claims that in defending the interests of Maya people the Maya Movement is inter-sectorial and inter-class. He does, however, acknowledge that it is the Maya middle class which plays the central role in galvanising the Maya people (Cojti 1997:50). The significance of Cojti's view is that it simplifies a much more complex class make-up within indigenous communities. Cojti's acknowledgement that some *indigenas*

are not poor is framed in terms of an ideal where one class advances the cause of all. Carol Smith distinguishes three categories of Maya Movement activists, the categories being students and intellectuals, community-based professionals, and members of local non-governmental organisations and cooperatives. In other words there are few Maya Movement activists from amongst the majority of Maya who are *campesinos*, workers on plantations and small traders (Smith 1991:30).

The nature of Maya activism and the Maya identity produced is directly related to the experience of its main proponents. Edward Fischer identifies three generations of Maya activists whose professional and political expertise has been developed through contact with foreign linguistics institutions, Catholic Church groups and more recently with pan-Maya activists (Fischer 2001:105). During the 1950s, when the reformist government of Jacobo Arbenz was promoting national development premised on the incorporation of backward rural *indígenas* into a new national identity, the Wycliffe Bible Translators, also known in their secular guise as the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL), were granted a contract by the national indigenous institute of Guatemala to carry out work on Maya languages (Fischer 2001:91). The impact of the SIL was contradictory. Whilst working towards the assimilation of all indígenas, SIL produced an extensive body of data on the Maya languages as well as training young Indians in the techniques of linguistics. Not only did the SIL equip indigenous people for work in the linguistics field, but also it provided a source of what Fischer has called "oppositional unity" when it opposed plans for the standardization of Maya orthography in the 1980s (Fischer 2001:91). Another linguistics Institute, the *Proyecto Linguistic Francisco Marroquin* (PLFM), which was founded in 1971 as an alternative to the SIL, also trained dozens of young indígenas as linguists. From its Catholic Church inspired origins, the PLFM rapidly became a secular institute establishing self-reliance through its successful Spanish language school. Both SIL and the PLFM have been instrumental in the formation of Maya activists and in giving them a very linguistic orientation.

Another major source of formation was Catholic Action, a programme sponsored by the Catholic Church in the 1950s to counteract the growth of communism (Samandu 1998:75). Central to the programme was the training of local people who were to act as religious leaders in their communities. Although always carrying a social message, Catholic Action took on a more overt social position following the second Vatican Council in the 1960s and the meeting of Latin American bishops at Medellin in 1968 where the influence of Liberation Theology was strong. Through Catholic Action

indígenas from many communities were trained as catechists, literacy promoters and health promoters (Samandu 1998:75). In addition promising students from throughout Guatemala were sponsored to undertake further do further studies at colleges run by religious orders in Antigua and Guatemala City (Fischer 2001:91). Many Maya activists born between the 1940s and 1970s were involved in Catholic Action and the work of linguistics institutes (Fischer 2001:91). Whether at home, studying in Maya orientated schools or working in Maya organisations, the third generation of activists born since the 1970s have been steeped in Maya activism from the outset (Fischer 2011:91).

According to Cojti, the Maya middle class has a greater level of consciousness of being people *"para si"* and is engaged in activities in the cultural/political field at national level to defend the Maya's national interests (Cojti 1997:52). *Campesino* Maya and proletariat Maya with links to the popular organizations have a consciousness of class *"para si"* and a consciousness of being Maya *"en si"*. Whilst maintaining a high degree of cultural authenticity and a *"conciencia de pueblo en si"*, Maya *campesinos* who are illiterate are not aware of their national potency as a people. That indígenas may strategically assert their community identity and identity is not considered.

Cojti's analysis reflects his class position as one who knows, writing about those who don't know, but who can come to know. Employing the language of class consciousness to ethnicity Cojti's analysis tends to depict *indígenas* as more or less aware depending on education and the extent to which their aspirations are in line with the Maya Movement. I argue that ethnicity is not merely about awareness of a shared past and other traits, but it is forged through its usefulness in a particular context. According to the Maya Movement's analysis Guatemalan Indians are Mayas or latent Mayas. The Maya people is *"Mayanista y por ende anticolonialista, solamente que con diferentes grados de conciencia y formas de accionar"* (Cojti 1997:50).

The promotion of Maya identity is not something that prompts either support or criticism from indigenous people. The debates carried out in academic conferences and political meetings hardly impinge on the daily lives of the majority of poor indigenous people. Educated Mayas face the problem of being both abstracted from the lives of ordinary poor rural indigenous as well as promoting an indigenous identity which is an abstract image of indigenous culture. The distance that exists between Maya intellectuals and the bases has prompted criticisms and soul searching amongst some intellectuals. There is a concern amongst some Maya activists that Maya leaders have some relevance to urban Maya but do not represent all Maya. As Victor Montejo, a regular Maya columnist

in a Guatemalan daily newspaper commented, "*Se teme que se desligue de la realidad social, politica y economica del pueblo maya en general*" (Montejo 7/3/2000 *Siglo XXI*). The unproductive competition between Maya leaders contrasts with true Maya leadership which Montejo sees as emerging from tradition and collaboration (Montejo 7/3/2000 *Siglo XXI*).

Through various articles entitled "*Crisis del liderazgo Maya*", which appeared in the Guatemalan daily newspaper *Siglo XXI*, Montejo questions the motives and authority of the "*burgesia Maya intellectual*". Montejo differentiates three groups within the burgesia Maya, "*populares*" – leaders who have established international revolutionary solidarity, "*intellectuals*" who work in the city with ONG's and the government and "*los que han sacado ventajas de las ONG's y que han utilizado las organizaciones como trampolin para sus intereses economicos y politicos.*" The position of certain Maya activists was further undermined when they took up posts in the Portillo government alongside Rios Montt, the ex-general who directed a military campaign which destroyed hundreds of indigenous communities in the early 1980s (Montejo 25/2/2000). Whilst some Maya figures have entered congress representing one of the existing political parties, which are inevitably *ladino* dominated, others maintain that it is premature to enter electoral politics (Otzoy 1996:33). The reticence about entering electoral politics is well founded. There is nothing to suggest that a Maya candidate and party would garner all the indigenous vote. For some there is a need for more grassroots organising and consensus building before launching into politics. Maya engagement in politics complicates the separation of Maya and state. According to the internal colonialism analysis employed by some Mayas, the state is against Mayas who are victims of a structurally unjust system. The economic benefit derived by certain Maya activists from their work on Maya promotion is viewed with cynicism by some Mayas. In a country with a history of corruption and nepotism among the political class it is perhaps not surprising that the Mayas who are driven to work in new 4-wheel drive vehicles at *Fondo de Desarollo Indígena* (FODIGUA) are viewed with suspicion by other indigenous people (Montejo 29/3/2000). Sam Colop, another Maya newspaper columnist, points out that working within the system can deeply compromise Mayas. He remarks that in depending on foreign agencies for funding, Maya organizations work within the limits set and sometimes under the management of non-Mayas. He cites the case of a job advert where "*personas de la raza indigena*" were encouraged to apply but a *ladina* was eventually

appointed. This is but one case where well-qualified Maya were not even short-listed (Colop *Prensa Libre* 9/12/2000).

The gap between the Maya middle class and ordinary indigenous people is brought into sharp relief by struggles for access to land. According to the Ministry of Agriculture 500,000 families are barely surviving at below subsistence level *"en gran parte por la carencia de tierras de cultivo"*, it is no surprise that land should be the main focus of popular indigenous organizing. The invasion by 65 families of a *finca* in Chisec is but one example of a general problem of lack of access to land in Guatemala. (*Prensa Libre* 30/04/02) At the *Segundo Encuentro Continental de Resistencia, Indigena, Negra y Popular* which was held in Quetzaltenango in 1991, differences between what have been termed "popular" and "cultural" organisations became apparent (Hale 1994:11). The "popular" organizations such as *Comite de Unidad Campesina* (CUC) and *Consejo Nacional de Viudas Guatemaltecas* (CONAVIGUA) are class-based organizations of predominantly indigenous membership which "have political roots in working class movements inspired by historical materialist critiques of capitalism and imperialism" (Warren 1997:190). By contrast the "cultural" organizations are regarded as *"propiament maya"* although some of their members have participated in popular groups (Borrell1997:74). Cultural organizations focus their attentions on education and language and spirituality whereas popular organisations deal with material issues such as land. Most writers recognise the tension that exists between popular and cultural perspectives in the Maya Movement (Bastos and Camus 1993:169). However by labelling the different organisations "popular" and "cultural", commentators gloss over the fact that they are both driven by economic impulses. The term "cultural" obscures the different structural positions of indigenous people.

For strategic purposes some Maya activists and foreign academics choose to play down the materialist concerns of many rural based Maya. In their edited volume on Maya Cultural Activism, Edward Fischer and McKenna Brown do not include treatment of land (Fischer, McKenna Brown 1996). For Estuardo Zapeta the continuing campaigns by poor Guatemalans for access to land which he refers to as *"re-campesinizacion"*, is a kind of postcolonial nostalgia based on the unfounded belief that while there are still *campesinos* there can be revolution (Zapeta 4/4/2000 *Siglo XXI*). Such trite dismissals of the struggles of rural based Maya reflect a view implicit in many of the writings of Maya intellectuals that, during the 1970s and 1980s the *ladino* left exploited Maya *campesinos*. Whilst it is clear that the guerrilla organisations were led by *ladinos* and influenced by revolutionary

movements in Nicaragua and elsewhere, it is wrong to conclude that Mayas developed a false consciousness during the civil war. Mayas were not duped by *ladino* guerrilla leaders. Revolutionary discourse and the praxis of Liberation theology resonated with the experiences of rural based Guatemalan *indígenas*. Zapeta on the other hand is an intellectual and therefore has little reason to be interested in the question of land rights and rural investment even though it is a burning issue for many indigenous communities.

By contrast Juan Tiney, the leader of *Consejo Nacional Indígena y Campesina* (CONIC) asserts that land is the foundation of culture, "*Nuestro gran problema es que no hay una base sólida sobre la cual se sostiene esa cultura...el eje principal de nuestra lucha es por la madre tierra*" (Borrell 1997:111). Furthermore Tiney points to a fundamental difference between Maya as envisioned by middle class Maya activists and indigenous identity based on land. Ours is not a "*cultura imaginaria...sino que tiene raíces y esas raíces vienen de la madre tierra*" Tiney declares (Borrell 1997:114). Tiney highlights the challenge facing Maya intellectuals for whom the task is to construct a general identity which is not cut loose from the roots which make it meaningful.

The selection of certain elements of the Mayaness at the expense of others evident in the work of foreign anthropologists glosses over the many differences that exist, and conveys the impression that a monumental shift has taken place which supersedes class differences (Warren1998: Fischer/McKenna Brown 1996). Richard Adams points out that up until the 1950s indigenous communities have not seen alliances with other communities as useful in dealings with the state (Adams 1996:52). Whilst there is ample evidence of competition between villages over sources of water and land rights, "*El hecho de una identidad ancestral común no era un factor que ayudara a resolver disputas sobre los derechos a la tierra*" (Adams 1996:52). The return of the refugees and the end of the civil war has highlighted unresolved land ownership disputes. Stoll draws our attention to the disputes which affected the family of Rigoberta Menchu Tum as well as other disputes in the Ixil Region. To argue that such disputes were ultimately caused by the colonial powers or the coffee economy in the late 19th century perpetuates the view of Mayas as victims.

Maya: an abstract identity

In the following section I analyse what Maya identity is and how the mechanisms for the dissemination of that identity contribute to the abstracting of it from the lived experience of indigenous people.

As Anderson has argued, the emergence of "print as commodity" was crucial to the growth of national identity in Europe (Anderson 1991: 44). Similarly in contemporary Guatemala print is fundamental to the propagation and dissemination of a shared identity and the imagining of Maya. In 1986 the Academy of Mayan Languages (ALMG) was founded to encourage the use of Maya languages in the face of language loss. Officially ratified by the state in 1990 as an autonomous state organisation, the ALMG has been at the forefront of language revitalisation work. Particularly important are the ongoing collaborations between Maya linguists, educationalists and the main universities in Guatemala. The work goes beyond a simple translation of existing school texts into Maya languages. The new texts aim at a more culturally sensitive approach to the diversity of the Guatemalan population. That there is no blurring of the boundaries between identities is evident in Maya linguists' concerned with the purity of Maya languages. In order to maintain what they regard as authentic Maya languages, linguists have refurbished words found in colonial documents and promote new "Maya" words (neologisms) to refer to modern technological innovations such as computers rather than borrowing from Spanish or English (Fischer 2001:120).

Although Anderson's discussion of print culture is related to the emergence of nation states, his approach is useful in understanding the growth of ethnic groups. Furthermore the approach is useful in directing us to the dynamics of ethnic organising. The fact that the language work requires both Maya language skills and knowledge of linguistics as well as some understanding of pedagogy places it beyond the present capabilities of the majority of indigenous people. The effectiveness of print-culture as a means of building a national identity rests on the top-down dissemination of a cultural package which may resemble that of the target group but has been selected by an educated elite group. The expansion from local identities to a single national Maya presents problems because of the possibility of the subordination of some local identities. One possibility is that the K'iche' language, being the most widely spoken of the Maya languages could be designated the official Maya language with other Maya languages receiving official recognition for use at local level (Borrell 1997:128). However K'iche' speakers amount to only approximately 20% of the indigenous population and K'iche' is one 21 different Maya languages and any rationalisation would reflect the power differential between indigenous groups (Warren 1998:16).

The stress on print culture has had a major impact on identity politics through its creation of an employment market in Maya identity. Economic value has at least in the

short-term been placed on the ability to read and write in Maya languages. Furthermore print culture inevitably entails a standardization of ideas about indigenousness and the need to distil identities and histories to fit the text books.

Print culture and Maya education

In this section I examine the assertion of Maya identity through Maya education and proposals for a Maya curriculum. I argue that Maya identity is a reified, idealised community. Whilst it is not my intention to provide a thoroughgoing analysis of education in Guatemala, I will examine the way that the abstract nature of Maya identity is very apparent in proposals for Maya education and the formulation of a Maya curriculum. Although by June 2002 an agreed Maya curriculum had not been finalised by Maya activists, I was able to examine the construction of Maya identity in education through interviews with teachers, representatives of Maya educational organisations and analysis of curriculum proposals.

The creation of Maya schools with Maya education is a central plank in the strategy of the Maya Movement and the context in which Maya print will be conveyed to all indigenous people in Guatemala. The Accord on indigenous rights advocates a reform of the education system in order for it to respond to the cultural and linguistic diversity in Guatemala (MINUGUA 2001:41). The extent and quality of education places limits on the possibility of imagining community whether it be Q'eqchi', Maya, Guatemalan or some combination of the three. For many indigenous communities the issue is not whether education should be Maya, intercultural, western and so forth, but whether there will be a teacher.

The concept of Maya education and Maya schools is theoretically problematic and challenging in practical terms. That there are competing notions of Maya is borne out by the range of organizations involved in the education reform process and the protracted nature of discussions at a time when education provision has been expanded markedly. The inability to reach a consensus and produce an outline curriculum has meant that different versions of the state curriculum are being taught by a range of education providers with a variety of approaches to identity. Evident in the existing school texts is a lack of clarity over the treatment of the history of *indígenas*. The concept of Maya schools assumes the control by Mayas of their own education (Becker Richards 1996:216). Thus the decentralisation plans of the current government do facilitate a degree of control by local people. However the control by local communities and villages is not complete

because they are reliant on organizations vetted by the Ministry of Education, which provides teachers and didactic materials. Included among the local education providers are various NGOs and the Catholic Church. A group of schools in North Izabal which have been categorised by a local NGO as Maya schools are not regarded as Maya schools by Demetrio Cojti Cuxil, the Vice Minister of Education and Maya intellectual. In question here is the influential role played by the local Catholic Church in the administration of the schools. The form and content of education is influenced by the interests of such organisations which, although sensitive to cultural issues, do not have the promotion of Maya identity as a prime objective.

Maya activists claim that there is a clear distinction between Maya education and western education. They argue that an alien education system was imposed on Mayas, "*se víro de una educacíon socializante, de tipo familiar y en contacto directo con la naturaleza, a una educacíon competitive individualista, automizante y de aula o irreal*" (Alvarado1992:37). They stress that it is not just a question of changing the content of education. To insert Maya elements into the existing system would be tokenistic and constitute another form of assimilation. Both Maya teachers and intellectuals explained to me that there is a specifically Maya way of knowing (PROMEM 20.05.00, AWINEL 21.06.01).

Evident in Maya proposals for a Maya education is the prioritisation of a Maya counterpoise to all western areas of the curriculum. Lists of Maya subject areas such as Maya history, Maya mathematics and Maya art mirror the existing curriculum areas (Palencia Prado 2000:60). For Mayas, establishing a Maya counterpoise to western knowledge is crucial for establishing the value and authenticity of *el pueblo maya*. The process of presenting a distinct Maya education implies the selection of certain Maya figures, Maya understandings of the world and Maya ways of living. The selected elements chosen by Maya educationalists are in effect de-contextualised and reified. In the next section I will highlight the abstract nature of Maya identity with particular reference to two elements of Maya education, Maya history and Maya cosmovision.

The Maya version of history establishes a direct link between pre-conquest Mesoamerica and the Maya movement in 2002. There are three parts to the Maya understanding of history. Firstly, Maya activists claim knowledge of the Maya –a pre-conquest people, secondly Mayas homogenise the experience of the Maya as victims of internal colonialism after the conquest, and thirdly Mayas trace the re-emergence of Maya identity from the work of the Maya linguist Adrian Chavez in the 1950s. The Maya

Movement presents a challenge to non-Maya writers because it prescribes how indigenous history should be written. The working assumption of many Maya academics is that there is a people - the Maya, who have been exploited under colonialism, victimised during civil war and who now claim their rights. Put differently, Spain divided a united Maya people into the sub-groups such as the Q'eqchi' the K'iche' and the Mam. The Maya view of history tends therefore to skip 500 years of exploitation and assimilation to connect present day Mayas with the Mayas of pre-conquest times. This requires a certain amount of imagination, a selective reading of history and a conviction in the particular perspective of an emerging Maya middle class. Demetrio Cojti' Cuxil's analysis of post conquest Guatemalan history in terms of "internal colonialism." accentuates the difference between Maya and *ladino* (Cojti 1997:23). The official statistics tend to support Cojti's assertion of the inequality between Mayas and non-Mayas. According to the national survey (*La Encuesta Nacional De Ingresos and Gastos Familiares*) between 1998-99 the indigenous population was 48.6% of the total, other sources put it at higher than 60% (MINUGUA 2001 16). According to the United Nations mission more than 60% of Guatemalans live in rural areas. The percentage of *indígenas* with access to drinking water is 55.2% compared with 70.4% for non-*indígenas*. Mapping poverty in the country, the UN uses SEGEPLAN research to indicate that Jutiapa with a low proportion of indigenous people has a significantly lower poverty index than San Marcos, Totonicapan and Alta Verapaz whose high levels of indigenous population correspond to high poverty levels (MINUGUA 2001 17,18). However the UN itself admits that the lack of "*datos desagregados por identidad*" means that it is not possible fully to understand links between economics and ethnicity and, I would add, the class differentiation within regions. Comparisons between predominantly *ladino* and predominantly indigenous departments do confirm a very general notion that *ladinos* are in a better socio-economic position than Mayas but do not help us to understand class differentiation within the Maya population. That Mayas exploit other Mayas is hidden in the UN statistics and serves the purposes of the Maya Movement.

Cojti's analysis is premised on an undifferentiated view of the Maya. The Maya are seen as victims of the civil war in which they were the foot soldiers of *ladino* guerrilla forces and the victims of racist government forces (Cojti Cuxil 1997:34). The commitment of Mayas to the armed struggle is seen as false consciousness which has now been superseded by an awareness of their true identity as Mayas. However Grandin's interviews with the Peasant Unity Committee (CUC) activists reveals that indigenous identity was less subdued than Maya intellectuals believe. Grandin cites the Declaration of Iximche

where representatives of many indigenous communities expressed their identity as both indigenous people and *campesinos*. The strength of the declaration, argues Grandin, lay in the interplay of class-based and cultural-based demands where, "class-based economic demands allowed for a strategically important alliance with Ladinos, while evocations of past traditions and rights justified those demands in the present." (Grandin 2000:225)

Mayan activists avoid dealing with the complicated role that the *indígenas* have played as victims and perpetrators in sometimes conflicting class-positions during the past 500 years. There is a degree of contradiction in the Mayan activist approach which on the one hand seeks to make Guatemala a multi-ethnic nation whilst on the other hand not engaging or attempting to understand those periods in Guatemalan history when indigenous people did engage with *ladinos* and attempt to build national identity.

A central figure in Maya history is Adrian Chavez who is regarded by many Maya activists as the forefather of the Maya Movement. Prominent in the Maya approach to history is what Warren describes as "the hidden history of resistance to indigenismo and castellanizacion" (Warren 1997:185). Just as in their version of history, *ladinos* have made reference to particular events and individuals whilst ignoring others, so the Maya movement is selecting events and individuals in line with its objective to fashion an identity which will appeal to all indigenous Guatemalans. In elevating Chavez, the Maya movement emphasises its understanding of Mayaness based on language as opposed to understandings of indigenousness based on community and control of resources.

The primacy of language is a common theme in the writings of both Maya activists and foreign anthropologists. Cojti states that the "Maya people exist because they have and speak their own languages" (Cojti 1990:12). Fischer traces recent Maya history back to the pioneering work of Adrian Chavez (1904-1987) a K'iche' teacher and scholar. Chavez decided that the existing alphabet was not adequate for the representation of Maya sounds and he developed a new alphabet which combined Spanish orthography with symbols derived from Native American symbols. Chavez's breakthrough was in creating a form of written language which was versatile and could be used to write all the Maya languages. The Kiche' alphabet introduced in 1945 is regarded by Maya academics as the forerunner of the eventual standardization of Maya languages which was promoted by the Academy of Maya Languages of Guatemala and given official legislative recognition in 1987 (Fischer 2002:98). Furthermore Chavez directed a conference in Cobán which brought together indigenous teachers from throughout Guatemala. Fischer claims that this *Convivencia de Maestros Indígenas de Guatemala*, "demonstrated the potential for

ethnically based collective action providing a pan-Maya organizational model that was later widely copied within the pan-Maya movement" (Fischer 2002:98). Fischer's emphasis on the work of Chavez is a selective view of history which chooses to highlight cultural issues and the supra-community organizing of indigenous teachers at the expense of accounts of community mobilization. At the same time as Chavez and the teachers were advocating indigenous identity based on language, a very different indigenous identity was emerging from a different sector of indigenous society.

Although it had been the intention of the reformist government in 1952 to promote capitalist development in Guatemala through the protection and support for individual peasants and workers, Handy's analysis of *denuncias* (land claims) during the 1950s reveals the persistence of the understanding that land was a community resource (Handy 1994:146). Appeals were made by villages whose claim to control of land was made under threat from municipal powers as well as by communities who had lost their land to *finca* owners or other communities (Handy 1994:149). Two years after the introduction of Chavez's alphabet, violence broke out in the municipality of San Pedro Soloma, Huehuetenango where the indigenous majority had lost its land to the ladino-dominated municipal government. Handy cites newspaper reports that "hundreds of Indians marched on the municipal buildings" (Handy 1994: 149). Such events spurred President Arevalo into the introduction of legislation to counterbalance the perceived undemocratic nature of municipalities (Handy 1994:149). In 1946 he introduced legislation giving legal recognition to *comunidades indigenas* as distinct from *comunidades campesinas*. The legal status of community ensured access to municipal land and as Handy argues, "acted as a democratic and community-focused counterweight to the municipal government" (Handy 1994:154). The emergence and significance of Chavez's work requires some contextualising. Just as the Maya movement in 2002 pursues an almost exclusively cultural agenda in the context of widespread unrest and protest over land rights, so Chavez's linguistic research was carried out in the context of rural upheaval in the 1950s (Handy 1994: 138). When we examine the wider picture of indigenous organising in Guatemala during the same period, the different understandings of indigenous identity which can distinguish educated indigenous elites from ordinary indigenous people are evident. Adrian Chavez and some teachers promoted a notion of indigenousness based on shared languages at precisely the time that indigenous identity based on community membership was being asserted during the term of the reformist governments between 1944 and 1954. Maya activists' elevation of Chavez is consistent with their project of

constructing an idealized Maya community. Chavez is the personification of the Maya movement because, as a teacher and professor, he offered a reworked indigenous identity for those whose education had taken them beyond community. Maya identity as proposed by the Maya Movement attempts to provide an overarching identity which embraces both indigenous *campesinos* and those who because of business and/or education have left communities and would otherwise be likely to cease to be indigenous (Arias 1990:245).

Cosmovisión maya

Of central importance to the construction of Maya identity through Maya education is the notion of a Maya cosmovision which Tania Palencia Prado defines as,

> *"un conjunto de relaciones y estructuras lógicas y simbólicas de comprensión percepción y sensacion del yo, el mundo y el cosmos. La cosmovisión es y nutre la cultura y las condiciones históricas inciden en su movimiento y sistema de auto construcción."*   (Palencia Prado 1999:41)

At the heart of the Maya movement's understanding of Maya cosmovision is the notion of *"complimentariedad"*. Implicit in the use of the term by Maya activists are notions of balance, equilibrium, integrity of the whole and completeness. Complimentariedad is understood by Maya activists as the basic principal in the establishing and maintaining the harmony of the created order,

> *"El Maya ...no hace prevalecer al ser humano sobre los demas elementos de la naturaleza, sino mas bien lo ubica como parte complimantaria del todo. En esta cosmovision el ser humano no tiene actividad mas importante que el mantenimiento del equilibrio en defensa de su propia existencia."*
>
> (Alvarado 1995:33)

The notion of *complimentariedad* stresses the relationship between the gods and the natural world and human beings. What is particularly striking, however, is Maya activists' use of the term to understand relations between men and women. On various occasions I asked Maya activists about the separation of men and women during certain rituals, the fact that there were no women church leaders and my observation that men always dealt with community business such as land documents (PROMEM 20.05.00). On each occasion it was explained to me that this division was due to the fact that the work of both men and women was valued equally and that according to the Mayas there was *complimentariedad* between the sexes. Activists also explained to me that according to Maya beliefs there were both male and female gods. The application of

complimentariedad to communities where some women were questioning the legitimacy of a system under which men made many of the major decisions, appeared be rather crude.

Maya intellectuals claim to know what Maya believed in the first century AD, but they fail to examine the extent to which complimentariedad was something in the minds of elite Mayas and not shared by ordinary Mayas. Maya activists invoke the creation story contained in their sacred book, the *Popol Wuh*, to illustrate *complimentariedad* and equality. According to the *Popol Wuh*, man and women were made from the same raw material (Saraveia 1992:104). The Maya Movement's reliance on the *Popol Wuh* is akin to fundamentalist readings of the bible. The mindset of the writers, the context in which they write and the ways that ideas can change over thousands of years is secondary to the kernel of truth contained in the text. Thus beliefs in such things as an all male priesthood and the sinfulness of homosexuality are taken as non-negotiable facts. In similar fashion the notion of *complimentariedad* is extracted from centuries old documents and hieroglyphics.

Tania Palencia Prado points out that general assumptions about *complimentariedad* obscure the real position of women in the first century when their position was to a great extent determined by caste or group. (Palencia Prado 59) For Palencia Prado *complimentariedad* was, and is in practice, a *"unidad de desiguales"* (Palencia Prado 1999:60). In other words it was as much about what women were barred from doing as it was about completeness. The selection of elements which together make up Maya identity is therefore not an innocuous apolitical act. By trading in abstract elite generalisations which suit their purpose, Maya activists uncritically relay a system of oppression glossed as a cultural practice based on a primordial belief system. Here we see one of the functions of invented traditions. The notion of *complimentariedad* is in effect the gloss of legitimacy applied to what are in fact unequal relations in order to establish cohesion (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983:9).

The essentialism of Maya activists which tends to idealize Mayaness has been challenged by Maya women. The group Maya Mothers Kaqla criticised the form of Maya organisations which stress the role of women as pillars of the culture and assume women's submissiveness and obedience to men (Borrell 1997:109). The prominence of women such as Rigoberta Menchu and Rosalina Tuyuc belies the absence of women in senior positions in Maya organisations. Such criticisms point to power differences and the existence of exploitation within the construct Maya.

Customary law

The present level of criminality in Guatemala and the incidence of lynchings and mob
justice in the period since the Peace accords were signed in 1996 underlines the need for a
rule of law which is both democratic and pluricultural (Sieder 1999:110) In that context,
Maya activists have been envisaging a return to the community form of management
practiced by the Maya in which decision-making was by consensus. The abstract, reified
notion of Mayaness evident in Maya plans for education is also present here in debates
about autonomy and indigenous legal systems known as *derecho consuetudinario*
customary law.

The limitations of a Mayan essentialist reading of history are evident in the
difficulties encountered in defining and establishing customary law in Guatemalan
communities. An essentialist approach to history presents an idealized people - the Maya,
whose lives are ruled by community consensus and a unity with the natural order.
Secondly it establishes a direct line of continuity with the Maya largely glossing over the
construction of indigenousness at different times and under different conditions. Sieder
explains that the recovery of customary legal practices in communities is perceived by
Maya activists to be an important element in the broader strategy of building Maya
identity (Sieder1999:111). In contrast to the present state of lawlessness, pre-Hispanic
Maya society is conceived of as a harmonious people.

As Sieder points out "customary law is a historically bounded construction", a
"dynamic set of institutions and practices" The essentialist ahistorical approach of Maya
activists is problematic because it views customary laws as fixed rather than contingent.
The failing of the approach is that it does not "situate attitudes and beliefs either
perceptually, by asking what people mean and understand by these concepts, or
structurally-historically by asking how historical processes and power structures have
generated particular attitudes and beliefs in specific contexts" (Sieder 1999:111). Sieder's
analysis underlines the limitations in practical terms of an "imagined community" which,
while acknowledging linguistic variation, does not acknowledge process and the
possibility of difference and diversity.

A mask that fits?

The Maya Movement faces important questions of representation and coverage. It is
difficult to measure the degree to which the Maya movement equates to a common project
(Borrell 1998:134). The possibility that the Maya Movement will take on a wider

significance will depend to a large extent on relations between intellectuals and communities and the extent to which Maya is a meaningful identity in the struggles which are both cultural and materialist. Borrell concludes that

> *"La possibilidad de que el movimiento moviliza a amplios contingentes de las communidades dependera del trabajo de las mismas y de de la forma como el discurso combine las revindicaciones propias de la identidad Maya, con los intereses cotidianos e inmediatos de tales poblaciones."*

<div align="right">(Borrell1997:215)</div>

Assessments of the level of unity in the Maya Movement reflect the limits of studies carried out thus far. Where studies are carried out in western Guatemala and the informants are cultural activists the prospects for and relevance of maya identity is noticeably higher (Warren 1998, Fischer 2001). The study coordinated by Victor Borrell which covered a wider range of informants is more sophisticated in its appraisal of the movement (Borrell 1997). As Warren points out, the Maya Movement will not be measured by the level of "mass mobilizations". What will be evident is the emergence of numbers of teachers, community leaders and students, people with a heightened sense of being Maya and how they can act upon it (Warren 1998: 200).

Conclusion

The extent to which Maya identity continues to be closely linked to language and narrow understandings of culture, or whether it can embrace the views of community leaders for whom access to land is crucial, is an important issue. The incidence of direct actions for land throughout Guatemala raises the question of whether Maya identity can reflect the diverse interests of indígenas who are academics, business people and subsistence farmers (*Siglo XXI* 10/05/2002). Equally important for the movement, I argue in Chapter 6, is the political context in which it is working and the ways that the Guatemalan state responds to different organizations and pressures. In this chapter I have emphasised the abstract nature of Maya community as imagined by Maya activists many of whom are urban-based educated professionals. I now move away from the national perspective of Maya intellectuals and in the chapters that follow I will present my analysis of communities and leaders in North Izabal before examining the convergences and divergences between the movement and those communities.

Chapter 4 : An ethnographic presentation of Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal

Introduction

After bracing myself against crates on the back of a pick-up truck for two hours as it wound its way along an unmade road fording various rivers, it was a relief to stop in the community of Searranx and see people gathered outside a small shop having a drink.

As I sat down with my drink a teenager swigging coca cola and wearing an *"Osama Bin Laden SE BUSCA"* t-shirt asked me where I came from and proceeded to explain to me that he thought Bin Laden was still alive and hiding in a cave. The teenager told me that he had heard radio reports about the war on terrorism and he was animated as he speculated on the chances of Bin Laden being buried alive in a cave. As we sat chatting a man strode towards us along the track which led from the community of Arcochoch. Leaning into each stride, his head was locked forward as the bark strap across his forehead took the weight of the 100 pounds of maize which he had carried on his back for forty minutes. Lowering his load of maize outside the *tienda* (shop) the man then explained to the *tienda* owner that the maize would be collected by someone in the afternoon. The maize was the man's monthly payment for his son's education in the local secondary college. When I asked the man whether he ever paid for his son's education in cash, the shop owner interjected explaining that the buyers who came from Rio Dulce three hours away could not reach all the communities because of the lack of roads. The man with the maize agreed and went on to add that because the price of the cash crop, cardamom, had been very low in recent years, he had resorted to making payments in maize like many other people in Arcochoch. The conversation moved on to the imminent sowing season. All three men, the *tienda* owner, the teenager and the man from Arcochoch explained that they would be participating in communal sowing in their respective communities. They explained that, by working in groups, each household in the community received assistance in sowing a certain amount of land.

This conversation gives a revealing initial insight into the lives of people in North Izabal. Whilst on one hand it confirms the conventional view that Indians do not live in enclaves isolated from global issues, the conversation does point to the fact that social relations of production ingrained in community have not been completely superseded by market relations. It struck me that things were not how they seemed. The availability of coca cola, the global drink, and access to information about Afghanistan, the pre-eminent global issue of the day, disguised a local reality which was as much informed and

structured by community expectations as it was by individual competition. In the third millennium the ubiquity of market relations and the integration of individual people into wider groupings cannot be taken for granted. Although Guatemala is a country which has been exporting coffee since the 19th century and now exports non-traditional agricultural products such as broccoli, papaya and palm fronds for the international market, at regional level there is evidence of contradictory conditions of integration and isolation. I am not advocating a return to the approach adopted by anthropologists in the 1950s who by decontextualising and de-historicising Mexican communities, presented them in overly romantic terms. However, the case of North Izabal suggests that there are still great variations in the levels and intensity of market relations which are understandable only by reference to specific local histories.

In the following section I present the communities in North Izabal in their regional and national contexts highlighting the particularities of their local histories as a prelude to later chapters where I analyse empirical findings. My approach is consistent with Joan Vincent's argument that we should examine structural conditions in order to understand the development of different identities. (Vincent 1974:74). In particular I describe the ways that export production and civil war were experienced locally in order to understand "when it lies in one's interest to admit ethnic distinctions into social and political encounters" (Vincent 1974: 74).

The ethnographic details which follow set the communities in regional and national contexts. As I explained in Chapter 3, my knowledge of the region as a whole is derived from interviews with teachers, religious leaders and NGO workers who have a regional perspective as well from interviews with community members. The references contained within the text provide details of 1) the individual's name, 2) their position in the community or regionally, 3) their community, and 4) the date on which the interview took place.1,2,3,4) The coding is explained in Appendix 1.

The administrative context

The analytical units which form the basis of my research are *aldea* (village) communities within the municipality of Livingston rather than the municipal unit itself which comprises of the municipal town and the same *aldeas*. Typically, western highland municipalities were not only units of colonial administration but were also contiguous with ecclesiastical administrative regions since the objectives of both institutions to control and suppress the

population coincided. Each municipal town with its administrative offices and parish church also became an important local market for the *aldeas*. Since the 1960s a high proportion of western highland municipalities have been governed by elected indigenous mayors. It is common for people to refer to themselves in terms of the municipality in which they live by stating "Soy Chimalteco" or "Soy Tecpaneco" and so forth. However no such term exists for the municipality of Livingston and only those people who live in the town of Livingston refer to themselves as Livingstonians.

In North Izabal it does not make sense to employ the municipality as the analytical category, because, unlike the municipalities of western Guatemala, the municipality of Livingston was not established as the broker for exacting indigenous labour and revenue in the colonial period. David McCreery's research on forced labour regimes in the first half of the 20th century reveals that Izabal was a safe haven for indígenas trying to escape the exigencies of estate owners and the state. David McCreery cites communications from the *jefe politico* (a state functionary) of the neighbouring department of Alta Verapaz who claimed that coffee workers were fleeing into Izabal (McCreery 1994:286). The pre-eminence of *aldea* communities over the municipality in Livingston is a product of the history of the municipality. Since virtually all the *aldeas* in Livingston were established during the last century the municipal town of Livingston did not establish relations with *aldea* leaders for exacting labour and revenue. Moreover the establishment of *municipios* as the local ecclesiastical and economic hubs for the *aldeas* in western Guatemala has not come to pass in Livingston. Because of the distances and the costs entailed, few if any of the *aldeas* in the west of the Livingston municipality go to Livingston to buy or sell their produce. The ecclesiastical area, which was until 1987 contiguous with the municipality, has been divided into two parishes (Appendix 2, map 2). As a result more than seventy *aldea* communities regard the parish centre in Semaji as their religious centre rather than Livingston. Although people from the *aldeas* do travel infrequently to Livingston in order to register a birth or to vote in elections, the municipal town has not established a strong interdependent relationship with the *aldeas* and there has never been a Q'eqchi' mayor of Livingston.

The economic context

In common with communities in western Guatemala the communities of North Izabal have been deeply affected by export agriculture. However, whereas in western Guatemala

coffee production was a significant factor in the process of proletarianisation or at least the combining of wage labour with subsistence production, in North Izabal the coffee revolution produced subsistence farmers. Where Indians remained within the coffee-growing regions and were exposed to land expropriation and population pressure on depleted land, they resorted to augmenting their infra-subsistence production with work on *fincas*. For Indians who chose to leave the coffee growing region and migrate to the north and east there was the possibility of occupying *baldíos*. *Baldíos* are lands which are as yet unregistered by the state. In Guatemala, the legalization of land follows a procedure whereby *baldio* land is first registered by the state and delimited as *finca nacional* before it can then be registered in the name of an individual or community. The communities in North Izabal were established by families who migrated from the coffee growing-region.

The onslaught of export agriculture in western Guatemala greatly contributed to significant changes in indigenous communities. The reorganisation of land under state promotion of coffee, sugar and cotton produced major flows of people from the western highlands to work on plantations. From the 1950s, stratification within communities was accentuated as some indigenous people engaged in commerce, manufacturing and non-traditional agricultural enterprises. Concomitant with these changes in indigenous communities was the growth of indigenous membership in trade and *campesino* organizations (Grandin 1997: 7). Indigenous people began to identify with workers and other indigenous people beyond the community level. In an unprecedented show of unity, indigenous and *ladinos* active in CUC (Peasant Unity Committee) produced a declaration which, "linked mythic symbols of a pan-indian past with class-based interests of a brutal present" (Grandin 1997:20). In zones occupied by migrants from the coffee region there was little evidence of such organising by pan-indigenous organisations.

The extent to which export agriculture prompted organising beyond the community level and impacted upon community cohesion and identity is an important issue. Similarly the extent to which the civil war affected communities through internal divisions and dislocation is important. Approaches to Guatemalan history have been heavily influenced by the scale of human rights violations and have tended to depict the early 1980s as a generalised assault on indigenous communities. However the impact of civil war was much less severe in North Izabal than in the western highlands. Whilst there are military bases in the region the army did not attempt to set up bases in the *aldeas*. In contrast in the neighbouring parish of El Estor small temporary army camps were established in some of

the *aldeas* and massacres disappearances were carried out by the military. (*Victimas* 1984). Unlike the western highlands, where more than 400 *aldeas* were completely destroyed and thousands of people were forcibly relocated, *aldeas* in north Izabal were left terrorised but largely intact. Not only did the residents remain in their *aldeas* but also the military's tactic of using people from the *aldeas* to serve in civil defence patrols (PACs) was implemented for a relatively short period of between one and five years. During 2002 when ex civil patrollers in other regions of Guatemala were demanding compensation from the government for their services during the civil war, there was no similar mobilization in North Izabal (*Prensa Libre* 18/6/2002).

The full significance of this local history which I have briefly outlined will become more apparent when I analyse in detail the dynamics within the communities which are at the heart of my research. The following profiles of four communities provide general information about the region and the communities which I have gathered from secondary sources and presented in a descriptive form.

Communities in North Izabal

The Sierra de Santa Cruz lies at the eastern extension of the Cuchumatanes mountain system which stretches from Huehuetenango in the west to Livingston in the east. The region is further delineated by the river system Gracias a Dios/Sarstun in the north and Lake Izabal in the south (Appendix 2, map 1). Most of the region lies within the boundaries of the parish of Rio Dulce which belongs to the municipal area of Livingston. Livingston, the main urban centre of the municipal area, lies at the far east of the region and is a journey of up to two days one way on foot and by bus for people from communities at the western extreme of the parish. For this reason the mayor of Livingston holds a weekly surgery in Fronteras, Rio Dulce to attend to people from the Sierra de Santa Cruz. Fronteras, on the banks of the Rio Dulce, which is the nearest town with amenities such as banks and post office, is also the local base for some national level education and environmental organisations. The region is traversed from north to south by the main road from Guatemala City to the northern department El Petén. For reasons of access I chose not to include in my study more isolated communities in the Sierra de Santa Cruz that fall within the parish and municipal area of El Estor.

According to the INE (*Instituto Nacional de Estadísticas*) census the population of Livingston in 1994 was 39,051 with 90% of that total population living in 232 *aldeas*

nearly half of which (49%) are indigenous according to unspecified INE criteria. The majority of rural communities are populated by between 100 and 500 people (Appendix 3 table 1). Of the 70 communities in the parish of Rio Dulce, 40 are predominantly Q'eqchi' speaking and it is those communities and their situations which are the focus of my study. However since this is a qualitative study, although I visited 30 of the communities, my analysis is based on in-depth research undertaken in four of them and does not claim to represent the experience of all Q'eqchi' communities. My focus is on the majority of communities which do not hold legal titles for their land. In visits that I made to the few communities which have already obtained land titles it became apparent that raising the issue of land was a sensitive subject which it would be difficult for me to pursue.

In the communities of Guitarras and Tamagas individual community members had sold land to *finqueros*. The local NGO which is creating a database of land ownership was struggling to account for the divisions and sales of land that had been made. Based on the limited information that I was able to glean from the few people who were willing to talk about the issue I estimate that at least 25% of community members in Guitarras have sold a portion of the land allocated to them by the community. The unwillingness of community members to discuss the land issue is telling. One of the workers with the NGO informed me that there had been considerable disputes between the community and individuals over the sale of land both in Guitarras and neighbouring Tamagas. The community had not sanctioned the sale of land but certain people had gone ahead with their private deals effectively ignoring the community norm (cc/past/tam/12.6.01). The sensitivity of the land issue for community members in Guitarras owes much to the fact that the first sales of land in the early 1980s coincided with the civil war. When the Catholic priest questioned the wisdom of selling land and stressed the importance of consensus a community member who wished to sell land, complained to the army. Although the military did not get involved in the community dispute, the priest received death threats and was forced to leave the country.

As a result of the land sales in Guitarras and Tamagas the communities are no longer mono-ethnic. In Guitarras 10 families out of a total of 150 families are *ladinos*, and in Tamagas 20 out of a total of 120 families are *ladino*. By contrast the Q'eqchi' communities which are the focus of my study are mono-ethnic and in the process of obtaining land titles as communities. Although there are individual *ladinos* in some communities, they have been accepted in by the community. In two communities I met

ladinos who had married Q'eqchi' women and had become integrated into the community. Both of the men spoke Q'eqchi' fluently and participated in community activities including reciprocal labour agreements and rituals.

North Izabal is a zone of migration which was sparsely populated in the early 1900s and of interest only to logging companies who set up temporary camps before moving on once they had felled the valuable trees (Wilk 1991:55). The *ancianos* (senior men) of communities which were founded before 1950 were some of the thousands of Q'eqchi' who migrated from Alta Verapaz to escape conditions of forced labour on coffee estates. From their beginnings as clusters of three or four families who cleared areas of virgin forest in North Izabal in the late 19th century, the communities of Searranx, Guitarras and Tamagas have grown to sizeable populations of 500, 1300 and 1000 people respectively. Appendix 3, Table 1 shows that the founders of communities before 1950 were migrants from Alta Verapaz. Since 1950 a significant number of communities which I will term "overspill communities" have been established by people who moved out of existing communities in the region. After 1980 these overspill communities had become the rule rather than the exception, as communities such as Chinaranx and Setaña divided giving rise to the overspill communities of Santa Maria Chinaranx and Setaña Nacimiento (Appendix 3 table 1).

Although there are no official statistics detailing migration out of the Sierra de Santa Cruz, the migration out of Alta Verapaz into Izabal and the Petén first analysed by Richard Adams in the 1960s has continued into the 2000s (Adams 1965:14). In the communities of Secaxte, Guitarras and Tamagas, I was told that a total of eighteen families (approximately 100 people) had left between 2000 and 2002 (ms/pad/32.07.01). During the mid 1980s people in the region moved on to places in the Petén because they had been told that there was land available there and the productivity of soils in the Sierra de Santa Cruz had in some communities dropped by a half (from 50 *quintales* to 25 *quintales* per *manzana*) (ncc/asaw/20.06.00). The ways that both the direct threat to community land, posed by landowners and other factors such as declining soil fertility, have sharpened the focus on how community lands are managed will be discussed in the chapter on land. The effect of this migration has been to increase the local population at a time when competition for land from other sources such as FUNDAECO (*Fundación para el Ecodesarollo y la Conservación*) and *finqueros* was intensifying, and to provide the impetus for the formation of the overspill villages which I mentioned. The establishment

of two protected zones of restricted use managed by the non-governmental organisation FUNDAECO was organised over the heads of Q'eqchi' communities. FUNDAECO admits that initially it was totally ignorant of the existence of settlements in the region (FUNDAECO 1999: 6).

The majority of the 40 Q'eqchi' communities in the Sierra de Santa Cruz lack basic services. Only four communities have mains electricity supplies and 75% of communities do not have access to piped water. None of the Q'eqchi' communities in the Rio Dulce parish are accessible by tarmac roads. From the parish centre located on the Petén/Guatemala City highway all of the communities are reached by a journey of from 10 minutes to 3 hours by vehicle on a dirt road followed in many cases by a walk which might be as much as 5 hours. Although there are four health posts in the region I was told constantly that the nurse attending had few medicines and that there were long periods when the clinics were closed (mc/sal/7.05.00). The availability of primary education was a major concern of virtually all communities.

All the communities which I visited are engaged in the production of corn, beans and rice and in each of the communities there is some small-scale production of cash crops such as cardamom, coffee and pineapples. The majority of *ladino* landowners in contrast are engaged in cattle ranching, rubber production and the farming of various woods such as pine. The type of slash and burn agriculture utilised by Q'eqchi' communities has drastically reduced the forest area creating unstable hillsides which are susceptible to collapse. Furthermore once the tree cover has been removed, the top soils are thin and their nutrients rapidly exhausted. In all the communities that I visited the people commented on the falling yields of lands in the region.

The life of all communities is dominated by the agricultural cycle. Since these are peasant communities predominantly concerned with production for consumption their main crops are maize and beans. The relationship between production for the market and production for the household consumption is addressed in the chapter on land. There are two maize harvests each year and harvests of other crops are spread throughout the year.

Table 1

Agricultural calendar based on observation of activities in ten *aldeas* and interviews with members of land committees.

	corn	rice	beans	Coffee	cardamom	Chile
January	clearing		sowing			sowing
February	Harvest/clearance					
March	clearing					
April	burning	sowing	harvest			
May	sowing					
June	sowing				harvest	harvest
July	clearing					
August	clearing			Harvest		
September	clearing	harvest				
October	harvest					
November	sowing					
December	clearing					

During the months which appear blank on the table the main agricultural task is *limpieza,* the weeding of the cultivated plots. Outside agencies such as the Catholic Church are sensitive to the calendar and tend not to organise meetings which clash with intensive work periods, particularly the sowing of maize. The times of greatest financial stress for communities are immediately before the maize harvests in April and September when people may have run out of their household stores of corn and are forced either to buy corn at inflated prices in local shops, to borrow from neighbours, or eat whatever they can obtain.

As I explained in Chapter 3, my study of community in North Izabal draws upon intensive research carried out in four communities as well as examples from throughout the region. In the following section my description of the communities focuses on the size and composition of communities, infrastructure, community organisation, and their proximity to the wider world and markets. I will also draw out those aspects of each community which are of particular interest to my study.

Arcochoch

The community of Arcochoch was founded in 1899 by families who had previously been living in fincas in the municipios of Senahu and Cahabon in Alta Verapaz. (apc/au/arc/13.07.01) Various people in the community told me that one of the *ancianos* had found the curved part of a harp in the area and so the community became known as Arcochoch or *arco de tierra* in Spanish. In 2001 there were 62 households in Arcochoch with a total of 359 people. The community does not have title to the land which they claim and work. The 42 *caballerias* and 47 *manzanas* claimed by the community is officially Finca Nacional, that is land which has been registered in the name of the nation.[6] Arcochoch is situated approximately 60km from the main Petén – Guatemala City tarmac road. In the dry months the community can be reached in 3 hours by driving along a rough dirt road. In the wet months sections of the road become heavily flooded and impassable. The main crops grown in the community are corn, beans, rice, chilli, cardamom and coffee.

The system of piped water is highly unreliable which means that the majority of people still need to collect water from streams. With recent funding from a government-funded community development organisation, latrines and stoves have been built at each house in the community.

There is no state-funded primary education in the community. The existing school was set up in 1987 with US and British NGO funding. There are two Q'eqchi' speaking teachers living in Arcochoch. The community has both Catholic and Protestant churches. Arcochoch follows the practice of all Q'eqchi' communities in selecting a community member to fill the posts of catechist, trainee catechist, delegate of the word and eucharistic minister. The catechist is responsible for leading the weekly services in the community church because given the number of *aldeas* in the parish the priest only visits Arcochoch

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[6] *Manzana* = 6987.2 square metres, *caballeria* = 66 *manazanas*

two or three times each year to say mass. In contrast although the Protestant pastor visits other *aldeas*, he lives in Arcochoch. All members of the community were at least nominally Catholics until 1999 when a Protestant church was built in the village. There are currently 100 Protestants in the community. The community celebrates its feast day on the day of San José and Santa María in December. The presence of the Protestant pastor in Arcochoch is significant and it is of particular interest to me whether his presence and the development of a Protestant congregation within the community inhibits community organising.

The longest established leaders in Arcochoch are the *ancianos*, the senior men who founded the community. There are also school and land committees in the community. Some community members serve as promoters in the fields of health and community development. In 2002 the school was being served by two Q'eqchi' speaking teachers.

Chinaranx

The community of Chinaranx was founded in 1930 by families who originally lived in Cahabon, Alta Verapaz and on migrating settled initially in Searranx before moving to their present position in the hills above Searranx (pcp/fisp/ch/25.08.01). The population of Chinaranx in 2000 was 96 people. Due to disputes within the community six households left it in 1984 to form another community called Santa Maria Chinaranx. The community of Chinaranx claims 16 caballerias and 52 *manzanas* of land which was measured by representatives of the government office INTA (*Instituto Nacional de Transformación Agraria*), but the process of legalization has stagnated. There is an ongoing dispute over the land boundary between Chinaranx and the neighbouring community Santiago Socela which has provoked threats of violence between the two communities. The extent to which such disputes encourage community consolidation and organisation is important for my research.

According to a survey carried out by the municipal authorities, the main difficulties faced by the community are the problems of vehicle access and access to a clean water supply (FIS/ALCALDIA 2001). Chinaranx is positioned high on the brow of a hill and water can only be collected by walking down the slopes to some springs. The very steep 1-hour walk from Searranx to Chinaranx makes the sale and transportation of produce and equipment extremely difficult.

The main crops cultivated in Chinaranx are maize, beans and rice. Community members have 3 *manzanas* of maize sown under the system of reciprocal labour. Most members also sow approximately 1 manzana of beans. One household has cattle for fattening which they then sell in nearby Searranx. Although there is still a forested part of the community land there is little valuable wood left. Some members of the community have planted as many as 100 mahogany saplings. During the 1980s and 1990s virtually all the men in the community spent some time working for a daily wage in a privately owned pine plantation (pc/esc/ch/4.06.01).

The community's school, which was established in 1987, has two teachers who are supervised by the local Catholic Church project. The community has health and development promoters as well as two traditional midwives who have received some training from health workers paid by the Catholic Church.

El Calvario

Located on the Transversal del Norte road which runs east to west from the frontier with Belice to Cobán, Calvario is a community of 100 people made up of 20 households. The community is in the final stage of the legalisation of the 4 caballerias of land which it claims. The original inhabitants of Calvario, including one *anciano* who is now 100 years old, came from Chahal and Cahabon in 1920 (emc/cat/cal/5.06.00). Up until 1990 the community of Calvario was relatively dispersed with some families living 20 minutes walk from the centre of Calvario at a place called Sepac. Then for a variety of reasons most notably the fact that the land near Sepac was designated a protected area, the families who had traditionally farmed that land decided to live closer to it in order to establish their claim (emc/cat/cal/5.06.00). As a result there are now two separate communities with separate committees for land and education. In practice however, there are strong familial links and the communities combine in Calvario for some cultural and religious celebrations. The quality of the Transversal del Norte road was improved dramatically in the mid 1990s so that it has become an important communications link. There is a regular micro bus service to the junction with the main Guatemala/Petén road which costs 15 *quetzales* [7] and takes 20 minutes. The location of the community on the main road next to *fincas* and a good water source makes the land an attractive proposition for *ladinos*

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[7] The quetzal is the unit of currency in Guatemala. During 2002, one US $ was equivalent to around 7.5 Quetzales.

seeking to buy land. The question of how and whether community continues to be an effective form of organisation in the face of outside pressures is of particular significance for my study.

The main agricultural products in the community are corn, beans and rice. Under the community reciprocal labour agreement men sow 3 *manzanas* of maize. Individual households also sow on average 3 *tareas* of beans and a *manzana* of rice. Some members of the community have *cacao* (cocoa bean) and *pom* (resin) trees which provide a small source of income. There are also hundreds of citrus trees in the community, planted as part of a government sponsored project in the early 1980s. The fruit is mainly for domestic consumption. All households keep chickens. In the last ten years the community has ceased to keep pigs because the neighbouring *finquero* threatened to shoot any pigs found on his finca (mpc/fisp/cal/22.07.01).

The *comite pro-mejoramiento,* which originally organised the development initiatives of Calvario, has been superseded by two committees which deal with the practicalities of land and education in the community. There are no Protestants in Calvario and the Catholic catechist is a prominent figure in the community as well in neighbouring *aldeas* where he organises a support network for the catholic lay leaders in the communities on the transversal road. During the mid 1990s the Catholic priest divided the parish into sectors comprising of between five and ten *aldeas* in order to facilitate mutual support between catechists and other lay catholic leaders.

Calvario also has a health promoter and development promoter who collaborates with FIS. Most of the latrines in the community are in a state of abandon and the well which was dug in the mid 1980s is not efficient. The state funded village school is served by a Camilio, a Q'eqchi' speaking teacher who has also worked with *Pastoral de la Tierra* the parish land legalization project. The role of such local intellectuals in the construction of community is addressed in Chapter 6.

Coyoute

Coyoute was established in 1960 by migrants from Cahabon in Alta Verapaz and Semuc. The population of the community in 2000 was 198 people. The community claims 43 *caballerias* and 42 *manzanas* of land, 15 *caballerias* of which was has been designated "*reserva forestal común*" by the community and forms part of the claim. The community agreed that the forest should be preserved intact as a community resource

(rdc/fisp/coy/28.07.01). The land which is *"Finca Nacional"* was measured in 1993 but has still not been legalised in the name of the community. Access to Coyoute is via the dirt road and then on foot for a further 2 ½ hours. The community has petitioned the local mayor since 1980 for a road to be built and work was begun on building a road in 2001.

All members of Coyoute community cultivate maize, beans and rice as well as cardamom and coffee. Under the reciprocal labour agreement members sow 3 *manzanas* of maize. When the community was first established there was an abundance of valuable trees but there is now no mahogany and members of the community expressed the desire to plant saplings. The community is almost totally dependant on production in the community. Various members did work for a short period (ranging from a few days to three weeks) in the pine plantation but the opportunity was for a limited period.

The community has land and school committees as well as a FIS promoter. The community school, which was established in 1987, is served by two teachers funded by a foreign education NGO. There are two community members currently working as teachers in nearby communities. One of the main points of interest for my research is the emergence of an educated minority within Coyoute who, whilst retaining a sense of commitment to community, are also keen to further their own education. The conflict between personal and community needs is likely to become more apparent in other communities in the region where schools began to function fifteen years ago and pupils and parents are thinking about what the next stage might be. In Coyoute, two of the pupils from the community school have trained to be teachers and are working in neighbouring community schools. Both teachers expressed their desire to continue their studies and Nectalino, one of the teachers, told me that he wants to study law (ncp/maes/coy/12.6.02).

Many of the houses in Coyoute do not have latrines and there is no piped water in the community. There is a small nucleus of Protestants in Coyoute but the majority of community members are Catholics. Just as in the other communities, the Catholic congregation is led by a catechist who is assisted by a delegate of the word and a minister of the eucharist. These lay Catholic teachers receive their training at the parish centre in Semaji.

Isolation and engagement

The various community amenities, activities and leaders are the product of the past forty years during which different understandings of community have contributed to the dynamic organisation which is community. In general terms the changes which have taken place in the communities since 1960 can be understood in terms of two processes which I have separated for purposes of explanation, but which are in practice mutually informing. The first change is from communities which were relatively isolated from the state to communities which are in closer contact with it. The second change is from communities in which the *ancianos* and *alcaldes auxiliares* were the dominant figures, to communities which are served by various committees and leaders. *Ancianos* are the senior members of communities and often their founders. *Alcaldes auxiliares* are the individuals in each community who have no official legal standing, but who operate as the responsible persons at community level in matters of disputes and the infraction of community norms. Both the increasing differentiation of attitudes and beliefs within communities and the changing structural conditions are fundamental to my understanding of the dynamism of community.

In 1960 the state had little or no presence in North Izabal. Judging presence in infrastructure terms, there were no roads, schools, clinics military bases or local government offices. People in the region remember making occasional trips to local towns such as Livingston or El Estor but they told me that the only person who came to their communities was the priest. In a pattern which was not dissimilar to the way that the colonial authorities and the Church had "covered" Guatemala in the 16th century, the religious orders visited communities which were outside those regions of the country which the state controlled. In the absence of the state, the Church became the main institution which inserted itself into communities and responded to some of the needs expressed by community members. Through this insertion the Church challenged existing constructions of community and had a major impact on how community was understood. In the following section I draw upon people's memories of the presence of the Church and how it affected communities.

When Catholic priests visited the communities of North Izabal before 1970 the region was not constituted as a parish, but was an adjunct to the parish of Las Casas in Alta Verapaz. Communities in the easternmost section were visited by priests based in Livingston. Because of the infrequency of priest's visits to the region, *ancianos* did not

regard Catholicism as a threat to autoctonous beliefs and practices (mcc/au/arc/14.08.02). In the communities of Arcochoch and Coyoute people remember the visits of Padre Cecilio in the 1950s. He arrived by mule from Las Casas after visiting other communities in the vicinity and offered three kinds of mass including a sung mass (*nim li mis*) for which he charged 40 *Quetzales*. The priest brought with him bags laden with medicines, rosaries and other religious items. As I as told by one *anciano* "*se hizo negocio el Padre Cecilio*" (mcc/ay/arc/14.08.02). The priest's visits had little impact on the local communities because at that time the Church was not training local leaders and the intermittent nature of the visits meant that the priest had little idea of the extent of autoctonous practices.

The life and identity of communities was based on reciprocal arrangements for subsistence agricultural work and the organisation of community tasks. The *ancianos* who had made the first clearances of forest in the communities were valued for their experience and knowledge.

Two main factors had a major impact on the integrity of communities and the leadership of *ancianos* during the 1970s and 1980s. Although they were located on the fringe of the worst affected zone, people within the Sierra de Santa Cruz were not immune from the civil war in the 1980s. At roughly the same period priests began to make more regular visits to communities and young keen male community members with a capacity to learn Spanish began to receive training as lay leaders called catechists.

Catechists are the community lay leaders who prepare people for the baptisms, first communions and marriage ceremonies when the priest visits the community. The catechists, who were all men, also directed the weekly Catholic services held in each community. The system of training community leaders in the Catholic faith began in the 1970s as a response to the vast size of the parish and the logistics of visiting each community more than once or twice each year. The intention of the local Catholic priests was to, "*Suscitar y consolidar communidades Cristianas...*" (*Plan Pastoral* 1996-2000:6). The first catechists were selected by their communities and needed to show an aptitude for learning and a willingness to make the long journey to the parish centre on a regular basis (cc/pad/10.07.01). Whereas Q'eqchi' catechists in Alta Verapaz attended courses along with catechists from parishes throughout the department, catechists in Rio Dulce were trained at local level.

Wilson describes the catechist courses in Alta Verapaz as meetings of the "first modern Q'eqchi' intelligentsia" (Wilson 1997:128). During catechist courses, representatives from Q'eqchi' communities throughout Alta Verapaz, come together, and Wilson sees such gatherings as instrumental in the formation of supra/community identity which was being provoked by the attacks of the Guatemalan military on communities. The catechists' courses provided the opportunity for the catechists from throughout Alta Verapaz to share their experiences of the violence. Catechists were supported in their repudiation of army violence by Bishop Flores, who personally oversaw the return of thousands of Q'eqchi's who had fled into the mountains and were regarded by the army as guerrilla collaborators (Wilson 1995:234). In contrast the catechist's courses held in Izabal tended to be driven by a more conservative focus on bible study and sacraments, which was prioritised by the Bishop Luis Estrada. According to Hans Siebers, Bishop Estrada was openly criticised by some priests for his conciliatory approach to land owners and the military in the face of land disputes and peasant organising (Siebers 1990:102). [8] Catechists were the main religious leaders in communities until the growth of Protestantism in the region in the mid 1980s.

Both the catechist programme and the war impacted heavily on *ancianos*, because in both cases, leaders linked to outside institutions, namely the army and the Catholic Church, became powerful players within the community. According to *ancianos*, priests who visited communities during the 1970s and early 1980s spoke out strongly against the offerings made by *ancianos* and communities (jc/an/sep/17.06.00). In particular, priests preached against the use of blood in cave offerings. Their message was clear, - there is only one sacrifice and that is the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross (jc/an/sep/17.06.00).

During the early 1980s when the Guatemalan military began to visit the communities they viewed all meetings and visits to caves made by community members with deep suspicion. A member of each community was required by the army to serve as *comisionado militar*. *Comisionados Militares* were ordered by the army to present themselves at the local base in Rio Dulce for their instructions. Communities needed to ask permission from the local commandante before holding any gathering or going on a journey. The custom of community level visits to local caves to make food offerings to

[8] Information that has come to light since Siebers wrote his study in 1990 goes some way towards explaining Bishop Estrada's stance with regard to campesinos and finqueros. Through the work of Pastoral de la Tierra in 2000, it emerged that Bishop Estrada is the owner of various cattle fincas in North Izabal (jc/Pdet/17.7.02).

the *tzuultaq'as* (earth deities) was not permitted. However *ancianos* told me that whilst the larger community gatherings were banned they found ways to maintain good relations with the *tzuultaq'as* by continuing their offerings on a smaller scale (jcc/an/sep/21.08.02).

From the mid 1980s there was a change in the priests' attitudes towards community rituals. According to *ancianos* in Arcochoch and Coyoute the priests were less inclined to accuse *ancianos* of idolatry and paganism and more likely to promote the traditional practices of communities (mc/an/coy/27.08.02). Beginning in 1988 *ancianos* were invited to attend the Church courses which up until then had been exclusively for catechists. This change introduced by the priests was initially intended to resolve some of the tensions and disputes which had arisen between *ancianos* and catechists. However the joint courses became the forums at which priests gradually began to affirm the community rituals (ms/pad/5.07.01). This affirmation of indigenous practices by the Catholic priest in North Izabal was part of a general trend in Latin America and globally towards understanding local cultures and contextualising beliefs (Schreiter 1985, Donovan 1985, Shorter 1988, Gittins 1989). The approach was characterised by a rejection of the civilizing attitude which had been implicit in much of the Church's work. Priests and religious workers recognised the need to learn languages and understand cultural practices. Siebers notes in some cases the new attitude fell well short of being an "iglesia autoctona" and was more like the translation of official Church teachings into local languages. When in the 1970s Catholic priests and religious formed a group called *Pastoral Indigena* in order to promote a church which was less Roman and western and more indigenous, the Catholic hierarchy which had initially been supportive of the pastoral, set up their own pastoral in order to ensure orthodoxy (Wuqub' Iq' 1997:245).

The underlying objectives of the Catholic Church were not disguised. At their 1992 meeting, Latin American bishops discussed what was referred to as "*la nueva evangelización*" (CELAM 1992). For some indigenous activists the new approach does not constitute a lessening in the threat to indigenous beliefs. According to Antonio Pop Caal, the aim of the Roman Catholicism is to proselytise and expand. He views Church affirmation of indigenous cultures not as a fundamental change in Church thinking but as "a subtle technique of penetration" (Pop Caal 1997:217).

The signing of the Peace Accords in 1996 marked a further significant change in attitudes towards community rituals (ncc/asaw/12.07.01). Both through radio

announcements and courses given by human rights organisations of the Catholic Church, *ancianos* and communities were told that they could participate in community customs. Even more important in the view of some community members and *ancianos* was the arrival in 1999 of a Q'eqchi' Catholic priest. He was greeted with great enthusiasm in all Q'eqchi' communities because he spent more time than any other priest had done visiting the communities and supporting both *ancianos* and catechists. In the words of more than one informant, *"el padre nos entiende"*. Whereas previous priests had usually combined the celebration of mass with a community visit to a cave or a *mayejak* (offering), Padre Manuel attended community rituals without attempting to mix them with a Catholic celebration. Not only was the Church promoting community rituals, but as citizens members of the communities had been told by the government that their rituals were important.

Notwithstanding the Church's current support for community rituals, *ancianos* retain the memory of previous priests who had sought to remove all non-Christian elements from community life (mcc/an/coy/13.07.01). Some *ancianos* recognise that their position in the community has changed. In particular *ancianos* told me that they have forgotten many of the traditions taught to them by their fathers and grandfathers. *Ancianos* are no longer the sole voice of knowledge and wisdom in communities. Since the 1970s a range of different people have taken up posts within the communities in order to respond to the new demands and intentions of the communities. In communities with Protestant households such as Arcochoch and Coyoute some Protestants reject the authority of *ancianos* outright. The gerontocracy of the communities has been challenged by other religious leaders as well as by some young people.

The continuing salience of community identity rests on economic improvement and the involvement of different members of communities including young people in the reconstruction of community in response to changing circumstances and demands. Young people represent a significant threat to community integrity. The majority of young people in the communities have had access since 1987 to primary level education. Based on visits that I have made to thirty communities in the region I estimate that a much smaller proportion, averaging no more than two people in each community, have spent time studying in local towns such as Carcha and El Estor. Having invested in their children's education in order to improve their communities, parents now face the prospect of their children selling land and leaving the community. The changing position of young people

within communities and their increasing confidence before senior members of communities such as *ancianos* was evident to me at occasions which would traditionally have been very solemn affairs in which a certain tone was set by the *anciano* or head of the household. Richard Wilson's account of the communal lunch after planting maize contrasts with my experience at two planting sessions in different communities. Wilson describes the lunch in the following way, "after the day's work, all return to the host's house. The men wash and are seated for the most solemn event of the day...The atmosphere at the planting feast is especially heavy and pregnant" (Wilson 1994:112). I participated in more than twenty planting sessions in different communities, and the atmosphere at the lunches ranged from the reverential to four cases where the younger men in the planting group disturbed the "heavy atmosphere". On one occasion, far from there being a reverential silence at the beginning of the meal, one of the sons of the house immediately put on a radio programme playing music. Nobody seemed disturbed or annoyed by this at the time, but when I asked some of the planters about the music a few days later, they expressed their annoyance *"es que hay jovenes que ya no respeten"* I was told (epc/cat/cal/14.6.02).

In talking to young school age people in the communities, it became clear to me that although I had observed a change in the attitudes of some young people towards the *ancianos,* no young person was forthcoming in openly criticising the *ancianos*. Amongst the photographs which I carried with me to elicit conversation, was a photo of a group of young people playing poker and smoking, huddled around a candle. The photograph provoked great interest when I showed it to young people in the communities. I was able to engage the young people viewing the photo in discussions about what they did when they were not working or studying. As well as the very positive reflections on community life, I was told about the young men in one community who smoked marijuana and about others who had been taken to the police in Rio Dulce for repeatedly robbing from houses in the community. This however was not normal, I was told, because people respect each other. When I asked whether young people respected the *ancianos* I was informed that there were young people who didn't believe the *ancianos*. Others countered that whilst those people lacked respect it was because they didn't have their own family and that things would be different when they had a family and had to farm their own land (dcc/fisp/ch/12.8.01).

Significantly I saw no evidence of reaction against community decisions or community work projects and I was left with the sense that whilst communities were far from harmonious at times, community organisation was questioned but not attacked. What was evident was a sense of frustration directed not at community organisations but at the limitations placed upon them by living in community because of the lack of financial resources. This frustration was particularly evident in those people who had left their communities to study in local towns and were now back teaching in the communities. Various people commented on the attitude of one young man who had gone to the town of El Estor to study to be a teacher and was now working in a community as a teacher. Various people from one community told me that when he came to their small shop he would only speak to them in Spanish *"como si no fuera uno de nosotros"*(spc/sep/5.07.01). Marcos Pan Ical, a 23 year old man, told me that he wanted to study at university, but because his father died he had to assume his role as head of the household. Marcos is active in the *Asociación*, and the continuing salience of community will depend upon the extent to which the *Asociación* can grow and provide employment opportunities for such people. There is a double bind for young people like David, a health promoter from the community of Chinaranx. David has demonstrated his commitment to his community, but in order to continue studying nursing, he will have to leave Chinaranx, and there are few employment opportunities in the public health system locally after he qualifies as a nurse.

The *ancianos* who were founding members of communities, became figures of authority within communities, but were not officially recognised by the local state authorities who preferred to relate to the communities through the alcaldes auxiliaries. *Ancianos'* authority rests their commitment to the religious rituals of the community and their experience and maturity which is known only to the community. As Wilson explains, that authority presupposed that community was the same as Catholic community, which is no longer the case (Wilson 1995:164).

Within schools the issue of respect for traditions and the *ancianos* as the bearers of those traditions is being addressed by many of the teachers in the region. It is important to note that teachers and school committees in the communities have worked hard to engender in the pupils an understanding of the community relationship with the land. In all the communities that I visited between 2000 and 2002 the school age children had been with the *ancianos* on visits to the local cave. However those visits were not glorified school trips but were the revival of the past practice where the whole community

participated in offerings to the earth deity. In effect the school was contributing to the construction of community. Since the 1990's there has been a significant rise in community visits to local caves. I attended several visits to caves prior to the start of sowing in which young men and boys accompanied *ancianos* and observed the proceedings.

What is evident in North Izabal is the contrast between a revived tradition created and prompted by outsiders, and living tradition fostered by *ancianos* through community activities. The learning by doing of communities contrasts with the way that Guillermo, a worker with the Maya organisation *Proyecto Movilizadora de Educacion Maya* (PROMEM), taught about offerings. I sat in a large community meeting house with approximately forty school age children. Guillermo had already laid out four coloured candles and ears of corn on the floor and proceeded to ask about the significance of the coloured candles. What is apparent from Guillermo's session with the youngsters is that in his mind the fact that he has abstracted the offering from the context of a particular occasion and place is not significant, what is important is that the youngsters should understand the meanings of the colours as defined by the ancient Mayas. One of the main focuses of Guillermo's work in Cacahuila has been the promotion of traditional skills in playing the harp, *chirimia* (oboe) and marimba. These are all instruments which community members have played in the past, and the renewed interest in the playing of the instruments following Guillermo's encouraging words illustrates the ambiguous impact of the Maya Movement on communities. Guillermo expressed his delight that some older men had offered to teach the instruments in the community school. In Guillermo's mind this is a small success in the revival of Maya tradition and the building of Maya identity.

When Guillermo talked to the community about the significance of *cacao* for Mayas, a similar disjuncture was apparent between the intension of the message and the way in which it was received by the community. Guillermo emphasised that *cacao* was important to the Maya. He explained that it was a ceremonial drink, and that *cacao* was an important product that was often used by the Maya as currency. In response people in the community told Guillermo that they drank *cacao* at planting time and that they had discussed with the agricultural promoter the possibility of planting *cacao* more extensively for economic purposes. When planters drink *cacao* from the same receptacle they

emphasise their agreement to work together. In the act of eating and drinking together, community members renew their ties to each other and the earth deity.

In Guillermo's discussion with the people in Cacahuila, there is evidence of the abstract nature of Maya community compared with the lived communities in North Izabal. Guillermo emphasises what Mayas in general do, and the community responds by telling him how they live. Guillermo's prime concern was that the community should associate *cacao* (cocoa beans) with being Maya. He tells the community that they are doing what the Mayas did before the Spanish came. The community informed him that drinking *cacao* was already an integral part of the agricultural ritual and other community rituals. Furthermore the community make a direct link between local consumption of *cacao*, local production and the strengthening of territorialized[9] community. They have already identified *cacao* as one of the crops which has been and can be cultivated in order to improve the livelihoods of people in the community. In practice Guillermo's strategy has been to engage with people at community level. It is noticeable that he has not attempted to engage with local intellectuals, the people with the most sophisticated analysis of the local reality. Neither has he expressed much interest in the land organisations which respond to the greatest local need.

The impact of the spread of Protestant churches

By the late 1970s the exclusive relationship which the Catholic Church had hitherto cultivated with the communities had changed markedly. The following section examines the spread of Protestantism in the region and the impact that it has had on understandings of community.

Up until the mid 1980s Q'eqchi' communities in the region were at least nominally Catholic and there were no Protestant chapels in those communities not on the main road. Beginning in 1986 Protestant churches were established in the villages of Tamagas, Searranx and Guitarras which are located on the dirt road and have easier access to the main Petén-Guatemala City highway. The arrival of a Protestant pastor in Tamagas prompted a dispute between the catechists and some of the other prominent men in the community.

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[9] Shannon Mattiace uses the term "deterritorialised" to refer to an indigenous group which did not identify with any particular Tojolabal place (Latin American Perspectives 117 Vol 28 No2).

When the Pastor was given permission to use the Catholic church in Tamagas to speak to the people he then launched into an attack on the Catholic Church and the saints' images in the church (cc/maes/cal/1.08.02).

By the late 1980s the Protestant populations in Guitarras and Tamagas had risen to more than 100 people and Protestants were beginning to make proselytising visits to neighbouring communities. In October 1999 an official post based in Arcochoch was created by the Iglesia de Dios del Evangelio Completo to minister to the Sierra de Santa Cruz. The current pastor, Pedro Pop Caal, a Q'eqchi' speaker from the neighbouring municipality of El Estor responded to the appeal and was the first Protestant to work in Arcochoch (ppc/past/arc/22.07.01).

The differences between Catholic and Protestant churches are marked and I was interested in seeing whether such differences produced significant ruptures within the community of Arcochoch. Having heard various reports from Catholic members of the Arcochoch community of the pastor's views as well as listening to his preaching, I expected an aggressively triumphalistic tone when I spoke to him. What has antagonised some members of Arcochoch are the pastor's comments that there is nothing in the caves but snakes and bats (mcc/asaw arc/2.08.02). These comments were directed at the traditional practice amongst many rural Q'eqchi', including people in Arcochcoch, of visiting caves to make offerings to the *tzuultaq'as*, and were seen by *ancianos* as a direct attack on their beliefs (mcc/asaw/arc/2.08.02). The pastor's words do challenge the practices promoted by the *ancianos*, who counsel the community that the reciprocal relations with the *tzuultaq'as* must be adhered to in order that no ill should befall the community. However, the pastor's words are consistent with those of other Protestant churches which challenge the use of images and symbolic forms such as candles and incense. The pastor explained to me that such symbols detract from the real issue of whether someone has really committed him/herself to God (ppc/past/arc/ 2.08.02). He cited to me biblical passages which he regarded as instructing people to stop making blood sacrifices. Some Q'eqchi' rituals involve the pouring of animal blood into the earth, the burying of animal offerings, or the smearing of blood on the lintels of buildings.

Nevertheless, whilst directing criticism at specific acts which contravene biblical norms, the pastor does leave room for common ground which is more inclusive of Catholics and Protestants. Some Catholics told me that they had watched the pastor climb to the top of a local hill in order to have a prayer meeting. The pastor himself informed me that twenty-three members of the community had visited the hill top with him to pray (pcc/past/arc/22.07.01). As well as the pilgrimage to the hilltop there is a striking symmetry between the actions of the pastor and what he criticises. The pastor told me that "*tiene que pedir al Señor antes de botar, antes de sembrar...hay que pedir a Dios que se da (la cosecha)*" (pcc/past/arc/ 22.07.01). The pastor was at pains to emphasise that he doesn't see the Protestant/Catholic religious difference as divisive in the community. Referring to his own church and the community service activities that all members of the community have traditionally engaged in he says "*La Iglesia no quiere quitar nada, hay communidad, allá están trabajando todos...chapear la escuela, el salón comunal...se puede reunir como somos cristianos*"(ppc/past/arc/21.7.01). From the point of view some catechists however, the Protestant church does represent a threat. In Coyoute, which has been visited since 2000 by the Arcochoch pastor, the catechist and some members of the community are alarmed at the appeal that the pastor's meetings hold for people. At one stage moreover the catechist threatened to suspend Catholic services (scc/cat/coy/8.06.02). A gathering of priests in the region stated "*Observamos con alarma la penetración y extensión constante de las sectas en Guatemala*" (*Plan de Acción* 1996-2000). Based on such examples and the expansion of Protestantism since the mid 1980s, it is clear that Protestantism is a dynamic factor within communities and a major factor which will be examined further below.

FIS (*Fondo de Inversion Social*) and health promoters

The increasing differences within, and understandings of communities are not confined to the religious sphere. During the late 1980s there was a marked local increase in (1) local political party activism, and (2) the presence of NGOs. In practice this meant increasing offers of, and demands by communities for infrastructure and social welfare projects. The securing of support or funding for the projects entailed the setting up of committees as well as the selection of individuals within communities to serve on them. In the process there is a premium placed on Spanish language ability and therefore by implication youth. It is more likely that a younger person who has benefited from the community's school

will fit the criteria for selection. In all four communities the FIS promoters were instrumental in the setting up of the primary schools and liasing with outside authorities. Two of the promoters have sons who are studying to be teachers and the son of one promoter is already employed locally as a teacher providing the household with a further income source. The promoter's proficiency in Spanish, their analytical skills and ability to conduct themselves outside the community, means that they have a potential advantage over other community members.

During the past ten years communities in the region have also been working closely with FIS (*Fondo de Inversion Social*), a government social fund whose aim is to promote social development at community level. The current programme of erecting multi-purpose school buildings relies heavily on the capacity of communities to mobilise all their members to transport building materials and assist in building tasks. The coordination of this work depends upon the work of community representatives who are selected by the community and are expected to attend FIS courses and to report back to their communities on what they are doing. I was present on various occasions when representatives reported back to their own communities, and it is clear that the representatives are only effective in so far as they have the confidence and trust of all members of the community. In this case contact with an outside agency is actively promoting community action and identity. Instead the FIS objectives emphasise the participatory nature of their work,

> "se busca fortalecer el capital social, potenciando la organización y participación comunitaria y ortogando personalidad juridical a grupos informales integrados por los mismos pobres, con el proposito de que participen en su propio desarollo humano."

> (FIS 2001:4)

Notwithstanding the perceived benefits to the whole community of the links with FIS, the FIS representatives themselves derive particular benefits. In particular it is noticeable that the majority (more than 75%) of FIS representatives were formally or still are health promoters trained by the local Catholic Church and a health NGO. All FIS representatives are therefore fluent Spanish speakers, are educated up to a minimum of sixth grade and have participated in courses held in the major towns of Cobán and Chimaltenango. The state is instrumental in defining communities. Working through the organisation FIS, the state is working with educated young men who have already received more than five

years of community heath training to be the key figures within Q'eqchi' communities. The FIS promoters are individuals who are not identified in terms of their religious affiliation and relation to the earth deity but are recognised and accepted by all the community as non-partisan. Although FIS are working most directly with individual members of communities, both FIS and the community member who is a FIS promoter are under constant scrutiny from the community. The execution of FIS projects such as the building of schools is heavily dependent on the cooperation of the whole community. For example in Coyoute which is not directly accessible by vehicle, all the men of the community joined in carrying the building materials. Over a period of three days each man made the hour-long trek dozens of times.

Communities and political organising

Contact between communities and political parties and their personnel inevitably provide opportunities for links between individual members of communities and the parties. Such links, which are built on certain choices and interests, can prise open differences within communities and make individual links more important than community solidarity. The MLN party (*Movimiento de Liberación Nacional*) tried to contract a Q'eqchi' speaking man in 1987 to stand as vice Mayor for Livingston. At the time the man was employed as a Q'eqchi' literacy promoter in the region both by the local Catholic parish and by IGER (*Instituto Guatemalteco de Educacíon Radiofonica*) and was told by both organisations that he would not be able to continue working whilst engaging in electoral politics. The point made by both entities was that the political party, MLN, was seeking to exploit the trust that communities had in the man. The man was a highly respected person, having visited the villages over a ten- year period. The man acknowledged that to have returned to the villages would have been a misuse of trust (jjt /sah/3.07.02). To my knowledge there are no community members who are active members of political parties in the region.

Various people expressed their interest in both national and international politics, but reflected that it didn't make any difference to their lives (jjt/fund/21.07.02). Indeed some community members were quite cynical about prominent politicians. After a political rally addressed by President Portillo and attended by members of communities from the parish area, a man from Coyoute commented, "*Portillo dijo ahora voy a ayudar a los pobres no voy a dar a los ricos – pero no lo hizo*" (rcc/fisp/coy/12.07.02). Another man who had been present when Rios Montt addressed a meeting in Rio Dulce said that

Rios Montt had spoken about drinking water and electricity and other projects *"pero ya se fue y no se ve nada – habló por su política."*(rcc/fis/coy/120702cc 08/02) The general impression given by most communities in the region is that politics is the interest of *ladinos*, and within the municipality of Livingston it is the urban-based *ladinos* who hold local government positions. There has never to my knowledge been any successful attempt to harness the voting power of Q'eqchi' speakers. In 1988 a Q'eqchi' speaker from San Marcos stood as candidate for vice mayor but failed to garner the votes of people in the communities. The communities have a very pragmatic attitude towards politics which is less concerned with political debate and long-term strategies, and more interested in the immediate short-term result which is gained from voting for a particular candidate. In all the villages that I visited, when people informed me of promises that had been made by candidates, they knew little of the political parties that they represented.

The way that Mayors have responded to letters, appeals and complaints from communities is important. The Mayor of Livingston in 2001 told me that he preferred to deal with whole communities rather than factions within them (bc/alc/ 4.07.01). The secretary in Livingston municipality told me that he had been instructed by the Mayor to respond negatively to any request or complaint that came from either just Catholics, just Protestants or from any particular group within a community. The mayor's requirement is well understood in the communities which I visited and is seen as being in keeping with the ways that communities would like to operate (ccmaes/cal27.08.02). Communities formulate letters, appeals and complaints only after careful reflection and an often lengthy process of consensus seeking. When communities have written letters they endeavour to include the signatures or fingerprints of all adult men.

The signing of documents is a useful indicator of which members of communities are significant in dealings between communities and the state and outside agencies. In most cases the signatures of the relevant committee are collected followed by the signatures of male heads of households and finally some of the women. The committees are made up of men, and it is often the case that official letters from the community are only signed by the men. None of the FIS promoters, catechists or *alcalde auxiliares* are women. Men not only occupy the main posts within communities, they form the interface between communities and outside agencies. Male community members explained that the work carried out within households and communities by men and women is of equal value. I attended more than twenty community meetings in different villages and each

time both men and women were present, but few of the women spoke during the meetings. Wilson provides a detailed analysis of the way that gender is the principle by which agricultural production is organised (Wilson 1995:114). However an analysis of gender differences in terms of *complimentariedad* and interdependence does not exclude the existence of a hierarchical system.

Change has been provoked from outside communities by the state which has changed land legislation to include women as owners and inheritors of land and beneficiaries of state investment (*Fondo de Tierras* 2001). In order to apply for the legalisation of their land, men are required to submit their personal documents as well as the documents of their wives and those of their children. During visits to communities with representatives of the NGOs *Pastoral de la Tierra* and *Asociación Awinel* I observed that representatives encouraged women to sign and thumb print documents. However whilst the NGOs talked about the need to address issues of gender, in practice the issues were set aside in the prioritisation of tasks. The only women working within Pastoral are in secretarial posts and the management committee of the Asociación is exclusively male. In the long term access to both primary and secondary education is an important factor in challenging the existing gender order. In all the communities that I visited, equal weight was being given by parents to the education of their sons and daughters.

Whilst I have presented the past forty years in terms of communities' increasing engagement with the Guatemalan state, the increasing levels of crime in the region since the mid 1990s draws our attention to the fact that in the area of crime and public order there is an increasing disconnection from the state. In some cases, neither the civil authorities, nor the communities themselves are dealing with the crimes. The Maya Movement's response to the problem of crime has been to call for the re-establishment of *derecho consuetudinario* as I have explained in Chapter 2.

In each community there is a community-nominated *alcalde auxuliar* who has no external validation but is regarded within the community as the senior person in matters regarding community order and the behaviour of individuals. Up until the 1980s the majority of communities had a gaol or a defined place where individuals could be placed. Such gaols have now largely ceased to exist, assign of a general weakening of internal community mechanisms for dealing with problems. This weakening coincided with the imposition of externally validated authority figures namely the military commissioners and PAC, *Patrullas de Autodefensa Civil*, during the early 1980s.

After 1980, while the *alcaldes auxiliares* continued to be elected and operate within the communities, it was more common for the community to look to the municipal alcalde or the police for the resolution of community difficulties (dcc/sal/ch/25.07.02). However, given the distance of many communities from the mayor's office and the nearest police station, external authorities were extremely inefficient in dealing with community problems and often sent people back to their communities saying that it was a matter for the community to deal with. In response to my questions about the kinds of acts which the *alcalde auxiliar* dealt with, the most common problem cited was drunkenness and the resultant behaviour as well as the infraction of community norms such as cutting wood without community permission (ms/eddir/14.07.02).

Throughout the region individuals told me about the increased insecurity that exists for people and property. I was told of numerous examples of robberies from houses in communities carried out by a group of youngsters from a Semachaca. The generally held view was that the short prison sentence of three months for such crimes had not been sufficient to protect the communities (ncc/asaw/1.08.02). Other incidents demonstrate the need for a more formalised and efficient mechanism for dealing with crime. For instance there have been various unsolved murders in the region and communities are increasingly affected by the activities of the drugs cartel in Rio Dulce.

Conclusions

To sum up, I have tried to emphasise here the particular local histories of communities in North Izabal. In this area the majority of the Q'eqchi' communities continue to be based on subsistence agriculture. Notwithstanding the devastating effect of export agriculture and the civil war on communities elsewhere in Guatemala, the North Izabal communities were on the fringes of the worst excesses of exploitation and especially of the violence which destroyed hundreds of indigenous communities and ripped the social fabric of other communities during the 1980s.

Whilst the communities did not exist in an enclave, they were isolated from the changes in economic and social relations brought about by these particular forces. Communities were constructed out of the memory of what community has been, as well as being contingent on understandings of how it meets present needs as they are expressed by different members. Community has no fixed form, but that is not to say that the memories of community recalled as tradition, do not inform community construction. Competing

voices in the construction of community are evident in the religious field where both Catholic and Protestant churches have had an impact on the relations between people and the tzuultaqa's. The variety of beliefs experiences and perspectives within communities has been further underlined by the increase in the numbers of community members with responsibility for particular concerns namely education, health, social development and land.

By analysing the communities in terms of isolation and engagement there is a tendency to imagine a continuum between two opposites so that the existence of one precludes the presence of the other. In the case of the communities of North Izabal I found evidence of both. The state is both dictating the terms of land legislation as I will explain in Chapter 6, and it is absent, leaving communities isolated in an increasingly lawless society. Throughout the region communities began to harvest *Xat* (palm fronds) from forested areas which they sell to a buyer who comes from the Petén region. Here again isolation and engagement are evident. Community members are participating in a global system within which *Xat* is shipped to the US for the cut flower market. However none of the people who I saw with their *Xat* harvest knew about the use of *Xat*, much less about the economics of production and packaging and whether it was a process which they could engage in.

Whereas during the first half of the twentieth century community was associated with isolation, when groups seeking refuge from labour regimes established communities in North Izabal, today, community is the vehicle by which those groups are pursuing greater integration. It is not accurate to see communities as closed but gradually being prized open by the market. Rather community organisation is being constructed as the form of integration into the market. Where communities are closed, it is in the interests of integration rather than an escape from it. By restricting membership of the community, members are able to secure ownership of land which is their basis for integration into the market.

In the chapter that follows I will analyse land tenure both in terms of security of land holding and competition for land. I will examine how the differences within communities which I have outlined here map onto land ownership, and how they affect land tenure within communities, and I will ask whether there is community consensus over land issues or whether differences within communities predominate.

Chapter 5: The dynamics of community

Introduction

The construction of a national level *indígena* identity presupposes the subordination of local and regional identities which are based on the municipality and *aldea* communities. In this chapter I examine the role of Q'eqchi' communities in the construction of a wider indigenous identity by Maya intellectuals and the significance of community for community members in their struggle for land.

The strength of local community identity in Guatemala represents a significant challenge for Maya intellectuals building Maya identity. Notwithstanding the considerable differences and variations both within and between communities, it is in local communities that Maya intellectuals find what they regard as intact and authentic Maya beliefs, practices and knowledge. On the one hand, Maya intellectuals rely on communities where traditional practices are nurtured and valued, but on the other hand their objective to promote Maya identity is predicated on an analysis of language and economics which reduces the significance of the boundaries of communities. Maya intellectuals regularly return from the urban centres to their communities of birth, and place great importance on maintaining links with rural communities. However, that desire to retain a sense of community has less to do with community as organisation which can and does adapt to change, as I will show, and more to do with the reification of common traits shared by people across all communities in the construction of a more mythologised notion of community. For Maya intellectuals, it is as if communities were receptacles of essential elements of Maya identity such as language and ritual. In Chapter 2 I examined the Maya Movement's construction of community which. I argued. is "imagined" and founded upon certain traits such as language and cosmovison which are selected and reified. In this chapter I contrast that Maya community with community as it is lived in North Izabal. The contrast is between a mythologised sense of community whose existence is dependant on looking backwards to establish a clear link between present traits and the ancient Maya, and community as an organisation which has a sense of the past but which moves forward adapting to changing circumstances. The contrast that I am drawing is not absolute; if it were there would be no scope for Maya intellectuals to construct an identity across communities. Maya intellectuals are able to try to construct Maya identity because there are identifiable common traits across communities. However

in order to make the commonality of those traits telling, an essentialist approach is adopted by Maya intellectuals.

In particular Maya intellectuals emphasise the underlying commonality in what are termed Maya languages. Language is taken by Maya activists to be the key marker of identity. This both overcomes apparent differences between indigenous groups and establishes a direct link with the pre-colonial Maya. Although in present- day Guatemala, twenty-one different languages are spoken, linguists have grouped them and traced their origin to a common root. However such an analysis rests upon the assumption that an original language exists which is not derived from other languages, and that it equates neatly to an identity (Le Page and Tabouret Keller 1985). This common root is presented as evidence of both the singularity of pre-colonial Maya identity and its continuing durability. The essentialising of language works in conjunction with a similar approach to other aspects of Maya community such as economic condition.

The homogenizing of *indígenas* in cultural terms through reference to language is given material grounding by Demetrio Cojti who asserts that Mayas were victims of internal colonialism, which appears when a power,

> *"monopoliza y controla el Estado mientras que el resto de comunidades etnicas son sujetos coloniales, mediante el expansionismo cultural de su etnia o la prohibicion de enseñar y utilizar los idiomas no oficiales.......y cuando practica políticas específicas de explotación económica de los miembros de Pueblos dominados."*

(Cojti 1997:25)

Whereas the concept of internal colonialism can be used as a tool with which to analyse exploitation within a country, Cojti employs the term in a more reductive way. Through their use of the concept, Maya intellectuals want to demonstrate that there is a direct link between shared cultural traits, especially language, and shared economic subordinacy. Maya intellectuals do have a point here. They are accurate in highlighting the high incidence of poverty in departments with predominantly *indígena* populations. However the Guatemalan case is not as clear-cut as the concept would suggest. People's experiences of poverty do not run uniformly in parallel with distinctive cultural traditions.

The unity which is crucial to the construction of Maya identity, informs the ways that Maya intellectuals look at and relate to local communities. In particular Maya intellectuals prefer to play down the differences that exist both within and between

indígena communities. Competition between *indígenas* and the exploitation of *indígenas* by other *indígenas* represents a significant limit to *indígena* organising.

By applying the paradigm internal colonialism to Guatemala, Maya intellectuals such as Demetrio Cojti are able to read economic history in a way that matches and complements the cultural unity which they find in the linguistic history of peoples in Guatemala. In offering an analysis I am going against the grain because there is little sense in the existing literature of Maya intellectuals that *indígenas* could not or would not share a common purpose with other *indígenas*.

My analysis of communities in Izabal follows the lead of Jim Handy and Greg Grandin who have addressed local Guatemalan histories and the way that communities have organised as political units in struggles for resources. Handy has shown how, under the reformist governments in the 1950s, communities took advantage of state legislation to assert community ownership of land over and against municipal elites. (Handy 1994). Greg Grandin's research on Quetzaltenango reveals how the urban-based indigenous elite engaged in constructing a national identity which attempted to embrace but did not represent the concerns of villages within the municipality of Quetzaltenango. The dispute between K'iche' elites and communities in the municipality "destroyed the lingering conceit that city K'iche's spoke on behalf of *la raza indígena en general*" (Grandin 2000:216). David Stoll's analysis of contemporary struggles for land in K'iche' since the return of refugees in the 1990s reveals the enduring power of community organising for rural livelihoods (Stoll 1998:51). Although it is difficult for Maya Movement activists to acknowledge that *indígenas* can have conflicting interests and exploit each other, greater emphasis on the history of indigenous community agency is important both for our understanding of indigenous history and the construction of Maya identity.

Jeffrey Gould's work on Nicaragua is useful in trying to look beyond generalised claims about *indígenas* to their local experiences. Gould situates people in contexts, historicizing identity and emphasising the importance of structural forces in shaping these. Understanding indigenous identity is much more than the identification of specific traits such as language and dress, it implies an examination of how and why, in the context of economic struggles, individuals and groups maintain, reject or re-emphasise those traits in the furtherance of those struggles. Gould's contribution to our understanding of community lies in his exploration of the dynamics of community. He examines assumptions of homogeneity and draws out the ways that individuals can share a common purpose in community. Whilst exaggerating the qualities of community and tending

towards historical nostalgia, Gould's claim that community was something like "a church, union, political party rolled into one" is useful for my study of communities in North Izabal (Gould 1998:15).

Gould is trying to emphasise in a pithy, shorthand way that community is a multi-dimensional, dynamic form which is not simply a culturally homogenous unit. Whilst there may be shared traits, they are not likely to be exclusive to that community. The danger is that by isolating particular traits a limited version of community is fixed which is less than the whole because it abstracts traits from the context in which they are meaningful to members. Community is difficult to describe concisely. As a result the tendency is to describe elements or characteristics of community. Community is more easily understood when conditions, in this case the competition for land, draw it out. It is then that the organisation, which is a representation of the dynamics of the memory, tradition, practical concerns, relationships and self-interest of members, becomes apparent. Communities are important sites of strategic action and identity as well as the sites of contradictory interests in which control of and access to resources are contested. They may also be channels through which the state is addressed. In ascertaining to what extent there is commonality of purpose amongst community members I seek to show that the energies and purpose invested in community by its members outweigh the divergences which could otherwise weaken the capacity for community political organisation.

In the following section I illustrate the ways that tradition is worked into and informs the political organising of community by looking at the ways that economic pressures in relation to land interact with traditional conceptions of community relations with land in communities of North Izabal. That integrating of tradition into current struggles contrasts with Maya intellectuals' conceptions of land which I will now briefly outline.

Maya intellectuals emphasise the symbolic nature of land. For Maya intellectual Raxche', Mayas are those "who conserve the worldview that propitiates harmonic existence with our Mother nature." (Raxche' 1995:76) Francisco Cali refers to land as "*nuestra madre, es de donde venimos, porque de maíz supuestemente hemos sido creados y el maíz ha nacido de la tierra*" (cited in Borrell 1997:112).

By referring to land in symbolic terms, Maya intellectuals attempt to encompass the interests of *indígenas* who are engaged in agricultural production as well as those urban dwellers for whom land is much less important in material terms. Maya intellectuals have tended to remain silent in the face of recent actions by both indigenous and *ladino*

campesinos who have occupied *fincas* and blocked main roads. When Maya intellectuals do exhibit a more materialist approach, their objectives are more concerned with territory than with production. In keeping with his espousal of the internal colonialism concept, Demetrio Cojti writes that

> "The Guatemalan state currently administers territorial space that does belong to it and it exercises sovereignty that belongs to the pre-Alvarado Maya nations. This fact must not be merely recognised; territories that have been expropriated must be returned."

> (Cojti Cuxil 1995:30)

In contrast communities' claims for land in North Izabal are not based on a symbolic understanding of the role of land within Maya culture.

In the following section I examine the centrality of land for communities' livelihoods in North Izabal. I analyse the changes that have taken place in the region and show how traditional practices in relation to land enable communities to negotiate the changes to which they are subjected. I will outline the changes that have taken place in North Izabal since the 1950s and in particular, the change from the relative isolation of communities from the state and the relative availability of land before the 1960s, to increased competition for land and engagement with the state from the 1960s to the present day.

Between 1900 and 1970 communities in North Izabal had been informal kin based groupings set up in many cases by people trying to escape the labour demands of the state which continued up until 1944. It is important to distinguish between the nature of community between 1900 and 1970 and the construction of community in the present in response to particular threats which draws upon and coincides with traditional ways of living but is actually community being constructed in the present. With the intensification of competition for land, community took on a more formal nature. Communities were often instructed by the INTA (*Instituto Nacional de Transformación Agraria*) the government land agency, to move their houses together into a more typically compact *aldea* form. They were also required to maintain paths to the community and clear the boundary line which separated them from other communities. Most important of all communities initiated the process of *tramite* (bureaucratic process) for the legalisation of their land. For many communities far from entering into a process for the legalisation of their land, communities' claims stagnated in the offices of INTA for in some cases as long as twenty years.

Threats to community lands

During the 1950s and 1960s, Izabal was a zone of migration for *ladinos* escaping political violence and poverty in the eastern departments of Zacapa and Chiquimula. According to *ladino* informants from those departments, the government land agency encouraged *campesinos* to migrate to land in North Izabal with promises of land titles. (hmi 03/87) Siebers writes that it was not just the availability of land which attracted people but, "*la fertilidad de las tierras siempre ha sido la razón de más peso para traer gente a Izaba.*" (Siebers 1990). The frontier zone of Izabal was also very attractive to high-ranking military personnel and large landowners seeking to increase their wealth (Painter 1987:46).

Since the 1960s Q'eqchi' communities have been under an ever increasing threat because they have no legal proof of ownership of the land which they farm. Not only were *ladino finqueros* able to play the bureaucratic and corrupt systems of the land registry to their advantage, but they were also willing to use violent means in their pursuit of more land. There are numerous examples of assaults on communities' land from across the region.

The case of the community of Sumach illustrates the kind of 'benign assault' which results when a landowner wishes to take control of community land whilst securing the community as a reserve labour force. Cattle ranchers whose agricultural project does not require a permanent workforce of more than half a dozen people but does require work parties for brief periods during the year to carry out specific tasks such as clearing weeds and putting up fences were anxious to retain the community whilst taking possession of their land. According to people in Sumach the community was already settled on the land when the *finquero* arrived in 1977 with legal documents to press his claim for ownership (cc/sum/1.02.88). In fact the people of Sumach found themselves in a zone with various absentee landlords asserting ownership. The landowner pressed his right to the land but at the same time encouraged the people of Sumach to stay on the *finca*. An unwritten agreement was established which gave Sumach people access to land for their subsistence crops, access to forest for firewood and hunting and the use of the river (cc/sum/1.02.88) 02/88). As a consequence of the *finquero* arriving and settling on "his" land the hitherto dispersed community of Sumach was reorganised into a more formal village layout with houses in plots on either side of a path.

During the mid 1980s, after various frustrated efforts to obtain the services of a government teacher, the community came to an agreement with the finquero that he would pay half of a teacher's salary and the community would provide the other half of the salary. The *finquero* both responded to some community appeals for help and proffered gifts. It was common practice for the *finquero* to provide a small calf for the patronal feast and he was the godparent to various children in the community which meant that he was regularly present at its religious celebrations. This kind of patron client relationship based on reciprocity and unequal power relations tended to suck the community in so that its attentions were directed more at cultivating and maintaining relations with the *finquero* than with any wider group such as other poor Q'eqchi speakers in the region. In the context of the existence or threat of violence in the 1980s and the seeming futility of approaches to local government for any kind of help in developing their *aldeas*, I was told by a senior community man that the relationship with the *finquero* provided some degree of support and security (mcp/cat/sum/1/02/88).

In other cases, where established communities suddenly found that the land which they had first cleared was now claimed by large landowners, the response was altogether different. When a finquero arrived in the community of Santa Cruz Tuba in 1988 to take possession of the land, the community felt that they had a strong legal position because they had been invited to settle on the land by the government land agency (hco/cruz/02.89). However after an initial attempt to oppose him, and various visits from the *finquero's* armed cronies the community of Santa Cruz Tuba succumbed to his intentions. The Q'eqchi' speaking members of the community abandoned the village, moving north into the Petén.

Members of the community of Paraiso were placed in a similar position in 1989 when they were suddenly made aware that the land which they had worked for fifty years had an owner. When he presented himself in the community threatening to use violence the community left the land. Some of the people were able to join the nearby Q'eqchi' community of Faja Sebenque but other members migrated to the Peten region in the north (apc/par/11.07.01).

In other cases where land titling processes are incomplete, or where land is a *baldio,* the threat of dispossession of community lands by *finqueros* is ever-present. The fact that, as a *baldio,* the land does not appear on the national land register and therefore in effect doesn't exist, means that the onus is on communities or finqueros to make a *denuncia* to the government land agency. In such cases Spanish speaking *finqueros* who

are familiar with state bureaucracy are in an advantageous position. The signing of Peace Accords in 1996, whilst addressing some of the problems relating to land tenure, could not change the mentality of some *finqueros* who are prepared to use whatever violence and acts of intimidation are necessary to secure their economic advancement. During 2000 a large landowner not previously known to the community of Cotoxha sent armed men to inform them that he was the owner and to collect the community's written acknowledgement of his ownership. When the community defiantly refused to sign the document the men fired shots into the air before leaving the village. Members of the community explained to me what had happened, "We told them that it is our land and they got angry and fired their guns outside the school" (bpc/cot/12.07.01). Many of the men in the community were enraged to the point of going to get their hunting rifles and machetes but they were persuaded by others that they should wait to see if the outsiders left of their own accord (bpc/cot/12.07.01). What particularly incensed the men was that the community space, the school, had been violated and the children frightened (ncc/13/.07.01). Days later the landowner himself arrived by helicopter accompanied by the same armed men and the *alcalde* of Livingston. The people of Cotoxha complained to the *alcalde* that the landowner's men had come armed again. As if for the benefit of the *alcalde* the landowner declared "We have signed the Peace Accords – we don't settle things in that way now" (bpc/cot/12.07.01). Evidence from throughout Guatemala contradicts that assertion. In a case which was well publicised both in the press and on the radio, two people were brutally dragged to their deaths behind a jeep by the guardians of a finca because they had entered the finca to cut firewood.

Whereas *indígenas* from the western highlands of Guatemala participated in wage labour on coffee and sugar plantations and developed an awareness of their common plight through the mobilising work of the *campesino* organisation CUC, Q'eqchi's in Izabal faced the increasing threats to their land and livelihood during the 1970s and 1980s as individual communities. According to Jonas, economic growth followed by economic crisis in the 1970s and early 1980s, "broke down the objective barriers that kept the Mayas relatively isolated in the highlands." (Jonas 2000:22) Jonas notes that *indígenas* were involved in mass strikes in 1980 organised by CUC on the southern coast plantations. Migrants from different language groups and communities in the west of Guatemala intermingled through plantation labour and in the ensuing struggles for labour rights *indígenas* learnt new ways of being *indígena* (Jonas 2000:22).

In 1988 representatives from communities in the region attended a meeting held in the parish centre at Semaji to share with each other their communities' experience of the generalised problem of insecurity of land tenure. Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal did not engage in migrant labour and as a consequence were not exposed to the kind of ethnic mixing and class organising which characterised the experience of many *indígenas* in western Guatemala. People attending the meeting in the parish did so as representatives of their communities to see what they could secure for them. Although the representatives shared their frustrations, a parish level strategy which would embrace the concerns and desires of all the communities in the parish was not discussed. Some representatives left the meeting disappointed because they were not offered anything concrete. The lack of parish and diocesan level responses to the problem of land tenancy in North Izabal contrasts with the response of the Catholic church in Alta Verapaz where Bishop Flores established a diocesan office to address communities' land problems.[10] In the late 1990s an attempt was made to cut through the bureaucracy and corruption that had hitherto thwarted communities' attempts to secure legal titles to their land. I will examine the role of communities in those initiatives in Chapter 6.

Throughout the 1980s the process of land privatisation from which Q'eqchi' communities were excluded gathered pace. During his term in office (1986-1990) President Vinicio Cerezo privatised an extensive area of land and designated it a protected zone in the name of his son Marco Vinicio. The combined area of Finca Chocon, the private protected zone controlled by the Cerezo family, and another protected zone in the Sierra de Santa Cruz was more than 23,000 hectares. This amounted to a massive privatisation of land at a time when communities were struggling to secure land titles. Eleven communities which occupied land within the protected zones were directly affected when Marco Vinicio Cerezo's ecological organisation FUNDAECO placed an embargo on all legal processes pertaining to the protected zone. A further thirty communities were also placed in a high state of alert because they were occupying land in the *zona de amortiguamiento* of the protected zone, where restrictions can be placed on land use (ncc/asoc/3.06.01).

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[10] Bishop Luis Estrada tended to promote purely spiritual rather than material initiatives in Izabal. Because of the lack of support from him, priests from the parish of El Estor (next to Rio Dulce parish) started to attend meetings in the neighbouring diocese of Alta Verapaz rather than in their own diocese.

The pressure on communities to obtain legal title to their land quickly has not abated in the twenty first century. The repairing of existing roads and the construction of more routes into the region during the late 1990s has increased the attraction of the region for prospective *ladino* landowners, as has the extension of the national electricity grid. In 1990 this reached as far as Fronteras on the banks of the Rio Dulce; now it has a spur reaching into the interior where the majority of Q'eqchi' communities are located.

Engagement with the state: land legalisation

Increased competition for land in North Izabal led directly to increased engagement between the communities and the state. In order to secure a land title all adult members of the community are required to present their *cedulas* (identification card), which both establishes their membership of a community and in theory enables the state to prevent individuals from petitioning for land in other departments.

The previous relative isolation of individual community members from the state is evidenced by the fact that many community members did not have *cedulas*. For the migrants from Alta Verapaz who initiated the communities in Izabal there are difficulties and expenses associated with the process of obtaining a *cedula*. During 2000, 25% of women and 10% of men in Arcochoch were in the process of trying to obtain their *cedulas*. Similarly, communities some of which had been in existence since 1900, were not officially recognised until their community committees visited the Municipal centre in Livingston in the early 1980s and were registered in the *Intendencia de hacienda*. As registered communities of the Municipality of Livingston, they were then entitled to appeal to the municipal authority for funds to improve the infrastructure of their communities.

Communities are deeply concerned that they do not legally own the land where they live and work. Table 2 in appendix 3 details the precarious legal status of many communities in the parish of Rio Dulce. *Ancianos* establishing communities in North Izabal between 1900 and 1970 assumed that the land did not belong to anybody because it was virgin forest (mc/an/arc/11.7.02). During that period access to land was not mediated by the state in North Izabal and the only tangible constriction on communities was that the land they claimed had not already been claimed by another Q'eqchi' community.

By 2000 more than 50% of the land in the region was privately owned by *ladino* landowners. Only 9% of the remaining land was officially registered in the name of Q'eqchi' communities. The vast majority of Q'eqchi' communities either found

themselves to be occupying private land or land which was untitled but sought after increasingly by other communities or *ladinos*.

When referring to the place where they live, communities use the word *K'aleb'aal*, which means place of the cornfield. The legal ownership of community land is important because communities define themselves in terms of maize production which is their main economic activity and the basis of their subsistence production. The lack of legal title to land and the consequent threat to livelihoods is the single issue which unites community members in the four communities studied here. Community members who have traditionally shared the common economic activity of maize production now experience their lack of land title as a threat to community.

The assumption of shared poverty

Having established that communities are facing significant external threats to land, I will now examine the communities more closely and analyse the dynamic between commonalities and differences which informs the capacity of communities to resist threats to land. I ask what keeps communities together in this context of competition for and insecurity of land tenure. Writing about community in the western highlands of Guatemala, Sheldon Annis argues that competition for land "undercuts the traditional cultural equilibrium, which was based on social egalitarianism (or at least the assumption of shared poverty)"(Annis 1987: 140). When I asked a range of leaders and ordinary people reflecting the age, gender and leadership positions within communities to describe their communities they said "we *(referring to all the members of the speakers' community)* are poor", stressing their shared economic interest and condition in contrast to the different economic condition of outsiders such as cattle ranchers or traders (mc/an/arc/21.5.00)(ec/cat/cal/3.05.00). Some of the leaders went further in stressing that community protects the livelihoods of people (ncc/cat/3.07.01). The assumption of the idea of shared poverty amounts to a mask which is a fundamental basis for identity in the communities of North Izabal.

All the people with whom I spoke talked of the need to improve and develop their communities. They stressed the importance of the legalisation of their land and education in the bringing about of the improvement (rc/fis/coy/10.06.01). Those desires to improve communities, as well as the memory of what community has been, inform the dynamism which constructs community in the current context of threats to community land.

Fundamental to that construction is the understanding of shared poverty within communities.

In the following section I discuss the basis of the understanding of shared poverty, and analyse what helps to preserve the commonality even when differences are apparent. I will first examine the commonalities of community before analysing the role of different leaders and people within communities, the interests that they pursue and evidence of tensions that exist between community and individuals.

Commonalities and change

Members of the communities share the condition of peasant farmers seeking to become more integrated into the market. The communities claim the exclusive right to use an area of land for which many do not have a legal title. In some cases, as a result of competition for land, groups of people are forced to move and re-establish themselves as what I have termed overspill communities. Some communities take with them an *anciano* from their old community or they select one of the members to serve as an *anciano* as in the case of Sepak. The communities manage to combine the traditional links to the land with the modern notion of land legalisation. It is not that a legal understanding of land is replacing a traditional understanding of community relations to land, but rather the two understandings are interdependent. The traditional relations with land impel communities to secure that relation in legal terms and the legalisation of land provides the context for the reassertion of traditional relations with the land.

The communities have established intimate relations with the landscape which provides them with their livelihoods. Carter doubted whether migrants from the Q'eqchi' heartland could ever inscribe their communities on a new landscape, and Wilson has described the dislocation and disorientation of Q'eqchi' communities during the civil war (Carter 1969:38; Wilson 1997:130). Hans Siebers tends towards the same kind of essentialism when he reports that the *ancianos* from what he terms the "settlement areas" in the Petén and Izabal go to the mountains in Alta Verapaz to make offerings and ask for fruitful harvests (Siebers 1995:121). Siebers stresses the importance of certain mountains in Alta Verapaz for all Q'eqchi' communities. He claims that there are no mountains in the "settlement areas" and that by visiting the mountains in Alta Verapaz at particular moments in the agricultural calendar Q'eqchi' communities affirm their relations with their place of origin. My research reveals that Siebers's essentialist approach to Q'eqchi' communities does not ring true for communities in North Izabal. Whilst the

mountains in North Izabal are not on the same scale as those of Alta Verapaz they are nevertheless referred to as *cerros* by the communities who have established intimate relations with them. This is important because it shows that for communities in North Izabal tradition is not lost because they have ceased to make trips to mountains in Alta Verapaz, rather tradition is established in a new setting.

Ancianos in the four communities told me about local hills which they referred to by name (mcc/anc/coy/22.06.01). The *tzuultaq'as* are the "sentinels" or "earth deities" who provide both human and crop fertility (Wilson 1991:34). Meaning literally mountain/valley, the *tzuultaq'as* are the physical features of the landscape, but they are also the "spiritual beings" who inhabit the landscape, controlling the climate, overseeing the animals which live there, and protecting the mountain (Wilson 1991:34). Whilst as Wilson explains their character is "authoritarian", through sacrifice they are open to a reciprocal relationship with the people (Wilson 1991:34). The maize rituals punctuating the agricultural cycle are directed at these sentinels who guard God's order. Permission to clear the forest, sow maize and harvest as well as hunt is granted by the *tzuultaq'a* through the reciprocal relationship highlighted in the *mayejak* or sacrifice. Particular local hills are the realms of particular *tzuultaq'as*. Thus, one community may have a *tzuultaq'a* who dwells in the land around that community and in that sense the *tzuultaq'a* is the patron of the community. Wilson explains that according to Q'eqchi' religiosity, the landscape is living, the *tzuultaq'as* must be petitioned before the earth will bear fruit (Wilson 1997:124). The asking of permission, the keeping of sexual abstinence and the giving of offerings such as candles, pom (aromatic resin), meat and maize is essential in the establishment of a harmonious relationship with the tzuultaq'a.

The reciprocal relations with the Tzuultaq'a are mirrored in the relations between members of the community. In maize cultivation all the men work together to plant maize for each community member. The equitable distribution of land between households within communities and the enduring practice of reciprocal labour, *cambio de mano,* in the cultivation of maize so that all community members work reciprocally to sow the same area of maize for each household, do give all households within communities a common base level for subsistence. All members in a community have the same area of land sown under the reciprocal community labour agreement which does not entail any payment. Similarly men gather to build a new roof on a neighbour's or family member's house without expecting payment.

Within communities there is an expectation that all members contribute to the common life and interests of the community. In particular it is assumed that all members will respond when there is a call to participate in community work projects such as clearing the boundary around the land, or contributing to a common fund for the measuring of the land. There are also community sanctions for any member who abuses his position within the community or contravenes a community agreement. In Secaxte a member who cut wood from the community forest without permission was ordered to do a week's weeding and clearing around the school and church as a punishment (msc/edir/sec/11.07.02). In other communities, members who were not in agreement with the cost of the land legalization process decided to leave the community, because it would not be possible to remain in there on different terms to the rest of the community (cc/maes/cal/20.7.02). In Sapotal a community member who signed an official document without consulting the community was driven out (ncc/asaw/2.06.02). In Coyoute a man who repeatedly beat his wife when he was drunk was apprehended by the community and forced to dry out (rcc/fisp/coy/ 8/02). The continuing existence of community is envisaged through agreed actions and projects which are seen as beneficial for all members of the community.

The community envisages its future existence in terms of mutually beneficial social development projects such as a school, land title, communal bank, road, electricity supply, drinking water and so forth. The demands of securing education provision and land have led to the setting up of particular committees to deal with the practicalities involved. Community coherence in relation to reciprocal labour agreements and the control of resources which I have just described is intertwined with a vigorous growth of *compadrazgo* and marriage relations which pervade virtually all interactions within communities.

Compadrazgo

The work of Foster, Rothstein and Wolf has been revealing in establishing the scope and potency of dyadic contracts (Foster 1967, Rothstein 1979, Wolf 1972). Survival itself, access to land, religious well-being, neighbourly relations and virtually every rung of the political ladder are enmeshed in dyadic contracts. Foster distinguishes between two types of dyadic contract which structure the aspects of life that I have listed. Whilst the process of exchange in all contractual agreements may be fairly similar, the societal position of the two parties and hence their access to resources can differ markedly. Sociologists seem to

be in broad agreement over this fundamental point, which distinguishes between colleague contracts between partners of equal status ("horizontal *compadrazgo*") and patron client relations ("vertical *compadrazgo*"), between unequal parties (Wolf 1972:6).

The common practice of *compadrazgo* in Q'eqchi' communities is evident when parents choose godparents who act as sponsors for their children at the religious moments of their baptism and confirmation as well as for marriage. Whilst in patron-client relations the transfer of resources between parties may provide clear evidence of the contract, horizontal relationships of *compadrazgo* within Q'eqchi' communities are manifested in less tangible terms. Mutual respect, recognition of authority, hospitality and willingness to attend to each other's needs are enduring signs of *compadrazgo* between the parents of the child and godparents. This relationship of baptism, where the godparents promise to follow up and support the child's religious progress, extends well beyond the ritual. As Cubitt points out, it is the scope for extending "supporting personal relationships" and the potential for manipulation which provides sustainability for *compadrazgo*. Consolidation of family relations, combined with the extension of *compadrazgo* to link in village neighbours, results in an unseen mesh of criss-crossing relationships which provide "stability and cohesion" (Cubitt 1988:98).

When I tried to map the *compadre* links between individuals within a community, a web of links emerged in which no individuals were isolated from the web. It was noticeable, however, that within the web there were hubs focusing on the catechist, *ancianos* and the president of the land committee in the community. In similar fashion the institution of marriage has worked to integrate communities. The high incidence of marriages involving partners from within the same community or neighbouring communities has contributed significantly to the consolidation of communities. Parish records reveal that 40% were community based, a further 50% were parish based, and only 10% were couples with a partner from outside the region. (*Archivos Parroquiales libro* 2) The communities are bound together by powerful bonds which are neither exclusively economic nor socio-religious but are combined in a way which makes it difficult to separate out the two.

Production: land

The salience of community identity hinges on whether internal differences are pronounced and tend to prompt competition between community members or whether those differences are successfully managed and rationalised in the communal struggles of

members. In the following section I examine differences in land ownership and production as well as evidence of entrepreneurship within communities. It is clear from each of the four communities which I studied in depth, that those people displaying most evidence of economic advancement were also the community members with high levels of commitment to the continuing existence of community.

Throughout the Sierra de Santa Cruz people told me that they and the rest of their community were poor and when I suggested that some people might be in a worse position economically I was constantly told that there was no difference between community members.

Whilst competition within communities is less conflictive than that against private landowners or other communities, it is nevertheless very important and contributes to the squeeze on land experienced by communities. Communities in North Izabal occupy extensive areas of land. The average amount of land held per family in North Izabal is 30 *manzanas* which is considerably higher than the average in the western highlands. The variation in amounts of land held by the four communities is as follows: Chinaranx 28 *manzanas*, Calvario 10 *manzanas*, Arcochoch 40 *manzanas*, and Coyoute 36 *manzanas*. (Base de Datos 2000) Wilson cites the minimum level of landholding necessary for reproduction of the household is 4 *manzanas* (Wilson 1995:43). It would appear, therefore, that communities have surpluses of land.

However this relatively plentiful supply of land disguises the impending threat of landlessness for some families. I was told that the critical moment would arrive when sons and daughters set up their own households. In Chinaranx the heads of families revealed that they were considering various options. One third of the heads in Chinaranx said that they would probably give 3 or 4 *manzanas* of land to each of their children. The other heads of families expressed the fear that by subdividing their land they would be condemning their children to poverty. Three heads of families suggested that they would not be passing land on to their children because it would generate disputes. The pressure is more intense in Calvario where each household controls 10 *manzanas*. All heads of families in Calvario said that they would like to give land to their sons, but that it would not be possible for all the children to receive land. Younger members of the community have already left to found another community called Sepak. The competition for land in the area around Calvario and Sepak is keenly felt because FUNDAECO has been inspecting the region and monitoring the clearing of forest. Community members in Arcochoch and Coyoute informed me that the decision about dividing up land between

sons and daughters would also be affected by the cost of the land (spc/tie/arc/16.06.02). I was told that at the moment of paying for the land there would probably be some rearrangement of land ownership within communities (jc/coy/21.06.01). This is most likely to occur in Coyoute and Arcochoch where families have laid claim to extensive areas of land for which they have yet to pay. Various people told me that they would consider selling their rights to other community members or another family member (pcc/fis/arc/2.07.02).

The apparent surplus of land must also be seen in terms of production levels. The soil in North Izabal is very thin and once the forest has been cleared the slopes are susceptible to erosion. In the communities of Coyoute and Arcochoch I saw evidence of the effect of the heavy rains which accompany hurricanes. Whole hillsides slip down and the topsoil is washed away. The harvests throughout the region have been reduced significantly and it is only in *ladino* communities where *campesinos* utilise chemical fertilisers that the level of production has been maintained or even increased. For most Q'eqchi' communities the productivity of the soil has dropped from its initial level of 30-40 *quintales* per *manzana*. I recorded the following levels of production for one *manzana* in the four communities, Arcochoch 10-15 *quintales*, Calvario 12-14 *quintales*, Coyoute 25 *quintales* and Chinaranx 30 *quintales* (ncc/cat/21.06.01). The people in each community explained the differences in production between communities in terms of the quality of soil. I did not find significant differences in the levels of production between members of the same community probably because people have not started using chemical fertilisers which would affect yields.

Production: labour

In this section I will analyse labour by members for outsiders before analysing labour within communities. In the western highland of Guatemala one of the major markers of economic differentiation is the commodification of labour. That is not the case in North Izabal where, although there is evidence that half the men in some communities have at some time engaged in short-term wage labour on local *fincas*, I found no evidence of households whose main economic activity is to cultivate the land owned by another community member, and little evidence of people who depend upon paid work on *fincas*.

People in all four communities have done paid work on local *fincas* but, as they explained to me, it was short-term work of no more than a couple of weeks. Various people explained that there had been work in 1990 when the pines were being planted but

that in 2002 there was little opportunity. Various young people told me that they had worked for two weeks in the pine *finca* Foresa and were able to combine it with classes for 6th grade which began in late morning (dcc/esc/ch/7.07.02). In Calvario, which is close to a number of *fincas*, people explained that there were some families living in the *finca* who did most of the work. All informants told me that they only worked in the *finca* when there was a slack time in the subsistence calendar and they were short of money or had a particular expense to meet. Such expenses included money to support education, the cost of cement for a house floor. I did not speak to anybody who was saving the money in a bank account.

The lack of availability of jobs in the region combined with the access to land for all community members has meant that there is little scope for economic differentiation within communities based on paid employment. Community members in all four communities emphasised that they were above all farmers who grew maize and some other crops. The lack of other incomes and the desire expressed by community members in all four communities to continue farming turns the focus in on the community and how it can address external threats.

Apart from some temporary work on *fincas* which is casual in the sense that it is paid by the daily task, there are few opportunities for employment in the area. A notable exception has been the Basics Oil Company, which is building an access road for the maintenance of the main oil pipeline which bisects the region from west to east, and has been careful to ensure that all people in the nearby *aldea* are offered a turn to work on the road and earn the 24 *Quetzales* per day this pays. I observed various men asking the Basics foreman if they could work, and saw them being told that because they had already worked they would have to wait until other members of the community had worked. Inevitably there were some people who showed a particular aptitude for the work and were favoured by foremen. I observed a group of people from the community of Guitarras struggling to match up and join sections of tubing which were to be used to drain water away from the new road. The foremen informed the workers that he would look for so and so in Guitarras. Clearly whilst the aim was for all local people to benefit, the requirements for the completion of the job meant that Basics were prepared to favour certain people in order to complete the work. The foreman explained that the system of contracting people for one plan only was based on their experiences that the availability of cash could cause internal problems in communities and had been agreed in conjunction with the Guitarras committee.

Labour within communities

In all four communities there was evidence of an increasing insertion into capitalist relations whilst community relations of production still prevailed. This increasing exposure to capitalist forces and the commonly held view in the communities that they should improve their links to the national market are important. It is in the managing of this dynamic between capitalist and community relations that community is being redefined.

The sporadic nature of paid labour, and the access of all community members to land and reciprocal community labour, means that economic differences are not pronounced. Even where some community members occasionally hire other community members to carry out a task such as sowing a plot of beans, the price paid is often not on a par with the price paid elsewhere in the region. Similarly when a community member ran out of maize before the harvest and went to buy a few pounds from his neighbour the price was artificially low. Although *ladino* buyers were paying over 100 *Quetzales* for 100 pounds of maize the neighbour who was also a *padrino* charged 60 *Quetzales*.

The practice of exchanging labour and some commodities such as maize at accommodating prices to other community members was a feature of all four communities. This is important because it raises questions bout the extension of capitalist relations within communities. In the communities of north Izabal there is no "general circulation" of labour or produce, so the commodity does not achieve its exchange value. Community members are not completely free when making transactions with other community members, because the exchange is enmeshed in kinship, *compadrazgo* and community relationships. Gavin Smith's observation that "items can be exchanged in a very localised context at relative prices that do not reflect the prevailing equivalents in the larger market environment" is pertinent to Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal (Smith 1989:160). In spite of the need to buy labour and maize from other community members, the logic of community relations, reciprocity and neighbourliness continues to be operational and underscores the assertion by many community members that the community is poor. Relations within communities contrast with relations between community members and *ladino* traders who buy maize and other crops as well as selling products such as sugar to the communities. People define themselves as poor in relation to these, because it is the traders who set the price

Individuality and community

In the following section I examine how community manages rising expectations different expertises and exposure to new ideas. In order to analyse the ways in which the tensions between individuals and community are played out, I will focus on catechists, *ancianos,* and committee members. The individual differences in outlook, personal drive and expectation are apparent in all four communities. Those differences are difficult to quantify because they are in the realm of aspirations and attitudes and people were concerned that they should not be seen as being critical of the community.

I will now examine both the material evidence of those differences and the less tangible entrepreneurial spirit which is fostered and promoted by external agencies such as the Catholic Church. It is the access of certain community members to knowledge as well as to fora outside the community where ideas are exchanged that sets those members apart.

However, those community members who display entrepreneurial potential are also members with a high stake in, and commitment to community. Since the majority of such members are Catholics it is important to examine the values placed upon entrepreneurship within the Catholic Church. Implicit in Weber's argument that there is a "relationship of elective affinity" existing between Protestantism and the capitalist lifestyle, is the argument that Catholicism is in some way at odds with capitalism (Lowy 1996:19). There are, according to Michael Lowy, two major reasons for the incompatibility of Catholicism and capitalism. Firstly, as Weber recognised, the fear of the impersonal nature of relations inside capitalism represented a threat to the Catholic Church which sought to influence people ethically. Secondly, scriptural texts such as Matthew 25:31 were picked up and used by some sections of the church to criticise capitalism. The identification of Christ with the poor when translated into action resulted in charitable acts and forms of individualism directed towards the service of other people and the amelioration of the worst forms of exploitation (Lowy 1996:24). This argument about the relationship between individuals and communities is useful in my analysis of the role of catechists in communities. Whilst catechists are in an advantageous position both materially and intellectually, they are also preoccupied with the desire to work for the benefit of the whole community. Community is therefore constructed through the dynamic tension between individualism and service.

Catechists

Catechists are at the forefront of economic and social improvements in their communities. Whilst supporting community level education and land projects their own household activities reveal an entrepreneurial spirit which is not present in all households.

The catechist in Chinaranx has bought up to 5 calves which he fattens up in the community before selling them in the neighbouring community of Searranx. He has also bought and planted approximately 100 mahogany saplings which, he explained, were for his children. One of the sons of the catechist is a health promoter who works at regional level and provides part of an extra income to the household.

The catechist in Calvario is also the president of the land committee. Although he is fully committed to the community he owns a plot of land in the town of Chahal which he may use to set up a shop. He also cultivates *pom* (resin) and *cacao* trees on his land and sells the resin and cocoa beans to other members of the community.

The catechist in Arcochoch receives an income from his son who is working as a teacher in the community. He told me that he also occasionally pays men from the community to plant beans for him. In 2002 he paid each man 25 *Quetzales* for a day's work, which is the minimum wage in Guatemala. Catechists attend courses at least five times each year in the church centre in Semaji. They receive training on church teaching, bible studies and, together with *ancianos* discuss strategies for strengthening the Catholic community in their *aldea*. The regular meetings with people from other communities are important exchanges of information, knowledge and experience about a range of issues including agricultural practices and the work of outside agencies.

Ancianos

Apart from the two churches and the house of the pastor in Arcochoch, the house of one of the *ancianos* is the only building in the community with a cement floor. The *anciano's* house also has a *lamina*, a corrugated iron roof. All the other houses in Arcochoch have floors made of bare earth. The cement floor represented a significant investment for the *anciano* as well as a logistical challenge in transporting the cement from the shop which is more than 50km from Arcochoch. In the other three communities *ancianos'* houses were the same in construction as the rest of the houses in the communities. *Ancianos* in all the communities stressed that they had worked hard to give their children a better life. The sons of two *ancianos* are catechists in their communities. *Ancianos* in Arcochoch and Coyoute were among the first members of their communities to plant cardamom and

coffee, although they explained that they had received little financial benefit for their efforts because the prices had collapsed in the mid 1990s (mcc/anc/coy/11.08.01)(ax/anc/arc/13.08.01).

All the *ancianos* in each of the four communities were illiterate and could not communicate in Spanish. However, *ancianos* told me that they were not frightened of engaging with people outside the community but that they were severely limited by their inability to speak Spanish. The *ancianos* were instrumental in initiating the community struggles to secure the services of a teacher.

Community committees

Each community has two committees which further the interests of the community with regard to land and education. Initially in the 1980s, when 95% of Q'eqchi' communities in the region were petitioning the government for a primary school, meetings of the whole community prepared petitions signing them "we, the parents of the community of ..."(solic/1988). As schools were built as part of a church-sponsored education project beginning in 1987, communities began to form school committees consisting of between 4 and 6 people who took the responsibility of dealing with all matters relating to the school and teacher. Similarly the land committee deals on the community's behalf with all matters relating to the securing of land titles and the protection of community land from outside threats.

The land and education committees reflect the range of experience, education level, and influence within communities. In each of the four communities there were "ordinary" people as well as people who either have another post within the community or have a certain level of influence. By "ordinary people" I mean people whose level of agricultural production is at or below the average for the community and who do not demonstrate entrepreneurship. Such people are often taking a post in the community for the first time and have not attended any training courses outside the community. Apart from the *ancianos* these community members are less likely to speak Spanish than other people in positions within the community. Committee members are willing workers who are prepared to take the responsibility for example, of collecting materials for teachers. It is also increasingly the case that men who have relatively recently finished school begin service to the community as school committee members. Most of the schools in the region come under the auspices of either the local Catholic church education project or PRONADE (*Programa Nacional Autogestión Educativa*). PRONADE is the

decentralisation programme of the Ministry of Education under which communities are given responsibility for the management of their community school. As in the case of Calvario, which is a PRONADE school, the president of the committee holds an important position since it is the committee which pays the teacher's salary. Similarly in the land committees the senior position is occupied by a senior member of the community. It is often the case that the catechist is also president of either the land or school committees. In the case of Coyoute the FIS promoter is also the president of the land committee.

The threat to security of land tenure and increasing population pressure on land has intensified identification with community in opposition to other communities and *ladino* landowners. Although there is evidence of some economic differences within communities, those differences are not pronounced and the individual community members who display entrepreneurial skills are also the community members with a significant stake in the defence of community. The skills of individuals and the entrepreneurial drives evident in some community members are directed towards projects such as land education and health which are seen by all community members as being beneficial to the whole community.

Since the 1960s, communities have faced major challenges. Communities could no longer expect to be able to cultivate the land that they occupied without having a legal title to that land. Whereas the original community members were keeping their distance from the Guatemalan state, present members realised that they needed to be much less isolated. Communities have organised to solicit land titles to the land that they claim.

Conclusions

There has been a change in attitudes towards production in the communities. The community plays an important role in the balancing of production for the market with subsistence production. There is a high value placed on reciprocal labour arrangements within the community whilst at the same time exploring the possibilities of cultivating crops such as coffee for sale. Communities strive to ensure that members have at least the minimum to survive. In the communities there are shared interests which it makes sense for members to pursue in the changing circumstances. All members agree that they want economic improvement, more cash and improved amenities in their communities. Communities work towards achieving those agreed aims by trusting individuals to liase with outside agencies and come back from meetings and courses with information and training which can be useful to the community. Communities are no longer the

gerontocracies of the past where the senior members of communities were the dominant authority figures. Community concerns about land tenure, education and health have resulted in the emergence of various individuals and committees who are responsible to the community.

The most potentially challenging changes for communities have come about through the setting up of schools in the communities since the 1980s. Although the struggle to secure a school and teacher in each community required significant effort and sacrifice and consolidated community will, the products of the school present a challenge to the unity of that will. Some young people do not want to engage in non- agricultural activities. A tension exists between the aspirations of individuals and the limitations of community. In the short term communities are managing those tensions. There is an expectation and an understanding that young people have studied in order to benefit the community and young people respect the sacrifices made by their parents on their behalf.

Maya activists are constructing Maya community based on specific shared cultural traits particularly Maya languages and the remembering of pre-conquest Maya in which little distinction is made between the experience and beliefs of elites and commoners and all relations are imbued with the ideals of harmony and *complimentariedad*. There is little sense in the writings of intellectuals of the ways that the cultural life of Mayas relates to material struggles, or that there may be differences between Mayas. That construction of a community which is uniform and homogeneous in cultural terms contrasts with the emphasis, in the communities which I studied, on emerging differences, adaptability to changing conditions and the management of change. Maya intellectuals stress the unchanging nature of Mayaness evidenced by Maya languages, which are pure Maya forms and different from other languages particularly Spanish. Thus intellectuals promote the drive to remove all non-Maya words in order to purify the language and in doing so create sameness. There is a sense of looking back to make today's Maya like the ancient Maya. By contrast, communities in North Izabal are looking forward and the continuing value of community organisation to members rests on its ability to adapt and change.

Whereas there is a strong sense that Maya intellectuals work from a "because we are all the same" premise, community members in North Izabal do not consider sameness, but members constantly construct commonality of purpose expressed through community organisation in defence of their land and the pursuit of the livelihoods of all members.

The enduring salience of community and its worth to all members hinges on the articulation of community with the underlying drives of individuals which is both

informed by memories of how community has functioned and constructed in the present in response to the drive to defend land and provide community health and education resources.

In the following chapter I examine the role of local intellectuals and the way that they articulate the different dynamics of community in relation to land security with particular reference to the local figures who make possible this articulating of differences.

Chapter 6: Land: legal changes and reforms and their impact on communities.

Introduction

In Chapter 5, I showed how competition for land and the memory of community prompted the reassertion of community organization in the face of threats to land. I argued that communities are continually recreated in the present out of the memories of community organization in the past as well as present exigencies. Competition for land in North Izabal accentuated the boundaries separating the community organizations which manage land. The result is a disjuncture between the ascription applied to community members by Maya intellectuals and the self-ascription of community members. Because all community members speak Q'eqchi', Maya intellectuals regard community members as Mayas. However although Q'eqchi' speakers in North Izabal are aware that they share a common language, the most salient social category for self- ascription is the village community[11] which controls a tract of land, defending it against other communities and *ladinos*.

In this chapter I analyse the material and cultural dimensions of land and the role of Maya intellectuals with regard to the issue. Through three interrelated sections in this chapter I adjust the focus from the wider political view which examines government policies on land and cultural issues, to a narrower view which highlights the impact of those policies on communities in North Izabal. In the first section I situate the promotion of Maya identity within the national context in order to show how the construction of indigenous identities is informed by the old order in which the oligarchy secures its economic interests through control of the state. In the second section I discuss the importance of communities for Catholic Church-sponsored NGO *Pastoral de la Tierra* and examine the decision made locally to pursue land legalisation through a *convenio* signed with the NGO rather than through the more confrontational approach advocated by CONIC. I argue that the *Pastoral de la Tierra*, has a particularly keen interest in the strengthening of community organisations and that this coincides with the interests of senior community members who are sensitive to the memory of community. Through the *convenio* the NGO *Pastoral de la Tierra* advances the interests of the state. As I showed in Chapter 5, community in North Izabal is real and capable of change unlike the imagined

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[11] Carol Smith (1990) argues that *indígenas* in Guatemala identify with their community. In many cases the persistence of this identification is directly related to land as the economic base. My argument is consistent with and builds on her assertion that community is not strong because of the "dead weight of the past" (Smith 1990:20).

Maya community which is reified and static. In the third section I examine how communities relate to *Pastoral de la Tierra*, and how conflicting interests within communities are subordinated to community interest through the work of local intellectuals. I argue that it is local intellectuals' understanding of and insertion into communities which allows them to integrate the perspectives of different community members in the construction of community.

The old order

In the context of the limits placed on agrarian modernization by neo-liberalism and the old order, the Guatemalan government encourages organising based on local community forms rather than on the wider social categories of small producer or Maya. By "old order" I mean both the members of the Guatemalan economic elite and the system which they have set in place. The history of Guatemala continues to be dominated by a nucleus of fewer than fifty families who have exercised economic and political power since coffee was introduced as a crop for export under the liberal regime of President Justo Rufino Barrios (1873-1885). Marta Elena Casaús Arzú traces the formation of the Guatemalan oligarchy which has grown beyond the initial nucleus of families but continues to distinguish itself from other Guatemalans through group endogamy. Members of the oligarchy who regard themselves as descendants of either Spanish colonisers or German immigrants do not marry people who they regard as being of another class, or people they consider to be ladinos or indígenas (Casaus Arzu 1998: 132). Under President Barrios the actions of the state were indistinguishable from the aims of coffee growers. State legislation was introduced enabling coffee planters to take control of vast extensions of land including land which had hitherto been farmed as community land by indigenous groups (McCreery 1994:267). Under the Redemption Law of 1877 communities were required to redeem the land that they claimed through the payment of a fee (McCreery 1994: 248). State systems of coerced labour were introduced by the state in order to provide labour for the coffee estates. In 1876 President Barrios applied a system of *mandamiento* under which as many as a quarter of the men in a village could be drafted by a *Jéfe politico* for work on a *finca* for a period of up to a year (Handy 1984:67). Planters also procured labour through debt peonage. Labour contractors working for the coffee planters advanced money to *indígenas* who in return were contracted to work on coffee fincas (Handy 1984:67).

The extent of the oligarchy's control of the state was such that forced labour continued until 1945 when following the fall of General Ubico, congress passed a law that ended the use of *libretas*. Under the Vagrancy Law anyone without sufficient property to provide for themselves or without proof that they were contracted to work on an estate was required to work a minimum of 150 days each year on an estate and to carry a *libreta* to record their work (McCreery 1994:317). The longevity and effectiveness of the old system rested on the willingness to use force. In 1873 when coffee production was beginning to take off, the Escuela Politécnica was established to provide officers for the army. The army's role was to enforce the system of coerced labour institutionalised by the state.

The power of the oligarchy, and its determination to maintain the old order was evident when it worked with other reactionary elements within Guatemalan society to reverse a fairly mild set of reform introduced under the Arbenz and Arevalo governments between 1945 and 1954. Under the Agrarian Reform Law of 1952 legislation was enacted which aimed towards a greater efficiency of land use (Handy 1984:128). The Law did not outlaw large estates but it did establish procedures for the redistribution of parts of estates which were not in use. Since less than 15% of its landholdings were under cultivation, the United Fruit Company was particularly affected by this legislation (Keen 1996:445). In response the United Fruit Company joined forces with the Guatemalan oligarchy and the Roman Catholic Church to overthrow the reformist government. In the counterrevolution that followed, all lands that had been expropriated were placed back in the hands of the oligarchy and a widespread purge of reformist elements who were labelled "communists", was carried out. After 1954 the army continued to act in the interests of the oligarchy by repressing unions and protecting private property. By that time the distribution of land was so skewed in favour of the landed elite and poverty and debt in indigenous communities so pronounced that *indígenas* were reliant on the poor wages that they could earn picking coffee. Whilst the beginnings of oligarchic political and economic power were intrinsically linked to the coffee revolution, during the 1960s and 1970s the oligarchy extended its grip on land still further through cultivation of cotton and sugar as well as beef production. In the absence of alternative sources of employment and intense competition for land the oligarchy set the wage level at a low level in order to extract the maximum profit from its economic production. During the 1950s and 1960s the oligarchy consolidated its economic power at the expense of the majority of rural dwellers and by the 1970s rural poverty had reached crisis point (Arias 1990:241). Apart from a minority

of indigenous people who lent money, hired labour and engaged in regional trade, the majority of people in the rural sector were pushed into a precarious economic position by the increasing cost of agricultural inputs and land concentration. Between 1950 and 1979, there was a significant drop in the average size of plots such that 31% of farms were less than 0.7hectares. Over the same period with the increase in the new export crops cotton and sugar, the landed oligarchy increased its holdings of land from 5.5 million to 6.7 million hectares (Painter 1987: 12). It was the exacerbation of conditions in the countryside which prompted many rural workers and farmers to join the ranks of the peasant union CUC and the different guerrilla forces. During the height of the civil war in the early 1980s, hundreds of rural communities were massacred by the Guatemalan army. The oligarchy operates through its own corporate organisations and through the military to repel any attempts to restructure the old system through land redistribution, government investment in small producers and improved labour conditions. The *Comite Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industrias y Financieras,* CACIF, and *Asociación Nacional de Café*, ANACAFE, represent the interests of the oligarchy and have vehemently defended the right to private property and opposed any suggestion of tax reforms affecting property owners (Painter 1987:19). CACIF has been consistently successful in ensuring that both private and state investment in the agricultural sector is calibrated in favour of the landed elite. The distribution of credit amongst agricultural producers is as skewed as the distribution of land. The fact that small producers were required to produce a land title as well as evidence of profit was affectively a barrier to their receiving credit (AVANCSO 1993). In 1990 whilst non-traditional agricultural products and traditional export production received 23% and 41% respectively, and basic grain producers received only 16% of credits. (AVANCSO 1993:15) For those small producers who did secure credit, the terms were such that, far from encouraging the development of the small producer, they broke producers (AVANCSO 1993:15).

Whilst the state's response to rural unrest was fuelled by racism, the underlying motivation was to protect private property. The state would not tolerate any attempt, peaceful or otherwise, to challenge the unequal system of landholding. David McCreery argues that during the period of the coffee revolution (1760-1930), the state's use of "political hegemony", understood as "the threat or use of force", took precedence over "ideological hegemony", understood as "the achievement of policy ends based on willing, or apparently willing, compliance, on shared ideas and values" (McCreery 1990:157). I argue that with the exception of the reformist governments (1944-1954), the

state was consistent in its employment of political hegemony to protect the interest of the landed elite up until 1994. The resumption of peace negotiations, involving the United Nations, was matched by a shift in the approach of the state from an almost complete reliance on political hegemony towards a greater emphasis on "ideological hegemony". The shift does not constitute a change in the allegiance of the state away from its historical ties to the landed elite. Rather it is a change in the state's strategy vis a vis the majority of Guatemalans in different circumstances in order to be able to sustain the historical ties. This shift is highly significant for the construction of identities in Guatemala. Decentralisation policies in the rural sector draw forth local community identities as a device to obscure and dissipate attempts to construct broader identities along class or ethnic lines. At the same time the state allows debate on the multicultural nature of Guatemalan society with particular focuses on the issues of language and education.

The Peace Accords signed in 1996 raised expectations among the majority of rural dwellers for the modernization of the rural sector. The hopes of the rural poor were raised by the provision within the accords for the establishing of a land market and the sale of land by the state at prices accessible to small producers. However because those hopes have been continually frustrated, small producers and indígenas organised through CONIC and other national level organisations have taken direct action against large estate owners and the government. The aim of the Guatemalan government is to dissipate bi-polar political organising which position the government as 'the other side' in struggles over land and labour. Given that poverty indicators are highest in those departments with the highest indigenous population, the construction of a shared indigenous identity linking cultural traits to economic condition and raising the potential for the making of economic demands based on cultural difference is a threat to the Guatemalan elite.

As Charles Hale points out, the Guatemalan government employs the discourse of multiculturalism in a limited and limiting way to weaken popular attempts to bring about structural reform without alienating those groups within society for whom structural reform is most necessary (Hale 2002). Thus indigenous activism is tolerated by the state, when it is restricted to language dress, ritual and education, whereas the construction of a people, the Maya, who claim rights and have their own systems of justice is seen by the state as very threatening. The tried and trusted state response to popular organising for structural change is repression. During the 1980's the Guatemalan government opted to violently repress people associated with CUC, the national level *campesino* organisation (Menchu 1995:68). The current strategy, whilst not excluding the

option of the use of violence against activists, is committed to a decentralisation policy involving local level organisations. Thus far the government has resisted any constructive engagement with CONIC (Coordinadora Nacional Indígena Campesina) which advocates direct action against landowners through occupations and challenges the existing order based upon the inalienability of private property. By establishing links with local community organisations and groups and permitting some limited gains such as land titling at local level, the Guatemalan government has tried to demonstrate a peace dividend to international donors whilst assuaging traditional elites by denying substantive reforms to the majority of rural dwellers in Guatemala. Despite some concessions from the Guatemalan government, the international community continues to be preoccupied with the overall failure of the Guatemalan government to implement the Peace Accords(UN Verification 2002).

In a double page newspaper advertisement on July 14, 2000 the government listed amongst its achievements during the first 180 days of the Portillo presidency the signing of an agreement with *Pastoral de la Tierra* in Livingston, Izabal. The explanatory note declared that,

> "Se trabaja en la resolucion de 377 casos en materia de tenencia de la tierra,
>
> por via de la conciliacion, con el fin de evitar posibles enfrentamientos,
>
> mediante alternatives de solucion justas, equitativas y definitivas."
>
> (*Prensa Libre* 14Julio 2000)

By contrast the majority of reports concerning land which appear in the press draw attention to the, as yet, unresolved struggle for land on the part of thousands of campesinos throughout Guatemala. The daily newspaper *Nuestro Diario* reported on May 18 2002, that hundreds of people were blocking various roads in the department of Alta Verapaz to draw the authorities' attention to popular demands for "*agua, luz y tierras*" (*Nuestro Diario* 18 Mayo 2002). The signing of the *convenio* in Izabal and its use as propaganda by the government at national level, reminds us that all these events form part of a wider picture of struggles over resources in which the state plays a major role. The Guatemalan state is not a neutral arbiter within society, but is closely linked to and acts for the class which has monopolised control of land since the 19th century. In order to understand the local struggles of small producers for land legalisation and the importance of community organisation in those struggles it is important to understand the long run of agrarian history in Guatemala as well as the current post peace accord context. In this first section of the chapter I argue that the signing of an agreement in 2000 does not represent

an about- turn in agrarian policy prompted by the peace accords, nor does it represent some kind of anomaly, but that it is a development consistent with the historic role of the Guatemalan state to protect the private property of the elite.

The legalization of land in Izabal represents a relatively soft concession, whose value to the government can be partly measured in the propaganda value that it can derive from the concession. It is a soft concession because the land is occupied by Q'eqchi' communities and for the most part is not claimed by large landowners. In other words it is not a signal event in which communities prevail over landowners in the reversal of a hitherto pattern of domination. The signing of an agreement does not place the land out of the grasp of the elite, because unless credit is made available it will be difficult for communities to sustain a living and they may resort to selling their land. The fact that much of the land has been cleared of forest and is in the process of being legalised makes it a more enticing prospect for cattle ranchers and large landowners. More than anything else, the soft concession of land in Izabal is utilised by the government to try and demonstrate the existence of agrarian modernization to international funders whilst keeping intact the state's historic role as the instrument of the landed elite.

The signing of a *convenio* granting land titles to small producers may seem to buck the trend of land concentration but I argue that it is consistent with the historical role of the state. The signing of the peace accords should be understood as the cessation of official state violence, but not as the end of violence perpetrated by organs within the state, or as an agreement to radically re-configure the state. However, whilst the attitudes of the landed elite had not changed, under the gaze of the international community, popular sectors within society took advantage of the cessation of conflict to raise a range of demands which were incorporated into the peace agreements.

The agreement on identity recognised the multicultural pluri-ethnic multi-lingual nature of Guatemalan society, and defined Mayas as the descendants of a pre-conquest people with a shared language and culture. Present day Maya identity is understood as "having a plurality of socio-cultural and linguistic expressions" (Warren 1998:211). The accord called for a reaffirmation of ILO Convention 169 on Indigenous Peoples and stressed the need for an education reform that recognised indigenous languages and indigenous peoples' right to have their own institutions. The accord proposed the setting up of Maya schools and a Maya university. Whilst it is not my intention here to analyse in depth the significance of indigenous activism in the field of education, it is important to note that differences in attitudes between Maya intellectuals and communities in relation

to land are also evident in relation to education. At one level bilingual education does appeal to communities which have experienced the frustrations of a *ladino* teacher who was neither able to communicate with community members nor teach the children. Bilingual education is seen by parents as the effective solution to the problem of learning Spanish. In all the Q'eqchi' communities in the region parents told me that their children learnt better with a Q'eqchi' speaking teacher. However at another level bilingual education is stressed by Maya intellectuals for whom the imagining of Mayaness is paramount. Maya intellectuals standardize and reify Maya languages and try to establish their position on a par with Spanish. This project is not shared by or meaningful to communities in North Izabal.

The agreement on socio-economic issues committed the Guatemalan government to the establishment of a land market which would give campesinos access to land, an office to resolve disputes over land and a survey to clarify registry information and legalise lands. The government guaranteed an investment programme for the agricultural sector and stressed the need for increased participation of local organisations in their own development (Hernandez Alarcon 1998:4).

On paper these agreements are at least an attempt to address racism and structural injustice but, as Susanne Jonas pointed out, there is a difference between what was included in the agreements and what would be implemented (Jonas 2000:184). The two factors which constitute the major obstacles to the implementation of the peace accords were entirely predictable. There is a clear contradiction between neo liberal reforms and the kind of state intervention which would be required for the implementation of the agreements. Furthermore it was to be expected that economically powerful groups within Guatemalan society would oppose the implementation of the agreements. However some distinction needs to be made between those accords which do not immediately threaten elite control of private property and those reforms which threaten to cut the state loose from its ties to the Guatemalan elite.

It is noticeable that there have been significant developments in response to the accords' call for education reform. Maya intellectuals have been actively involved in consultations leading up to the preparation of the reform document and groups of Maya educationalists and linguists are working on didactic materials. By contrast the rural poor are still waiting for greater access to land through the mechanism established in the peace accords by which the government would buy *fincas* and sell them on to *campesinos*. In a report prepared for international agencies, the UN Mission in Guatemala stated that the

Land Trust Fund had not received sufficient funds in the period between 2000 and 2002. The report concluded that because the Fund could not respond to the demand for credit, "social and political tension in the countryside would increase" (MINUGUA 2002:61).

According to the *Coordinadora Nacional de Organizaciones Campesinas* (CNOC), the peace accords did not go far enough in addressing the socio-economic issues facing poor Guatemalans (CNOC 2002). Since 1999 there has been an intensification on the part of organizations of the left, human rights groups and church groups to promote far-reaching reforms in the agricultural sector (CONIC, CALDH 2002). Amongst the many points which they raise is the unwillingness of the state to access private land that is idle and the lack of credit and investment for the small producer. Unlike Mayas involved in education reform however, people active in promoting structural change in rural Guatemala are under constant threat.

In the current context of neo-liberal reforms, the international community's concern for democracy, and the demands of different sectors within Guatemala, the state has an important influence on the construction of identities in Guatemala. In the following section I discuss how, within the above context, the state exploits the different tendencies, strategies and interests of indigenous individuals and groups, making it increasingly difficult to talk of a Maya movement which is collectively empowered through a coherent shared identity. Cultural activism is encouraged by the state as a strategy to nullify calls for structural reforms. The opening created by the peace process of the 1990s was both an opportunity for indigenous groups and part of a state strategy of containment and neutralisation. The strategy is evident in the willingness of the government to engage in dialogue with different groups about the multicultural composition of Guatemala. Charles Hale argues that the neo-liberal agenda could accommodate a particular version of indigenousness, which he terms "neo-liberal multiculturalism" (Hale 2002:487). That version of indigenousness could neutralise the more radical indigenous elements whilst furthering its own agenda (ibid). In other words, the state engages in debates about the multicultural nature of Guatemalan society precisely as a strategy to dampen down more far reaching material demands based on ethnic differences. Since disproportionate numbers of indigenous people in Guatemala are ranked within the poorest sector of society, any hint of an attempt on the part of indigenous people to identify as a people with rights would constitute a major threat to the elite. "Neo-liberal multiculturalism" involves tempering the radical edges of ethnic identities by involving indigenous people in

protracted debates about education reforms which consume the energies of indigenous activists without ceding any significant economic ground.

One of the strategies employed by the government to disarm the Maya Movement and to focus attention away from economic issues and onto a cultural agenda was the incorporation of certain prominent Maya intellectuals into the government. Under the Portillo presidency Maya intellectual Demetrio Cojti Cuxil was made Vice Minister of Education, Otilia Lux de Coti was made Minister of Culture and Demetrio Rodriguez Guajan heads DIGEBI, the government bilingual education programme. First and foremost, the appearance of Mayas in government posts plays to foreign funding organisations which want concrete evidence of change (Warren 2003:175). Secondly the appointments have ramifications for the capacity of indígenas to organise as Mayas. The involvement of the three Maya intellectuals in the party FRG (Frente Republicana Guatemalteca), of which Efrain Rios Montt is leader was highly contentious for many Mayas. Rios Montt was implicated in the destruction of dozens of rural communities in 1981. For communities still living with the effects of the violence, the willingness of some Maya intellectuals to consort with figures such as Rios Montt was deeply problematic and divisive. Whilst publicly fellow Mayas are loathe to criticise Demetrio Cojti, privately they claim his move has impaired his critical voice and undermined his position of authority with respect to other Mayas (PROMEM 2001). Maya activist Victor Montejo, whilst not singling out individuals, acknowledges that there is a problem related to individualism within the movement. He points out that some Maya activists advocating autonomy are "immersed in the patronage" of international institutions such as UNESCO and the World Bank which, according to Montejo, maintain a neo-colonial system in Guatemala (Montejo 2003:127). Furthermore he is sceptical of the motives of Maya intellectuals and questions whether some Mayas are more interested in being "nivelado", achieving economic parity with ladinos, than with representing Mayas. This criticism was raised repeatedly by members of communities in North Izabal who were deeply sceptical of the ability of indigenous people to remain immune to the corruption of the political system (Arc21/02).

The way that the state has limited and managed debates about the rights of indígenas is recognised by some Maya intellectuals. Hale cites the case of one intellectual who declared, "before the state simply told us 'no', now we live in the time of 'si pero'" (Hale 2002:509). The overall effect of 'neo-liberal multiculturalism is to give the illusory impression that society is undergoing meaningful changes by providing real space for

workshops, participation and consultation. In reality there is a careful managing of indigenous voices, and a separating out of "acceptable demands for cultural rights from inappropriate ones" (Hale 2000:507). The "inappropriate" demands from the state's perspective are demands which link culture to power. Hale describes a conversation with a U.S AID director who explained that CONIC had been removed from the list of civil society groups which were suitable for funding according to the Guatemalan government.

The "no" vote in the referendum for constitutional changes in 1999 exemplified the state's effective management of what it regarded as unreasonable demands. The subject of the vote was a range of issues many of which were presented in the peace accords. Voters were presented with four packets of issues containing items pertaining to the nation and social rights, the legislature, the executive and the judiciary. The first package raised the possibility of the recognition of Guatemala as multiethnic, multilingual and pluri-cultural nation. It offered the possibility of the officialisation of Maya languages within the constitution, and proposed making sacred Maya sites more accessible to Mayas. It is noticeable that land which did appear prominently in the peace accords did not figure in the referendum. The 53% to 47% defeat of the proposals for constitutional reforms both proved the effectiveness of the government's strategy and raised questions about the Maya Movement's powers of convocation and representation, particularly since abstention rates were between 70 and 80% in both departments with majority indigenous populations and those with majority *ladino* populations. Warren presents the case that the contents of packages confused voters (Warren 2003:168). Not all issues affecting indigenous people were in the same packet, and there was a significant difference between one packet where the reforms were radical and another packet in which reforms were minor alterations to existing points of the constitution. However the result of the referendum cannot be put down solely to government manipulation. The opposition to constitutional changes highlighted the contested nature of indigenousness identity in Guatemala. The government also took advantage of the fact that some Mayas, such as Estuardo Zapeta, were strongly opposed to the implications of the votes. Through columns in the press and radio broadcasts Zapeta developed an approach to indigenousness which challenged the basis for political differences along cultural lines (Warren 2003: 171). Zapeta argues that since the inclusion of indigenous issues in the Peace Accords the proposed reforms are political and should not be treated as constitutional issues. Zapeta has an uneasy relationship with the Maya movement because on the one hand he recognises cultural differences whilst on the other arguing that the political fixing of those differences will work against the larger

project of nation building. Zapeta emphasises that issues such as poverty and lawlessness should not be treated as exclusively indigenous issues. Zapeta's perspective is important because Maya intellectuals tend to stack the argument in such a way that people are indigenous and Maya or ladinos. Zapeta's perspective argues for an identity which is not either or. He acknowledges differences but regards attempts to package those differences in terms of Mayaness as separatist.

At the local level there was some uncertainty about the meaning of the referendum. I was told by members of three communities in North Izabal that the people behind the "yes" vote were activists in ANN (*Alianza Nueva Nacion*) and guerrilla sympathisers (Arc00/1). Not only does the veil of impunity continue to cover human rights abuses but the military, the main perpetrator of those abuses, has been given a continuing role as the "guardian" of democracy in direct contravention of the peace accords (McSherry 1998:16). Evidence of the continuing power of the state and its resistance to change is not difficult to find. The United Nations Verification mission in Guatemala noted that there had been an "expansion in the role of the army in public security and other spheres of government action", and that, in direct contravention of the spirit of the peace accords, a military general had been appointed to head the ministry of the interior (MINUGUA Julio2001-Junio2002). In 2001 army spending was near the level spent during 1995 when the armed conflict was underway. MINUGUA analysts report that the state has maintained its network of control in rural areas, with military commissioners continuing to operate in local municipalities. This continued militarisation of society expresses a determination not to allow structural changes to take place. By maintaining a presence in rural areas, the memory of the violence is kept at the forefront of people's minds and attempts to mobilise are hampered (Warren 2003:171). As Warren argues, the vote at local level could not be separated out from the civil war framework of being for or against the state. (ibid)

Various people also commented to me that whatever happened in the vote would not affect the situation in North Izabal because it didn't say anything about improving roads or increasing government spending in schools (px/coy/12.07.01). As well as highlighting a deep sense of distrust of national politicians, the referendum refocused attention on the apparent inability of national level Mayas to construct an identity which could appeal to and represent the interests of *indígenas*.

Convenio and community

Concurrent with the state's management of identity construction at national level is the management of demands for land at local level. Article 2 of the 2000 Land Law states that the government Land Fund Office, "*esta facultado para negociar, contratar y suscribir convenios o acuerdos con instituciones publicas o privadas, organizaciones no gubernamentales y entidades de acompanamiento nacionales e internacionales*". In articles 22 and 30 of the same law the government states its intention to decentralize its operations and promote the legal constitution of local organizations including communities. (*Ley de Fondo de Tierras* 2000 *decreto* 24-99) The signing of a *convenio* for the legalization of lands with the non-governmental organization *Pastoral de la Tierra* in Izabal is consistent with the government's aim to decentralise rural issues. The policy of establishing links with local organisations through the signing of *convenios* is calculated to deflect attention and expectation away from the state. The convenio signed with *Pastoral de la Tierra* in North Izabal which will be discussed in detail in part 2 of this chapter stands in continuity with the past policy of blocking *campesinos'* attempts to secure legal title to their land. The pattern of favouring the landed elite is not broken by this concession. By making some concessions, the state satisfies international funding bodies and avoids having to implement more thoroughgoing reforms.

Polyarchy

Both the way that the state has managed indigenous issues at national level, and the state's attention to some demands for land through a decentralised system fit well into William Robinson's analysis of democracy in Latin America. William Robinson argues that what is striking about the shift from military governments to the promotion of democracy under civilian governments in Latin America in the 1980s and 1990s, is that democracy has advanced hand in hand with the neo-liberal ideology (Robinson 2000:42). However because traditional understandings of democracy, which assume the power of people to challenge economic domination, are incompatible with the freedom of the market, Robinson proposes that the market needs a particular form of democracy called "Polyarchy", in which carefully managed elections are held, and the interests of capital and structural inequalities are insulated against efforts to transform them. He argues that,

> "Polyarchy is promoted in order to co-opt, neutralize and redirect mass popular democratic movements and to relieve pressure from subordinate classes for more fundamental political, social and economic change in emergent global society".

(Robinson 2000:44)

The state establishes hegemony by co-opting and neutralizing potentially radical elements, and fostering a discourse on Maya culture which enthuses Maya intellectuals at national level but fails to capture the meaning of being Indian in North Izabal where culture and material needs are integrated. As I argued in Chapter 1, approaches which privilege either class or culture are inadequate when addressing the existence of different identities. For the state however, the separation of cultural and economic elements is fundamental to its strategy of affirming cultural differences whilst ignoring the economic exploitation associated with the differences.

The state attempts to legitimate itself in the eyes of international bodies by appearing to incorporate all groups within society and creating the semblance of stability even though conflict is constantly simmering beneath the surface. The dynamics of "ideological hegemony" contribute to the convergences and divergences between the Maya Movement and communities. A product of this ideological hegemony is the teasing open of existing differences between indigenous people. The state favours the promotion of cultural issues detached from power and material needs and refuses to engage with popular groups such as CONIC, creating a situation where some Mayas are with the state and some are at odds with the state. Employment within urban based institutions which have exploited the space permitted by the state to pursue Maya education and languages, leaves Maya intellectuals increasingly detached from poor rural communities which continue to view community organisation as the most effective strategy for securing their livelihoods.

Community struggles have been brought into sharp relief over the past twenty years by pressures on land and the increasingly multi-vocal nature of communities as I showed in chapter five. I argue that the promotion of Maya identity at national level coincides with the emergence of a discourse in the communities of North Izabal which stresses community organisation as faithful to the past and appropriate for securing resources and guaranteeing an improved economic future.

The application of the etic/emic distinction is helpful for understanding convergences and divergences between the Maya movement and communities. Drawing from linguistic theory, anthropologists such as Marvin Harris distinguish between etic outsider and emic insider perspectives (Harris 1991:20). The etic perspective is that of the outsider who in viewing people and their ways fixes those ways as static forms. The emic perspective of insiders focuses on the meaningfulness of cultural traits to the people

themselves and the ways in which changes occur. The etic perspective of Maya intellectuals and the emic perspective of communities is a recurring theme in my treatment of convergences and differences between the two.

The fact that communities in North Izabal speak Q'eqchi', which is regarded as a Maya language by organisations such as the *Academia de Lenguas Mayas*, does not imply shared self-identification with other Maya language speakers. The common traits identified as "maya" by the Maya movement do not mark a shared identity which is accepted and useful to local communities. By contrast, the notion of community organisation promoted by the state as well as the local church is informed by and meshes with *ancianos'* memories of community organisation which has structured peoples' lives and controlled local resources. People in the communities of North Izabal regard the Maya Movement, and particularly those Mayas who have taken up posts in government as distant from the everyday struggles of Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal. The differences between the understanding of community promoted by Maya intellectuals and that of the communities that I have studied echo the conclusions of R.B Le Page and Andrée Tabouret-Keller in the field of linguistics. They show how languages are reified, totemized and universalised following a process which involves the fixing of a "closed system" of rules governing grammar and lexicon (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985:200). The reifying and totemizing of particular traits by Maya intellectuals to counteract what they see as the loss of those traits, contrasts with practice of community in North Izabal where traits are inextricably bound up with and integrated into a dynamic understanding of community as a "changing same" (Gilroy 1993:101).

Nation-building projects have demonstrated that identities can be constructed, albeit artificially and temporarily masking differences. However the construction is not a quick procedure, and achievement depends upon the constructors having an education system and other tools of the state at their disposal. By contrast the Maya organisations have a weak presence in the region, and have not prioritised the North Izabal area. A representative of the *Academia de Lenguas Mayas* told me that the west of Guatemala and the urban centres in particular were more important in strategic terms because that is where Maya language loss has been most severe (AGLM 24.6.01). According to Maya intellectuals, culture loss is at a more advanced stage in the western highlands, and it is there that Maya organisations have focused their efforts. Throughout Guatemala it is noticeable that most Maya organisations are based in towns. In North Izabal the Maya organisations maintain a presence in the town of El Estor, but their presence in the

communities has been limited to brief visits. The exception to this rule is the *Proyecto Movilizador de la Educácion Maya* (PROMEM). The local representative of PROMEM Guillermo Sam, has focused his attentions on the communities of Lo de en Medio and Cacahuila and on young people's courses organised by the parish at which he gives talks on the Maya calendar, Maya languages and ritual which are disarticulated from the communities' struggles for their livelihood. He has not established links with the *Pastoral de la Tierra* and the *Asociacion Fuerza Campesina San Antonio Awinel,* the two local organisations which work directly on the issue of land legalization. There is a marked contrast between the communities' experience of Mayas who come to teach and "do" the culture, and the community's own lived practice in which the ritual aspects of community life are deliberate only in so far as they are integral to the defence of community land and livelihood.

The divergences between the Maya movement and communities have become more explicit as the process of land legalization through a *convenio* is pursued by the communities. In the following section I will examine the origins and objectives of *Pastoral de la Tierra* and how the land legalization process in North Izabal produces a strengthening of community organisations in the absence of a meaningful Maya Movement response to the threat to community lands.

Pastoral de la Tierra consists of a team of four professionals with experience of legalization processes in the Peten region, and the *Asociacíon Fuerza Campesina San Antonio Awinel* which brings together representatives from each community. It was established by the local Roman Catholic parish in 1999. Insecurity of land tenure was seen by the Church as the most pressing issue for the communities. The local parish priest Father Manuel told me that on visiting the communities he was constantly aware of this source of community insecurity (ms/sac/15.07.02). The response of this Catholic priest is consistent with the tendency within the Church described by Chea as "*desarrollista*". (Chea 1988:153) Since the late 1960s a sector of the Catholic Church has moved away from a purely spiritualistic and fatalistic view of life and begun to respond to the material needs of people supported by intellectuals such as Gustavo Gutiérrez whose book "A Theology of Liberation" provided a critique of structures in Latin American society. (Gutiérrez 1968)

However the setting up of *Pastoral de la Tierra* is not simply a response to material needs. It is also consistent with the church's concern to preserve communities as a strategy of its underlying mission to maintain congregations and expand its dominion.

Since the early 1990s, the proselytising urge within the local church has been made explicit through social development projects which take into account the beliefs and practices of the Q'eqchi communities. I am arguing that the construction of community organisations is central to the church's mission in North Izabal. The local church is a major mover in promoting community organisation and through it the possibility of a locally conceived and locally managed effort for socio-economic improvement.

The proselytising aim of the parish is worked out through the training of Catholic community leaders (catechists) who preside at the weekly community services held in the communities. In 2000 the priests organised a *Santa Misión* as the central activity in a concerted effort to renew the commitment of existing Catholics to the Church, and to encourage non-practicing Catholics and Protestants to return to the church. During the mission all the houses in each community were visited by the catechists and other volunteers. The undeclared aim of the mission was to restore the integrity of communities by restoring the former situation when all community members were at least nominally Catholics. The Christian message preached by the priests and elaborated upon by the catechists in their weekly services extols the value of love, commitment, and self sacrifice and relates those values to the life of the community. The community is both the objective of the local church's preaching and the organisational unit by which it maintains and extends its reach.

In Chapter 4 I showed that the parish has promoted Q'eqchi' religiosity in the communities since the 1990s. Influenced by the continent-wide resurgence of indigenous identity, the priests have supported the resurgence in Q'eqchi' customs throughout the parish area. The Church commitment to Q'qeqchi' cultural practices was given further impetus when a Q'eqchi' priest was appointed as parish priest in 2000. On one occasion at the inauguration of a new school building Manuel, the Q'eqchi' priest, joined the *anciano* of the community in smearing pigs blood onto the corners of the building according to a Q'eqchi' rite. I was told in several communities that *el padre* had come to visit the cave in their community, but that he didn't say mass but came just like one of the community. At the local secondary college Manuel participated in the *yo'lek* (vigil) and the sowing of corn which took place the following day. In the words of more than one informant "*el padre nos entiende*". Whereas previous priests had usually combined the celebrations of mass in a community with a visit to a cave or the making of a ritual offering *mayejak,* Padre Manuel often attended community rituals without attempting to mix them with a catholic celebration.

In conversations with Manuel he explained that his Q'eqchi' identity and indigenousness was very important to him. Before arriving in North Izabal Manuel had spent several years in the *Comarca* (indigenous autonomous region) in Panama amongst the Cuna, and he has participated in international meetings of indigenous people. What is significant from the point of view of the construction of Maya identity, is that the cultural practices supported by Manuel are an integral part of, and integral to the life and organisation of the communities. In one parish activity, the catechists were directed by Manuel to consult the *ancianos* in their communities in order to draw parallels between the life, death and resurrection of Jesus and community rituals around the cultivation of maize. Through the interdependence of catechists and *ancianos*, Manuel has promoted community and the recovery of the memory of community. In all the communities which I visited people reported a resurgence in the celebration of the community *mayejak* to prepare for significant events such as the beginning of the new school year, the clearing of the boundary around the community land and the beginning of the planting season. On the land of each community there is a cave which is the focus of offerings to the *tzuultaq'a*. Catechists, *ancianos* and teachers have worked together to organise visits to the cave involving the whole community. The establishing of intimate relations between communities and the land that they work, contrasts with Maya ritual in western Guatemala where ritual sites are less fixed, and one popular location for ritual the ruins of Iximche is an archaeological site, rather than a feature of the landscape. Linda Schele describes how since the early 1990s, the site has become the focal point for thousands of Kaqchiquels in western Guatemalan (Schele 1998:291).

Manuel explained to me that the contextualised ritual in the communities of North Izabal contrasted with rituals performed by self ascribed Mayas in western Guatemala (ms.pad.14.8.02). After attending a Maya ceremony in the western Guatemalan town Chimaltenango, which culminated in a sacrificed cockerel being held aloft, Manuel commented to me that it made him feel uncomfortable because it was too extravagant, "*se veía que fue aprendido*" he told me (ms.pad.14.8.02). On another occasion I accompanied Manuel, a catechist and various members of Manuel's family on a trip to Tikal. Having gained the necessary permission from the guardian of the site Manuel's elderly father conducted a ritual at the foot of the Gran Jaguar Temple 1. The recuperation of Maya archaeological sites by Mayas is important for many Maya activists and it is increasingly common to see coach loads of indigenous people from the West of Guatemala participating in ceremonies at Tikal or at Iximche. As Manuel's father laid the candles and

other items on the floor in front of the temple, Manuel commented *"pero no lo hacemos así"*. His father, who has been attending some meetings with Maya priests from the west, responded *"no así es"*. Manuel's comment was based on his experience of attending numerous Q'eqchi' rituals in caves and on hill tops. Such practices highlight the difference between contextualised and revived tradition.

Manuel is not alone in noticing the creeping influence and homogenisation of indigenous ceremonies. There is some disquiet amongst indigenous groups who live outside the western heartland over what they perceive as the "Kiche-isation" of other indígenas. The Kiche' are the dominant and most populous indigenous group in Guatemala. Aside from the way that the ceremony was conducted Manuel was uneasy with the location of the ritual. Whereas for Maya Movement activists a ceremony in Tikal is a ceremony in a Maya place, for Manuel the ceremony was detached from reality. Some days later when I asked Manuel about the trip, he said that he preferred to participate in ceremonies with the people in the communities and that the ceremony in Tikal was like *"un acto folklórico"* (ms/pad/18.08.02). Manuel's reaction stems from a feeling that the ceremony was superficial and detached from the preoccupations and struggles of everyday life and from the people who make that struggle with him. There is a distinction here between the reification of cultural traits as symbolic acts for the Maya Movement and the way that "traits" are embedded in communities' struggles for land and livelihoods.

In the following section I focus on that struggle and analyse how it has focused attention on the community organisation. As a response to the release of the Catholic bishop's letter in 1988, the parish of Rio Dulce held a course in which representatives from the communities discussed their own experiences of struggles for land. The Bishops' letter, which was released with great publicity at national level, was not accompanied by any initiative to address the problems it outlined. The re-emergence of CUC in the late 1980s was the only attempt to mobilise *campesinos* at national level. A major limit to a nationally agreed strategy was the lack of consensus on the kind of strategy which could be employed to achieve greater equality in the rural sector. In particular CUC's ability to gather support was limited by its strong links to the guerrilla forces, and when CONIC with its greater emphasis on indigenous identity was formed in the 1990s, it continued to be associated with the guerrilla in the eyes of many people who feared the return of the violence to their communities.

The approach of the priests in North Izabal was informed by an awareness of the response of *finqueros* to any attempt to resolve disputes in favour of *campesinos*.

An Amnesty International report explained that because of his support for a community against a local *finquero* the priest and other members of the Church in the neighbouring parish of El Estor, " *han sido objeto de hostigamiento y persecución, amenazas de muerte y frustrados atentados contra su vida por personas no identificadas*" (AI 1997:44). Several priests and community members suggested to me that the priest in El Estor had been too aggressive, and that he had not sought a negotiated resolution. In western Guatemala the support by Bishop Ramazzini for *campesinos* on coffee *fincas* was met with a campaign of intimidation and death threats against activists and priests.

The priests in North Izabal saw the possibility of a *convenio* signed between the state land office and *Pastoral de la Tierra* as a way forward which would avoid conflict with local landowners. The strategy favoured by the priest, and community leaders, was preferred to the direct action approach of CONIC, the national level organisation with some albeit tenuous links to the Maya movement. Although espousing the rights of indigenous people, CONIC is also a class based organisation which has little in common with Mayas who own businesses and intellectuals such as Estuardo Zapeta who accept the current neo-liberal project. According to Pedro Esquina, a CONIC leader, the response of campesinos must be resolute because, "*aqui el que no reclama no recibe nada.....todos los exitos están a base de movimientos fuertes*" (Esquina 2002). As I explained in Chapter 4, CONIC tends to pursue direct actions such as occupations and road blockages which antagonise large landowners.

When it became clear that the legalisation programme for eleven communities had been halted because their land was claimed by FUNDAECO the communities were offered assistance by CONIC. However after discussions between *Pastoral de la Tierra* and the communities it was decided that the communities would continue to pursue their case through negotiation. *Pastoral* reported that the involvement of CONIC, "*en lugar de resolverlo podría agravar el asunto*" (*Pastoral informe* 2000:25). The communities were persuaded by *Pastoral de la Tierra* that the conciliatory approach was more effective. Randolfo Cantoral, the agronomist employed by *Pastoral de la Tierra* told me that CONIC "*hacen movimientos populares pero no se ofrece la manera de resolver , no se propone una solución*"(rc/past/26.5.01). By contrast, during the first three years of legalization work there is evidence that the conciliatory approach of *Pastoral de la Tierra* under the *convenio* signed with *Fondo de Tierras* has been able to advance the interests of the communities without provoking a violent response from the competing interests. In 2000 the case of the communities of San Fernando, Quebrada San Miguel Castulo and El

Porvenir was addressed at a meeting held at the parish centre attended by representatives of the communities, six *finqueros* and their bodyguards, and representatives of government land institutions CONTIERRA and the Ministry of Agriculture. Some agreement was reached that the land boundaries needed to be redefined and the secretary noted "*que no han existido problemas en las reuniones , al contrario existe mucha voluntad de las partes para solucionar este problema definitivamente*" (*Pastoral Informe* 2000)

The progress made by *Pastoral de la Tierra* has confirmed the communities in their preference for locally directed and accountable initiatives rather than national level movements whose motives are not reliable. Community leaders told me that with *Pastoral* the community was able to ensure that it acted in their favour (pcc/cal/17.6.02). Since *Pastoral de la Tierra* was set up by the parish, it was in the interests of the priests to ensure that *Pastoral* negotiated resolutions which were to the satisfaction of the communities. Anything to the contrary might result in the alienation of communities from the Church. The legalization process focused attention on the local characteristics of the land problem and provoked debates about community which ultimately resulted in the revitalisation of community organisation. With the intensification of debates at local level and the construction of a discourse stressing the belief that community organisation could protect local resources such as land, the local communities are less likely to look to national groupings within which they might forward their agendas.

Pastoral de la Tierra has two distinct parts, the team of professional agronomists, surveyors and legal experts who work with the communities to formalise land ownership, and the *Asociación Fuerza Indigena Campesina San Antonio Awinel* which is the section comprising of members of the communities. The *Asociación*, which has juridical status, is the first formal grouping of Q'eqchi' communities in the region. In interviews with community leaders such as catechists and land committee representatives, as well as ordinary community members, there was a general agreement that a strategic alliance with neighbouring communities including *ladino* communities could be useful for the development of community organisation. This conclusion was based on at least fifteen years of different forms of regional organising. Community promoters have been meeting together since the early 1980s and both catechists and FIS promoters have been meeting regularly since 1987.Whereas in the west of Guatemala opportunities for education have led to the emergence of an elite who live apart from but in solidarity with communities, the stated aim of the *Asociación* is to promote community organisation in relation to the

control of land. It is significant that the elected directors of the *Asociación* are themselves members of communities with a vested interest in community organisation. The chairperson, Nikolas Chus Che, holds land in Porvenir where the community is in dispute with three finqueros over the land boundaries. The secretary, Marcos Rax Chen, is a community member in Arcochoch where the community dos not have legal title to their land. The *Asociación* has in effect locked the most dynamic and progressive individuals into a programme of support for community organisation rather than the promotion of supra community identity. The *Asociación* has a decentralised structure to ensure that each community is a beneficiary. Both the communities and the directors of the *Asociación* have stressed the need for communities to choose *promotores jurídicos* so that each community can manage its own land resources.

Central to the plans of the *Asociación* is the decision to convert the local secondary college into a specialist agricultural college. The existing *Instituto Indígena San Pablo*, a traditional secondary college, will be completely revised in order to bring it in to line with the discourse on community development. The planning for this conversion envisages an institution whose function will reach far beyond the purely academic. In applications to funders, the college was described as the "*Proyecto de Apoyo, Fortalecimiento al Autosostenimiento y Seguridad Alimentaria a las Comunidades Campesinas Q'eqchi'es de Livingston*". The main aim of the project is radically to alter traditional education a secondary level so that it prepares young people to be leaders in their communities whilst improving economic production and marketing. Whereas education has been traditionally linked with the raising of human capital and individual betterment, the aim of the college will be to promote community integrity, and in the words of the project proposal to "*promover en el joven actividades de liderazgo para ayudar a su comunidad en el desarrollo integral*" (*Proyecto de Apoyo* 2002: 3).

The establishment of an agricultural college as a central part of the *Proyecto de Apoyo* represents an important move to counteract the perceived danger that young people will abandon the communities. Through the *Instituto* a new generation of leaders will be trained who have skills and knowledge to improve and diversify agricultural production whilst respecting the community and its past. The continuing salience of community rests on economic improvement and the involvement of young people in a new development model. The project to establish the college signals the recognition by communities that they need to be proactive in expanding the economic possibilities in their communities rather than expecting any state initiative. Communities are not only the organisations for

the defence of resources, but also the vehicles for the economic improvement of the region. The initiative is autocthonous, conceived locally by community representatives with support from a surveyor and an agronomist employed by *Pastoral de la Tierra*. Although the surveyor and his colleague have links to national and international level funders, they are not linked to Maya organisations. The attention given by the *Asociación*, by *Pastoral de la Tierra*, teachers, local intellectuals and the communities in North Izabal to providing immediate practical responses to local challenges stands in sharp contrast to the laboured attempts by Maya intellectuals to draw up a national Maya curriculum for schools. The emerging vision of community integrates the religious element of people's lives with the economic struggles to both protect and exploit the resources which the community organisation controls. In one sense the religious elements are objectified because community members recognise the importance of renewing old practices such as the community offerings to the earth deities. However such practices are not disarticulated from the daily struggles of the community.

In North Izabal the signing of the *convenio* prompted debates within communities about the nature of landholding within communities. The *ancianos* and some catechists preferred to continue with the existing system within which the community meeting organised the allocation of land to each household(MR 7/02). The majority of community members, and particularly the younger men, were in favour of the division of community land into *parcelas* with individuals holding title to the *parcelas*. One community leader explained to me, " *La gente quiere parcela todos quieren parcela se trata de evitar un problema en el futuro...hoy se da tierra a la communidad...quien sabe si la comunidad va a reconocer este mismo derecho en el futuro*" (sbc/esc/Arc/27/01). This contrasts with the views of *ancianos* who stood by the tradition of community control of land and saw the potential dangers of individual titles, "*cuando se va a hacer parcela, se va a destruir la aldea......cada quien agarra por su lado....nosotros queremos la unión...trabajar juntos*" (mc/anc/coy/17.06.01). However the state institution *Fondo de Tierras* stipulated that communal land titles would be issued to the communities. I was told by *Fondo de Tierras* that the communal titles were designed both to respect the way that indigenous people controlled their land and as a way of protecting the small producer from the temptation to sell (FT 13/8/02). The agronomist with *Pastoral de la Tierra* explained that, whilst on paper the title would be issued to communities and anyone seeking to buy a portion of the land and enter the community would need the agreement of the *comuneros*, in reality the law could be ignored and deals for land done without community consent. (*Fondo de*

Tierras 2001 articulo 21) In reality in order for communal ownership to be fixed, it would require the renewal of community agreement on landholding. Through visits to communities, it became apparent that at least internally, each household had their own *parcela.*

By entering into negotiations with local non-governmental organisations the state avoids dealing with mass movements such as CONIC. The government contributes to the construction of communities by providing organisations and communities with assistance in establishing their constitutions and achieving legal status. The strategy has implications for the building of Maya identity nationally. In North Izabal, members in each of the four communities informed me that they preferred to organise in communities because they knew who their neighbours are and what their neighbours interests are, whereas they didn't know whether national organisations shared their concerns, even if they said that they did (rcc/fis/coy/18.06.01). Community leaders told me that it was important to work with the local non-governmental organisation because the people who work for it understand the problems of the community. The state's strategy to focus on local community and organisations confirms the perception that already exists amongst community members, that community organisation is the best vehicle for the struggle for livelihoods.

Local intellectuals

The debate about communal and individual forms of land tenure has intensified in the communities since the late 1990s. The younger members of communities challenged the virtue of communal landholding, drawing forth memories from *ancianos* and some catechists who stress the importance of working together. The different attitudes to community and the need to construct community in response to present demands is a dynamic process of negotiation within communities involving local intellectuals whose role I will explain shortly.

One of the recurring themes of the debates in communities was the possible impact on a community if one *parcela* owner decided to sell his land to another person from outside the community. It was pointed out by more than one *anciano* that the new owner might put barbed wire around his land and close off the paths which give access through the land to the *parcelas* of other community members (mcc/anc/arc/23.07.02). Some people pointed out that the new owner might not want to contribute to the school and other community ventures (rcc/fis/coy/23.07.02). I was told by several community members that

they feared that some of the problems endemic in *ladino* communities such as violence, robberies and rapes, would appear in their communities if the members stopped working together (rcp/coy/23.07.02).

Throughout my visits to the communities I was aware of the contrast between the vocal nature of those in favour of communal ownership, and the silence emanating from community members who had privately expressed their desire for individual titles to me (mcc/23.5.02). Juan Caal, the director of *Pastoral de la Tierra*, confirmed that there were many people throughout the communities who were dissatisfied but had not come out in direct opposition. Juan described it as "*una etapa de acomodamiento*" in which there was general compliance with the *ancianos*' views (JC 2/02). In communities such as Secaxte the community decision went beyond a tacit agreement. In 1999, the community of Secaxte met, and it was decided that those community members who didn't want to hold the land as community should leave the community (ms/edir/sec/3.07.01). As a result three families left Secaxte and migrated to the Peten region in search of available land. The position of *ancianos* and those favouring a community land title was bolstered by the work of *Asociacion Fuerza Indigena Campesina*, the element of *Pastoral de la Tierra* which involved representatives of the communities in an association to promote the development of the communities. The *Asociación* and local intellectuals were key to the development of a discourse which stresses the value of community organisation. Communities' reflections on their own experiences and on incidents in other communities are part of a common pool of examples which is often drawn from in community meetings. The following examples illustrate some of the concerns of communities.

Throughout the communities people referred to the Christian Children's Fund project in the community of Guitarrras. The project, which involved child sponsorship and the funding of education, healthcare, and an agricultural cooperative in Guitarras, was managed locally by the son of one of the *ancianos* in Guitarras. Although the project was meant to be community controlled, its resources, including a motor cycle and a truck, were monopolised by a few friends of the *anciano* and his son. I was told by various community members in Arcochoch, that the son of the *anciano* had expropriated funds, crashed the vehicles, and that he was always going out drinking or on trips to Guatemala City (Arc/14.6.02). The project in Guitarras is remembered as an example of a failed community project in which certain people had appropriated funds and then left to live elsewhere. The problems associated with the uneven distribution of funds were evident in various projects in the communities. In 2000, the government agency for indigenous

affairs, FODIGUA, promised two hundred roofing sheets to community members in Arcochoch and Cacahuila. Such projects are seen by communities as problematic because the tend to *"crear diferencias y preferencias"* (ncc/cat/arc13.07.02). Community members in Calvario stressed the dangers of individualism within communities and how it can easily lead to corrupt practices. Community organisation is seen as a mechanism for bringing accountability for all individuals for the benefit of the whole community (ncp/cal/fis2.07.02).

Community members in Nimlasahal recalled a moment of community solidarity and its effectiveness. In 1988 the community agreed to allow a man from Buena Vista, a *ladino* village, to cut wood including mahogany and cedar on the community's land. The teacher in Nimlasahal, Jorge Bin Isem, pointed out to the community that the logger was paying a very low price for timber which was valuable and as a consequence the community met and agreed to tell the man that the deal was off. On being informed of the community's decision the man was extremely angry and confronted various community members asking *"¿Quién está dando cabeza a la gente?"* In response the community disguised the role played by the teacher and resolutely declared its right to control the land and the forest. This example and other similar memories are part of the discourse which highlights the importance of community organisation and its management of resources. Furthermore it illustrates the importance of the need for knowledge about the market and the prices of products in order to be able to stand up to ladinos. The Asociación sees its role to be learning from the errors made by communities as much as building on the positive aspects of community organising.

In the section that follows I introduce four local intellectuals and analyse their roles in the promotion of this discourse.

Camilio Chocoj has lived in the region all his life and has worked both in community primary schools and the *Pastoral de la Tierra* team. Camilio is 35 years old and married with three children. His family home is the community of Tamagas. During his youth, Camilio was active in his community, and trained as a health promoter with *Asociacion de Servicios Comunitarios de Salud* (ASECSA) both in the parish centre and in training sessions held in Coban and Chimaltenango. Camilio found that his language proficiency in both Spanish and Q'eqchi' was an advantage when the local education provider *Escuelas sin Fronteras* (ESF) was seeking to employ bilingual teachers in the late 1990s. Camilio had two stints working as the teacher in the community of El Calvario

interspersed with a period when he worked as a promoter with *Pastoral de la Tierra*. As a result of his work Camilio is well known throughout the communities of the parish.

Miguel Santos is a thirty five year old married man from San Pedro La Laguna in western Guatemala, who has been working in North Izabal since the late 1990s. Miguel told me that his father had been a major influence on him and had taught him to struggle for the community. Miguel's father, whose work involved selling baskets to coffee *fincas*, had served as the mayor of San Pedro and had struggled to ensure that his children were educated. Since 1999 Miguel has been living in the community of Secaxte where his wife lives with their two children. Miguel is employed by an education organisation as the director of rural schools. His work entails visiting many of the communities in the parish area and he regularly meets with local state officials as well as people involved in development projects in the communities.

Juan Jo Tzalam was born in Chahal in the neighbouring department of Alta Verapaz. Juan had worked on fincas before moving to the community of Sahila in the parish in the mid 1970s. From 1987 until 1992 Juan was employed by *the Instituto Guatemlateco de Educacion Radiofonica* (IGER) as the Q'eqchi' literacy promoter for the communities in the parish. During the same period he was instrumental in setting up eight community schools. Juan is well known in virtually all the communities in the region. In 1988 Juan was approached by the MLN political party (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional) who were seeking a Q'eqchi' speaker to stand for election as vice alcalde in Livingston. Having been told by IGER to choose between work with them or a political career, Juan chose to continue with IGER. In 1999 Juan took up a post with FUNDAECO working as a regional representative with the responsibility of liasing with communities within the environmental protected zones.

Nikolas Chuz Che, a 46- year- old married man with six children, moved to North Izabal in 1978 from a community on the south of Lake Izabal. He had worked as a fisherman as well as being a guardian on a finca but decided to move to the parish area when he heard that there was land available in Porvenir. Nikolas' father was the *anciano* of Porvenir and Nikolas began training to be the catechist there. He quickly established himself as the senior catechist in the parish because he could relay information between catechists and priests in Q'eqchi' and Spanish. In chapter two I explained that it is through Spanish

proficiency that Maya intellectuals have been able to communicate across language groups in order to build Maya identity. Although Maya intellectuals prioritise the revitalisation of Maya languages, that revitalisation work is carried out by people for whom Spanish proficiency has been a priority. Similarly for local intellectuals such as Nikolas, Spanish proficiency has been an important element in their emergence as local intellectuals. Nikolas attended catechist training courses in Coban and Chimaltenango, before going on to prepare and coordinate courses in the parish. He knows the communities better than anyone else and his knowledge is valued by the priests, teachers, health promoters, and visitors to the region. Nikolas was instrumental in the establishment of *Pastoral de la Tierra* and was chosen by the communities to be the president of the *Asociacíon San Antonio Awinel* in 1999.

The role of local intellectuals

Whereas Maya intellectuals have established their position through their published works and involvement in public debates, the authority of local intellectuals has been earned through years of commitment to work at community and regional levels (Cojti Cuxil 1993:100). Local intellectuals are people who live in North Izabal and have over a number of years developed a historical perspective of the dynamics of communities and the role of the state and organisations. Florencia Mallon defines local intellectuals as, those who laboured to reproduce and rearticulate local history and memory to connect community discourses about local identity to constantly shifting patterns of power solidarity and consensus" (Mallon 1995:12). In North Izabal the local intellectuals are also activists who are engaged in community struggles for land, and are instrumental in developing the local discourse which linked community with the past as well as linking it with economic improvement in the future.

Local intellectuals are regarded by priests, people, *ancianos* and visitors to the region as people who know the area and the communities. Their position was built up through years of visits to communities during which the intellectuals listened to the memories of people there. Local intellectuals have attended community events, particularly religious events, when the ties and commitments between people were renewed. They have also travelled outside the immediate region of the parish, and that contact with other realities enables them to gain an objective distance in reflecting on their own communities. Local intellectuals are recognised as people who know the reality and that knowledge is channelled into the planning of projects.

Unlike national level Maya intellectuals who were not chosen by their communities, but reached their position by studying to tertiary level and having their work published, local intellectuals have a stake in legalisation because they have families and still farm land in their community. Florencia Mallon has pointed out that in relation to Mexico the success of the local intellectual lay in the fact that whilst he cultivated a relationship of *compadrazgo* with the president, he "remained a humble man , living in his community, taking care not to distinguish himself too dramatically from those on whose support he depended" (Mallon 1995:303). Local intellectuals have been raised in the tradition of respect for the land and they are tuned to the conversations that go on within communities. They stress the importance of land as the base of culture and they place great value on the work of campesinos. They have an understanding of and are sympathetic to the tendencies amongst people to focus on the potential monetary value of their land. They also understand the frustrations of some young people who see more opportunities outside the community. Local intellectuals engage with the different voices within communities.

The local intellectuals are not dependent on national level Maya organisations, nor are they beholden to the Church or other local institutions. Whilst most of the intellectuals have in the past benefited from their work with the Church, the intellectuals are not the mouthpieces of the priests. They are able to speak with a voice which is independent, whilst at the same time resonating with the concerns of communities and upholding the intellectuals' good relations with the priests.

However the status of local intellectuals is not permanent. I have included Juan Jo Tzalam amongst the four intellectuals, because during the 1980s he was an important figure in the area who was known and respected in the communities through his work as a literacy promoter. The first suggestion that Juan's position with regard to the communities was changing was when he vacillated before eventually turning down the possibility of standing for the position as deputy mayor. In 1999 Juan took a position of employment with FUNDAECO who controlled vast tracts of land in the region. As with the political party who wanted Juan as their candidate, FUNDAECO were keen to have Juan's support because of the credibility that he would give them in the communities. However Juan's unofficial position as local intellectual then became untenable, because eleven of the communities were in direct opposition to FUNDAECO's acquisition of land in the region, and other communities were suspicious of FUNDAECO's links to ex-president Vinicio Cerezo. In the context of the polarisation of interests in support of community claims for

land or support of the large landowners, Juan's work alienated him from the communities. Juan was no longer as Mallon described local intellectuals, "the champion of local interests"; he had become in the eyes of the communities an agent of the forces who challenged the communities' right to land, he had been co-opted (Mallon 1995:287). Manu, one of the leaders of *Asociacion Fuerza Campesina* explained it in the following terms, *"es que Juan tiene que decidir ...o sea que no puede estar con las instituciones y con su pueblo a la vez"* (mc/past/choc/32.8.02). The temporary life of community or its enduring worth hinges on the articulation of community with the underlying drives of individuals, which may be cultural and economic and more or less constrained by the past. Communities are no longer the gerontocracies of the past where the wisdom of the *ancianos* was revered, all members were at least nominally Catholics and there was little immediate threat to communities. Since at least the 1960s, communities have faced three major challenges. They can no longer expect to be able to cultivate the land that they occupy without a legal title to that land; the members of community increasingly want to participate in the market by growing cash crops; and education has begun fundamentally to alter the attitudes and economic positions of some people within communities. The question of how this impacts on community depends upon whether, despite the differentiation which is occurring, there are shared interests which it makes sense for members to pursue in the changing circumstances. The endurance of those shared interests depends upon the ability of intellectuals to articulate the differences or the common interests. That articulation is the dynamic quality of community.

The dynamic of community can be understood in terms of the mechanics of a motor vehicle. In order to be able to respond to the demands of different road surfaces, and inclines as well as to the requirements of the driver, vehicles are geared. The clutch is the mechanical device which harmonises the drive of the motor with the mechanism of the wheels. Conversely it is the failure to employ the clutch correctly when gear changes are made which causes the juddering which results from the motor and wheels being out of kilter. When the clutch is not engaged the change in speed required by the driver is not achieved and furthermore damage can be caused to the vehicle. Like a vehicle, community needs to be able to respond to changing conditions and the efficacy and integrity of community rests on its capacity to engage with changing conditions. The smooth use of the clutch equates to the work of individuals within communities who find ways to make apparently contradictory elements compatible in a way which makes progression possible. Intellectuals are particularly important at this time when communities are on the brink of

change and the advent of new possibilities challenges old ways, calling into question the basis of community. The communities turn to the local intellectuals who are people that they know and trust.

Local intellectuals have to continually balance their personal abilities and individual aspirations with a commitment to community. The skills acquired by local intellectuals such as their proficiency in both Spanish and Q'eqchi' place them in an advantageous position should they decide to pursue employment opportunities outside the community. Juan's desire to maximise his earning potential by working for an NGO ultimately placed him in conflict with those communities which had looked up to him in the past. On the other hand Nikolas with similar skills and experience to Juan chose to continue with community based projects even if they were demanding both in terms of time and money. Nikolas explained to me that he had been reluctant to take up the post as the unpaid director of the *Asociacíon* because he knew that it would be very time consuming. However after being approached by representatives of more than twenty communities Nikolas explained that he could not fail the communities who needed his continuing service. The balancing of individual aspirations and community commitment is particularly true for teachers who are keen to continue studying at university which would take them away from their communities.

The Guatemalan state's prescription of communal landholding for communities in North Izabal coincides with the tradition of community land holding advocated by the *ancianos*, the discourse of local intellectuals which stresses community organisation as the base from which economic development can be achieved, and the underlying objective of the Catholic Church to secure believers in the communities. At the same time the work of *Pastoral de la Tierra* is advancing the policy of the state which is to limit economic change. The policy is achieved through by focusing on local community initiatives so dividing and weakening support for class based organisations without having to engage directly with them. It is a strategy which suits the communities who are keen to secure concrete results, and it is consistent with the way that communities have organised in the past.

Conclusion

Local intellectuals who are both Catholics and community members, draw together strands from continent wide indigenous activism, and from the memory of community solidarity to create a discourse which stresses the role of Q'eqchi campesino community

organisations. Crucial to the construction of community organisation is the re-emphasising of intimate relations between the communities and the local landscape. Communities both make their claim for particular tracts of land through the legal procedure established through the *convenio* and petition the guardian *tzuultaq'a* of their land through offerings made at the cave on the land of each community.

This focus on community organisation, and the energy that is invested in the construction of and commitment to community organisation, precludes organising at a wider level as Mayas or *campesinos*. As I emphasised in Chapter 2, the majority of Maya organisations are based in western Guatemala and Maya intellectuals are predominantly urban based. This physical distance between communities and Maya leaders and organisations is important. Maya organisations have not emerged from within communities in North Izabal and it is partly because of this that they are not sensitive to the differences between "etic" traditions and living "emic" tradition which is formed through the daily struggles of communities. Whereas people in communities know where the allegiances and commitments of their neighbours lie and can with the help of local intellectuals build community consensus, they are suspicious of the personal interests of western Maya, particularly those who have been active in political parties. In the absence of a coherent alternative provided by the Maya movement, local intellectuals and community members in North Izabal have prioritised local development which is conceived from and reliant upon local ideas about community.

CONCLUSION

The literature on Maya identity shows the country divided up into regions based on language groups (e.g. Warren 1998:14, Fischer and Brown 1996:10). For the proponents of Maya identity, establishing the existence, location and boundaries of ethnicities in Guatemala is very important. For Maya intellectuals the languages spoken by the different ethnic groups are markers of Mayaness. By mapping the speakers of a particular language onto a defined region, Maya intellectuals both establish links between modern day indígenas and pre-conquest Mayas, and establish a basis for claiming the rights of the group. Through maps Maya intellectuals link indígenas to the ancient Maya in the same region and the idea of the Maya as a people with a territory is constructed. However the maps showing linguistic groups and boundaries demonstrate the difficulties faced by people seeking to create a homogeneous, abstract, shared identity from a reality that is far from uniform.

Maps are also important for the communities in North Izabal. During the 1980s, the Guatemalan military took all maps of the region out of circulation for fear that they would be used by the guerrilla forces. However on making my first visits to communities and organisations in the region in 2000, it became apparent that the acquisition or production of maps was the most pressing issue for communities and many local organisations. During the period over which my fieldwork was spread (2000-2002), I often observed men from a local NGO using global positioning equipment to locate community boundaries, whilst members of the communities used machetes to clear them. Whenever I was walking between communities, the person accompanying me always informed me as we crossed the often indiscernible boundary between the land belonging to one community and that of the other. The locations of the boundaries were best known to the senior men of each community who were most familiar with the local geography as they had staked the original claim. Just as maps form part of the agenda for the Maya Movement, which is keen to establish the rights of predominantly indigenous regions, so maps are the agendas for communities and organisations in North Izabal. However the intentions of those drawing up the maps, as well as the information carried on the maps, and the implications of that information for the people involved were different.

In comparing the language map favoured by Maya organisations with my knowledge of the North Izabal region, I noticed inaccuracies. In order to establish a Q'eqchi' region, the presence of non-Q'eqchi' groups was glossed over as was the

presence of minority Q'eqchi' populations in the south of the department which is regarded as *ladino*. Furthermore there are *ladinos*, including some military people and landowners who speak Q'eqchi' fluently. The intention of the Maya Movement in making linguistic maps is to promote the boundedness of Maya identity, firstly in ethnic language groups and secondly as the conglomeration of all those groups into the Maya people. Edward Fischer notes that the Maya editors *Editorial Cholsamaj* have produced two further maps, based on the work of the explorer Eric Thompson, which ascribe to those ethnic groups the status of *"el Pueblo Maya"* and relate them directly to Thompson's understanding of the territory held by the pre-conquest Maya (Fischer 2001:132). In these cases maps are used with clear political intent. By registering identity onto the space depicted, the question of territory and autonomy can be raised. The maps are as much concerned with where the Maya intellectuals would like the boundaries to be as they are with the reality of any existing boundaries (if they do exist).

By contrast, the maps of North Izabal drawn up by INTA (*Instituto Nacional de Transformación Agrarian*), which were the subject of discussion throughout the communities, were maps which located real communities and the land that they claimed. The maps established claims to ownership of land which was worked and controlled by communities against claims from other communities as well as *finqueros* and FUNDAECO. In various meetings that I attended the main points of discussion were between neighbouring communities and between communities and *finqueros* about the exact location of boundaries and whether the INTA maps were correct. Both Maya and North Izabal maps are concerned with positioning people in relation to other people and places. For my purpose, these maps are useful for highlighting different agendas, strategies and competing identities. In particular it helps me to clarify the boundaries both real and imagined between people. Maps are crucial for control and hegemony. In drawing maps, decisions are taken about the criteria by which Maya are identified and in doing so other criteria, which may be less conclusive for a particular goal or indeed divisive, are glossed over.

Throughout my dissertation I have tried to hold in tension the very different conceptions of community held by Maya intellectuals and Q'eqchi' communities in North Izabal. However in emphasising the tension I also acknowledge that conceptions of community are not fixed. Just as young people may leave communities in North Izabal so urban-based intellectuals are drawn back to their communities of birth. A distinction needs to be drawn between imagined community and real community.

In Chapter 2, I argued that Maya identity is an 'imagined community' conceived of by educated, urban-based people, many of whom have spent time living abroad. Typically they are people who are employed by NGOs with funds from international organisations. The identity is imagined in the sense that it seeks to unite people of diverse backgrounds and classes. I argued that the Maya Movement is a rather loose grouping of individuals and organisations who are engaged in the same argument about autonomy and power. For Maya activists, the establishing of difference which is clearly delineated from ladino identity, is paramount for the assertion of rights based on being a people. Maya intellectuals emphasise the authentic roots of present day ethnic groups in a language and common pre conquest history. Although the basis for such a direct link between Maya past and indigenous present does not stand up to close scrutiny, there is enough common ground from which the story of a people can be constructed in a way which is consistent with Hobsbawn and Ranger's notion of "invented tradition" (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1989). Central to my argument about the differences between imagined and real communities is that Maya is a case of "ethnogenesis" (Hill 1996:1) which involves the top-down construction of a people based on objectified and abstracted cultural traits. In the construction of an imagined community cultural traits are rediscovered or separated from the social interactions where they are dynamic, and presented in a more fixed form as specifically Mayan ways. Commonalities are identified and constructed to bolster Maya identity. The Maya Movement's emphasis on culture and ethnic identity emanates from certain prominent individuals and organisations who are engaged in work on Maya education, languages and rituals. The construction of Maya identity tends towards being top-down and homogenising as it forces people into one or other ethnic category, and in that way it is similar to Anderson's analysis of the construction of national identity (Anderson 1983). By contrast my findings from North Izabal reveal that there is significant bottom-up indigenous activism which was not provoked by the Maya Movement and fits into neither the state municipal units nor the Maya linguistic/ethnic units.

The understanding of indigenousness promoted by Maya intellectuals is consistent with the cultural survival theoretical approach which I outlined in chapter one. In similar fashion to Redfield (1941) and other researchers, Maya intellectuals focus on the identification of cultural traits which are claimed to be authentic markers of Mayaness because their form has remained unchanged from the pre-conquest period until the modern day. This cultural survival approach to identity is very rigid and is more useful for

understanding the activities of the intellectuals than for understanding the nature of identity For example the notion of survival based on certain traits can not cope with the categorisation of *indígenas* who no longer speak a Maya language and some *ladinos* who do speak a Maya language. By understanding identity in terms of certain cultural traits, Maya intellectuals fix identity in such a way that the alternative to displaying those traits is the loss of culture and identity. There is a strong political motivation in the assertion of cultural survival. In order to construct Maya community, Maya intellectuals hark back to a pre-conquest time and play down the history of exploitation and the ways that indigenousness has been constructed by elites in the furtherance of that exploitation within indigenous communities in the intervening period. The theoretical emphases on cultural survival and historical context and boundary which I outlined in chapter one draw out the underlying issue of the political purpose of Maya intellectuals and how that is revealed in their promotion of Maya identity. The emphasis on language as an essential trait, reflects the position of Maya intellectuals for whom the study of languages has been a path which has taken them away from the rural sector. The majority of Maya intellectuals are university graduates whose livelihoods do not depend on access to land. The historical contextual approach draws attention to the changing nature of indigenous identity and the different understandings of indigenousness which emerge as a result of class differences between *indígenas*.

The maps of North Izabal which were the objects of such interest and debate in communities and in meetings between different parties, detailed the position of *aldea* communities and the boundaries between the various land claimants. The "we" on the maps were not strangers united through sharing certain cultural traits, but neighbours and family who made claim to a specific piece of land. For the construction of Maya identity, such local details and the histories of difference that they evoke are irrelevant to the imagining of a united Maya people which occupied a Maya territory before the conquest. The maps of North Izabal and disagreements between communities and *finqueros* about their accuracy, prompt memories of local history, the establishment of communities and subsequent struggles for livelihood. In Chapter 4, I showed that the communities in North Izabal are not imagined and detached from tradition but engaged in daily struggles which inform and construct their identity.

I have emphasised in Chapter 4 that it is the concrete and contradictory nature of communities in North Izabal which sets them apart qualitatively from the Maya imagined community. I have tried to analyse the importance of a multitude of interpersonal relations

within communities without lapsing into an idealising of community. I stressed that in North Izabal communities there is a high level of community endogamy and individuals and families are intimately linked through relations of *compadrazgo*. Community members tended to emphasises their shared condition of poverty in relation to ladino traders who buy some of the communities' produce. Alongside the pervading view that members wanted to participate more fully in the market, I also noted that members were keen to maintain non-monetary reciprocal labour arrangements as well as community management of resources including land. Evident in all of the communities was the integration of spiritual, economic and social spheres. The integration was most clearly seen in maize production where the success of the harvest was intrinsically bound up with the offerings made to earth deities which affirmed relations between community members and between the community as a whole and the sacred landscape. Unlike Maya traits which have been identified and reified to serve the purpose of imagining community, in the communities of Izabal tradition has not been lifted out of the lived context in which it is continually regenerated.

Fundamental to my argument that community identity continues to be pre-eminent in the lives of people in North Izabal is my assertion that community is not brittle, but flexible and responsive to changing conditions both internal and external.
The communities in North Izabal fit well into the theoretical approach emphasising boundaries. Barth (1969) and other scholars showed that the decisive element in defining identities is the boundaries between groups rather than cultural content. Boundaries and the interaction with other communities and groups which the boundaries imply are very important to communities. Furthermore this relational approach to identity takes account of the changing context in which groups interact and the competition for land which is important in the assertion of community. However, community organisation in North Izabal is more than the boundary between communities. The boundary does not just exist, but is the dynamic embodiment of the negotiation of agreements, norms and traditions which are rooted in material reality. In other words there is cultural content, but it is not fixed. It adapts and changes to meet present exigencies whilst retaining the sense that it is tradition.

Since the 1970s, communities have been affected by the evangelising work of the churches, the militarisation of Guatemalan society, the growth of NGOs and the intensification of land competition. I argued that in spite of the influence of the war and aggressive evangelisation, communities in North Izabal did not experience the scale of

dislocation and disturbance reported by Richard Wilson in Alta Verapaz. When the national and international resurgence in indigenous identity reached a high point in 1992, and people in North Izabal heard the report in 1996 that they were free to participate in indigenous rituals, they responded as communities. Furthermore the resurgence of interest in identity and culture in the 1990s roughly coincided with the sharp increase in competition for land and the privatisation of extensive swathes of land which had hitherto been available for settlement. In Chapter 6 I analysed the role of local intellectuals and how they work in conjunction with the communities to analyse the situation of land tenure and discuss ways in which what was happening could be reconciled with the memory of community. At the time that Maya intellectuals in Guatemala city were advancing a discourse about national level Maya identity, a discourse emerged in North Izabal which understood community as territorialized, dynamic and fundamental to the struggle for livelihoods.

In the 1990s, the intensification of community organising prompted by the land legalization process was not a temporary strategic position in order to secure land, but became fundamental to the discourse of territorialized community which was elaborated by local intellectuals and discussed in community meetings. Local intellectuals and communities identified the possibility that communities could be broken up through the sale of land by individual community members and the dissolution of community forms of organising. Communities are engaged in a continuous process of construction and accommodation to new challenges. Through the discourse of "territorialized" community, local intellectuals hold in tension the *ancianos'* traditional conceptions of community and the changes which may be required if community production and economic position is to improve. By using the term "territorialized community" I am distinguishing between the importance of place for communities in North Izabal, and conceptions of place which assume either extreme localism or a vague undefined attachment to place evident in Maya intellectuals' desire to maintain links with the place and community where they were born. In the case of the communities in North Izabal, the attachment to place is not a case of extreme localism. As I explained in Chapter 4, the significance of place is both spiritual and economic. Communities establish a reciprocal relationship with the earth deity dwelling in the landscape where they live, the land is their home and source of livelihood, in short it is the community's domain. If one person tries to sell their portion of the community's land it is regarded by the community as a threat to all community members.

Local intellectuals have been developing the discourse of territorialized community through an Asociación formed by the communities for the communities.

The current construction of community does not hark back to an idealised pre-conquest Maya past, but is rooted in *ancianos'* memories of when they did not have access to their own land while they worked on coffee estates in Alta Verapaz. Above all, the community envisaged and constructed is a grouping of people whose prime interest is the protection of territorialized community. Communities are not brittle organisations somehow surviving in a world where individual aspirations are the norm. Rather, communities are flexible organisations whose functioning depends upon their constant renewal and adapting to changing exigencies, both external and internal.

The resurgence of community identity represents a significant challenge for the Maya movement. The construction of Maya identity requires that community identities be folded into Maya identity. Maya intellectuals are trying to promote a disembedded identity for people whose identity is embedded in their locality. At the same time intellectuals recognise that it is the embeddedness of cultural traits in regions such as North Izabal which has allowed them to endure. However embeddedness does not mean that the community provides a protective cocoon in which they remain intact, unchanged. The embeddedness of cultural practices means that they are integrated into economic, social and spiritual relations which constitute the dynamics of community and so they change. What my study of communities in North Izabal reveals is that the embeddedness of cultural traits is not the survival of old traditions in spite of the domination of *ladino* culture, it is rather the construction of identity in relation to that culture in order to secure livelihoods. In community, cultural traits are inexorably bound up with economy through the community organisation which has evolved as a strategy for controlling and exploiting land. Here there is no selection and reification of certain ways which then become significant markers for the community. In writing about identity in North Izabal I have emphasised that economy is not divorced from culture. It is this integration of past and future, culture and economy in the everyday social relation s of people expressed as community organisation which presents a difficulty for the Maya Movement.

In the work of the Maya organisations such as PROMEM there is an evident disjuncture between imagined community and real community. The fact that Q'eqchi' speakers share cultural traits such as language, dress and religion which have been objectified by Maya intellectuals as evidence of Mayaness, does not in itself establish Maya identity. In North Izabal local intellectuals have constructed an understanding of

community where economic struggle articulates with cultural practices. I am not arguing that people are unaware that in other regions there are Q'eqchi speakers with similar cultural practices, rather I argue that in North Izabal the practices have been renewed and imbued with fresh meaning in the context of community struggles for land.

What is evident in North Izabal is the contrast between constructing a revived tradition, in the sense of creating and promoting an abstract notion of community at the prompting of outsiders, and doing tradition particularly through community activities. The disjuncture between the Maya Movement and communities lies in the teaching of objectified traits rather than recognising that some practices are already an integral part of community resurgence. In order to appeal to indigenous people throughout Guatemala, Maya intellectuals face the task of producing a map which combines the broad abstract units of identity from the Maya map with the detail of local communities. In Chapter 6, I showed how local intellectuals who are community members and farmers have been able to articulate the different tendencies and interests within communities through their sensitivity to the past in the context of present and future challenges.

The articulation of different groups within a single Maya identity is problematic particularly since the Maya intellectuals have not established a relationship of trust with rural indigenous people. To fold community identity into a wider identity, rather than subsuming local identities under a centralised, standardized identity, the Maya Movement will need to engage with local histories and identities in order to recognise the ways that economy and tradition are integrated through the dynamism of community organisation.

List of appendices

Appendix 1   Interview codes

Appendix 2 Map 1 the location of the communities
Map 2 the parishes in North Izabal
Map 3 Maya language groups

Appendix 3 Table 1 the origins and demography of communities
Table 2 communities and land tenure

Appendix 4 Photos used in photo elicitation

Appendix 1 Codes for interview references

The order of the information as it appears in the text is as follows
(initials of person / position in community or region / community / date)

position in the community/region
(an)   anciano
(cat) catechist
(esc) school committee
(tie) land committee
(fisp) FIS/health promoter
(maes) Teacher
(aux) Alcalde auxiliary
(pad) priest
(pas) Protestant pastor
(fisreg) FIS official
(alc) Alcalde
(pdet) Pastoral de la tierra
(asaw) Asociación Awinel
(eddir) State Education supervisor
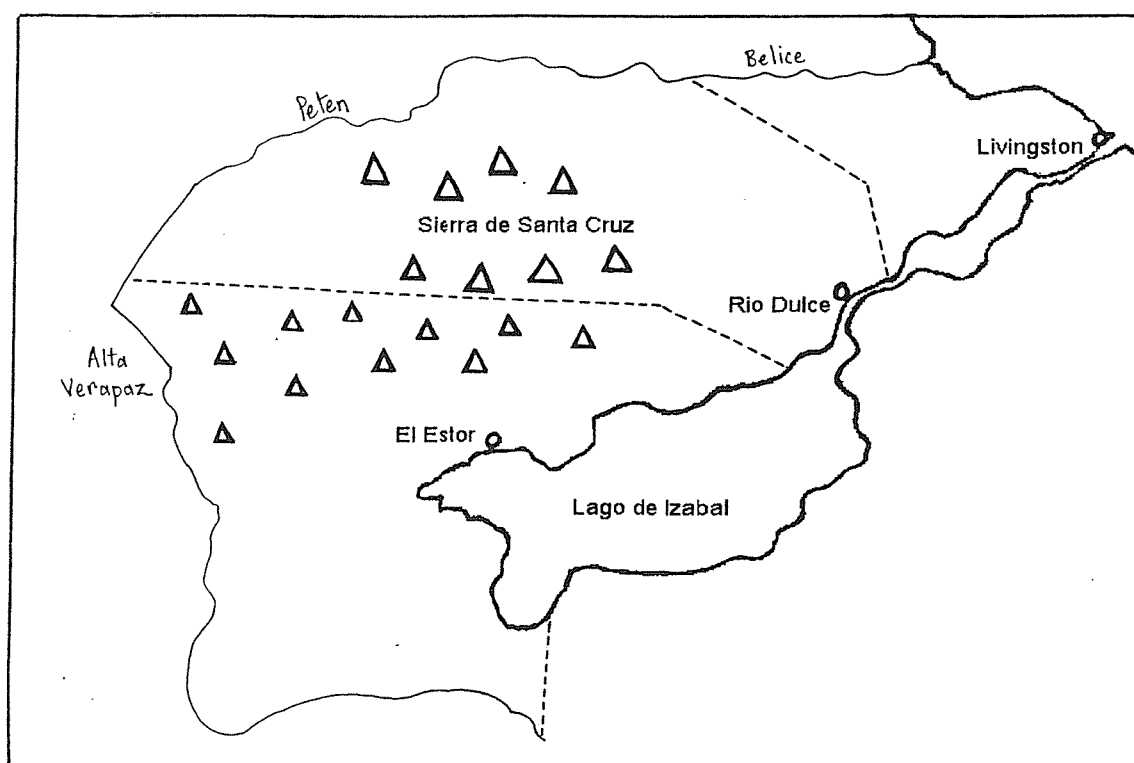(fund) FUNDAECO official
(sal) Health worker

Communities
(arc) Arcochoch
(cal) Calvario
(ch) Chinaranx
(coy) Coyoute
(por) Porvenir
(sah) Sahila
(sem) Semaji
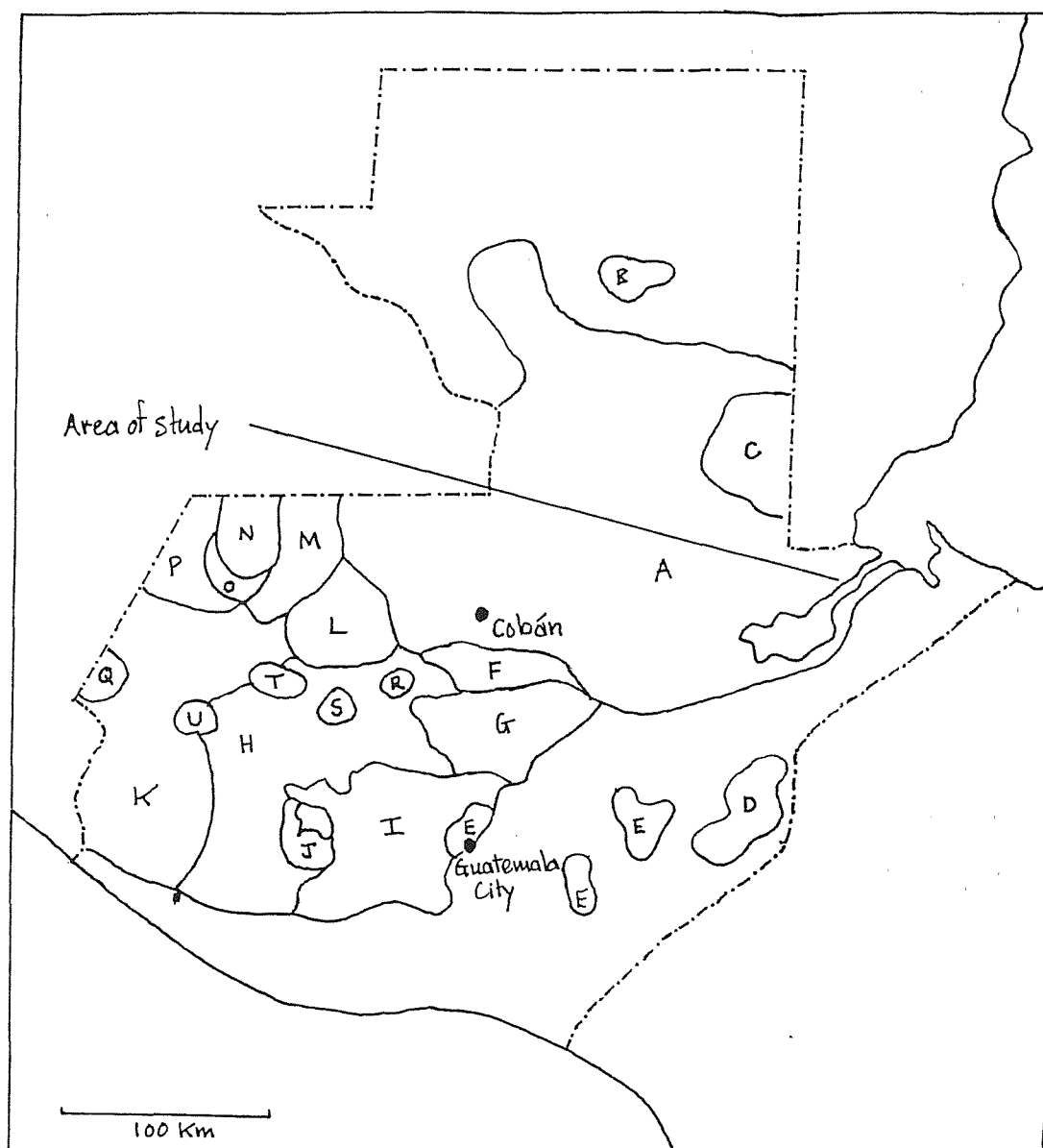(sep) Sepemechila
(tam) Tamagas
(cruz) Santa Cruz Tuba

Appendix 2 Map 1 Location of communities in North Izabal
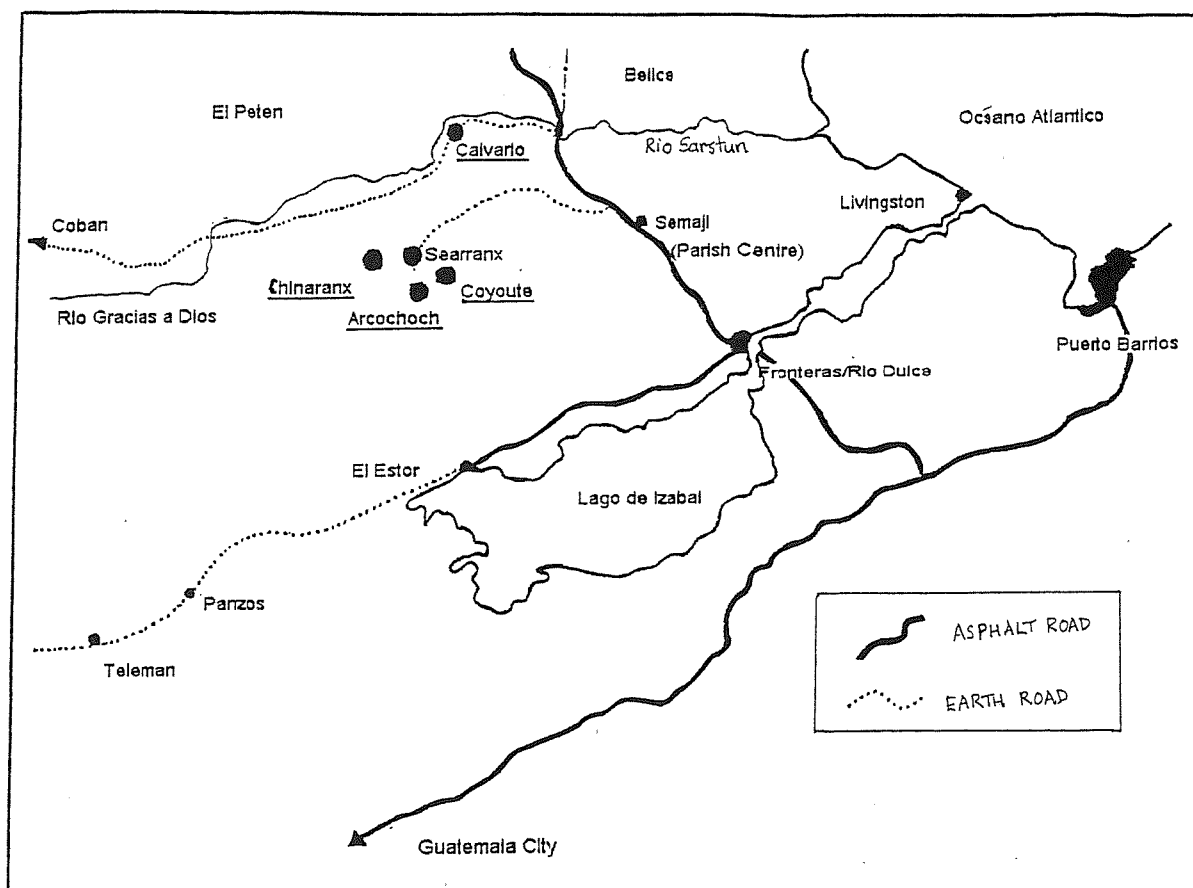
Appendix 2 Map 2 Parishes in North Izabal

Appendix 2 Map 3   The Maya Languages

Area of study

Cobán

Guatemala
City

100 Km

Maya Languages

A - Q'eqchi'

B - Itza

C - Mopan

D - Ch'orti'

E - Poqomam

F - Poqomchi'

G - Achi'

H - K'iche'

I - Kaqchikel

J - Tzutzujil

K - Mam

L - Ixil

M - Qanjobal

N - Chuj

0 - Akateko

P - Popti

Q - Teko

R - Uspanteko

S - Sakapulteko

T - Awakateko

U - Sipakapense

Appendix 3 Table 3 .1   Communities their origins and demography

community	founded	origin	population
Arcochoch	1920	Cahabon A.V	(359) 62 Households
Angel Ha *	1989	Semachaca L	22 households
Cacahuila	1930	Senahu,Cahabon A.V	(293) 47 Households
Caquich'och	1912	Searranx and A.V	12 households
Chacalte I	1960	L	(500) 60 Households
China Aranx	1930	Cahabon and L	(96) 16 Households
Chirujiha	1900	Semuc,Cahabon A.V	(56) 14 Households
Chocon Tamagas	pre1950	A.V	(135) 27 Households
Coyoute	1960	Semuc,Cahabon A.V	(198) 33 Households
Jalaute	1985	Cahabon A.V	(68) 14 Households
Nueva Semanzana *	1983	Semanzana L	(77) 12 Households
El Mirador *	1984	Tamagas L	10 Households
Guitarras	Pre1900	A.V	(1500)
Nimlasajal	1920	A.V	(210
Se Cortez *	1993	Caqichoch L	44
Sepak *	2000	Calvario L	10 households
Setana Chacalte	1925	Carcha A.V	(155) 30 Households
Rubel Ho *	1995	Sepemechila L	(170) 36 Households
San Juan Pacayal *	1980	Sahila,Chahal,El Estor	(68) 14 Households
Santa Maria Chinaranx *	1950	Chinaranx A.V	(34) 6 Households
Santiago Socela	1937	Chahal, Cahabon A.V	(83) 15 Households
Santo Rosario *	1973	Tamagas, Semuc	(200) 42 Households
Se Waribal Pek *	1985	Aldeas cercanas L	(145) 34 Households
Searranx	1899	Cahabon, Chahal	(46) 88 Households
Secaxte	1955	Cahabon A.V	(293) 51 Households
Semachaca	1940	Chahal Cahabon A.V	(98) 17 Households
Semanzana	1960	Chahal A.V	(256) 42 Households
Sepemechila	1900	Senahu, Cahabon A.V	(132) 22 Households
Setaña Nacimiento *	1984	Setana Chacalte L	(100) 13 Households
Tamagas Creek	Pre 1950	A.V	(1000) 250 Households
Arenales	1930	Chahal, Cahabon A.V	(500) 60 Households
Semau *	1993	Chinaranx L	(48) 12 Households
China Cadenas	1940	Chamelco A.V	(230) 45 households
Chunacte	1950	Chahal	(200) 37 households
El Calvario	1920	Cahabon, Chahal	(100) 18 Households
Setaña Chacalte II	1925	Carcha	(155) 30 Households
Sumach	1960	A.V	86 Households
Santa Maria Guadalupe	1987	Cahabon/ Saquipec	(60) 11 Households
Se Inup	1989	Caquichoch	4 Households
Semau	1993	Chinaranx/Socela	(48) 12 Households

L - Livingston (municipio in the department of Izabal)
A.V - Alta Verapaz (neighbouring department)

(Cahabon, Chahal and Chamelco are municipios in Alta Verapaz

Appendix 3 Table 3.2 Communities and land tenure

Angel Ha	Baldío	
Arcochoch	Finca Nacional	
Cachuila	Finca Nacional	
Caquich'och'	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	
Chacalte I	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	*
Chinaranx	Finca Nacional	
Chirujiha	Finca Nacional	
Chocon Tamagas	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	
Coyoute	Finca Nacional	
El Mirador	Baldío	
Guitarras	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	*
La Ceiba, Rio Moxela	Baldío	
Adelita	Fondo de Tierras	*
Se Inup	Finca Nacional	
Semau	Baldío	
Rubel Ho	Baldío	
San Juan Pacayal	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	*
Santa Maria Chinaranx	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	*
Santiago Socela	Finca Nacional	
Santo Rosario	Baldío	
Se Waribal Pek	Finca Nacional	
Searranx	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	*
Secaxte	Finca Nacional	
Semachaca	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	
Semanzana	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	
Sepemechila	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	*
Setana Nacimiento	Finca Nacional	
Tamagas Creek	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	*
Nueva Semanzana	Finca Nacional	
K'ampurilha	Baldío	
Santa Maria Guadelupe	Convenio de posesion	
Semau	Baldío	*
Sumach	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	*
Arenales	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	*
Santa Elena	Finca Privada	
China Cadenas	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	*
Chunacte	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	*
El Calvario	Patrimonio Agrario Colectivo	
Porvenir	Finca Privada/Tierra Nacional	
Nimlasajal	Finca Nacional	

Appendix 3 Explanatory notes

Tables 3.1 and 3.2 are not complete lists of all the communities in North Izabal. The Q'eqchi' communities listed are located in Rio Dulce parish, west of the main Rio Dulce/Peten road.

Table 3.2

Baldio - land which does not appear on the state register

Finca Nacional – land which appears on the register which is being claimed by a particular community/individual (s)

* community with land title

Patrimonio Agrario colectivo - Land title granted or provisionally granted in form of community controlled parcelas

Fondo de Tierras – land purchased by the state institution on behalf of a group

FUNDAECO
The following communities are located within the protected area managed by the Guatemalan NGO FUNDAECO.
In 2001 efforts by the communities to secure legal title were placed on hold "embargado"by FUNDAECO.

Nueva Las Tortugas
Cerro Blanco
Monterito
El Tigre
Rubel Cacao
Saquipek
Sepaq
Sakitzul
San Jose Pacayal
Huxila

Sources
Juan Caal Pastoral de la Tierra
Juan J tzalam (FUNDAECO)

Appendix 4 Photographs

I took the following photos in 1987 and 1988 during the time that I was working in North Izabal as an education promoter. The comments accompanying the photos are statements of what I was focusing on as I took the photos.

Appendix 4

Men sowing maize in Calvario North Izabal

First grade at Arcochoch school with the teacher Anita

Appendix 4
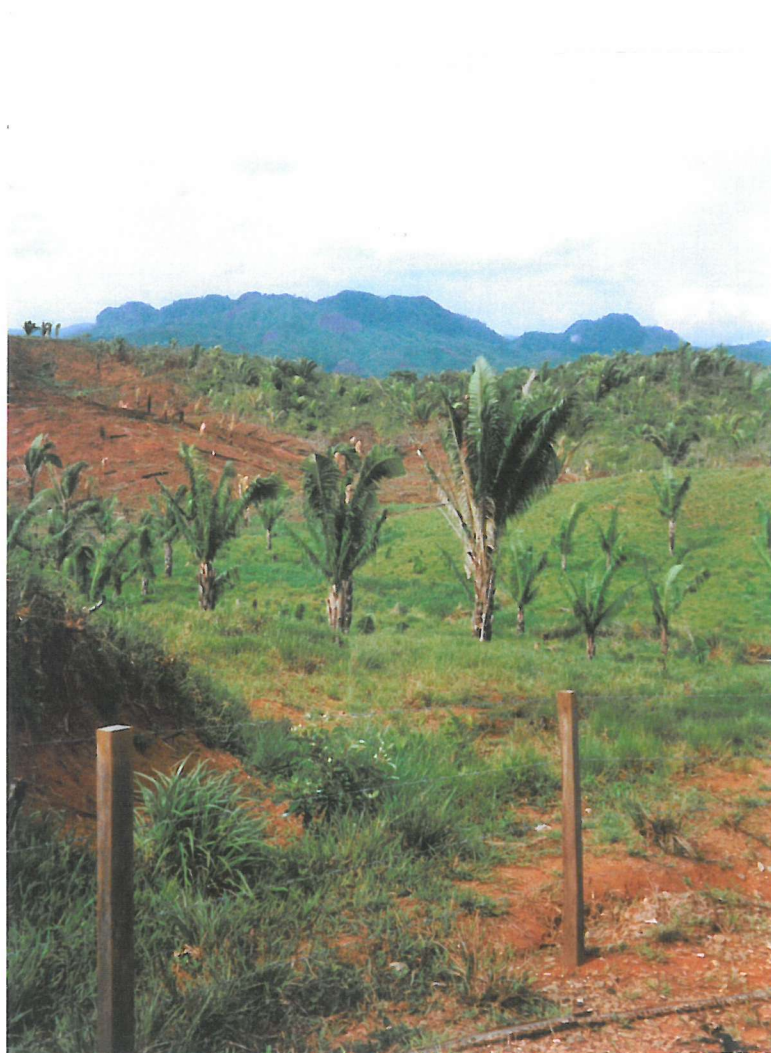

Girls washing maize in Searranx

Q'eqchi' man buying crates of coca cola from a ladino trader

Appendix 4

Replacing a neighbour's roof in Tamagas

Appendix 4

Boundary of Calvario community land and cattle finca

Appendix 4

Community members from Arenales burning Pom (resin) before entering a cave

Appendix 4

Young men in China Cadenas playing cards

Appendix 4

Food laid out for 2am community meal in Sakitzul

Appendix 4

Women preparing food in the community kitchen Semachaca

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ASECSA (Asociación Comunitarios de Salud), interview with Calixto Po (14 June 2001)

Escuela Awinel El Estor interview with Anibal Cuc Ical andIgnacio Rax Tiul (19 May 2000)

CEDIM (Centro de Investigación y documentación Maya). Interview with Jaime Roquel Chavez (24 July 2000)

ESQUINA 2002 CONIC (Coordinadora Nacional Indígena Campesina) interview with Pedro Esquina (17 June 2002)

FIS (Fondo de Inversión Social) interview with Isaías Portillo Zona Rio Dulce (25 June 2002)

FUNDAECO (Fundación para el Ecodesarrollo y la Conservación) interview with Osvaldo Calderon (18 July 2002) various interviews with Juan Jo Tzalam

DIGEBI (Dirección General de Educación Bilingue) interviews with Rigoberto Vasquez (20 July 2000) and interview with Ch'ub' IK'al, Rodrigo(18 June 2002)

PROMEM/UNESCO (Proyecto Movilizador de la Educación Maya) interview with Carlos Jacinto and Blanca Estela Alvarado (13 June 2000)

ESF (Escuelas Sin Fronteras) interview with Ingrid Yaneth Caal Bat (13 June 2001)