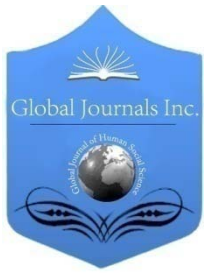
Volume 15 Issue 9
Originally issued as D1



Global Journal of human-social science: D
History, Archaeology & Anthropology
Volume 15 Issue 1 Version 1.0 Year 2015
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-460X & Print ISSN: 0975-587X

Fading Mayan Identity in Belize

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I include trip interviews with Mayan individuals and families involved in the tourism industry in Belize that discuss how the Maya have commodified their culture. I also address the question of whether the rate of economic development is worth the loss of their unique culture. By analyzing the cultural trends and patterns the Maya are experiencing, we gather insight into how interacting and becoming a part of the outside world is resulting in the potential loss of Mayan identity.

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GJHSS-D Classification : FOR Code: 200299, 210399



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Fading Mayan Identity in Belize

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I. Belize

a) Background

A former British colony known as British Honduras, Belize received its independence in 1981 (Sutherland 1998), and is now a significant tourist destination despite its relatively new autonomy and small size. El Salvador, which is a Central American country comparable to Belize in size, only had about two hundred thousand tourists in 2004 where as Belize had two hundred fifty thousand tourists (www.unwto.org). According to the Belize Tourism Board (October, 2008), 184, 132 total overnight tourists visited Belize from January to August, 2008.

b) Geography

A small, flat niche in Central America, Belize borders Mexico and Guatemala and consists of swampy coastal plains and dense forests encompassing a diverse flora.

Geologically, its limestone shelf consisting of porous caves has prevented Belize from becoming submerged in water. As is, Belize is covered with underground streams, juts into the ocean, and is coated with a low layer of soil (Fig. 1). Researchers are finding mangrove swamps, which are usually located in water near the coast, as close as 30 miles inland, a strong indication that Belize is hardly above water (Sutherland 1998).

c) Demographics

Belize is the most sparsely populated nation in Central America with about half of the population living in rural areas and about one fourth of the population living in Belize City (www.governmentofbelize.gov).

According to the Belize 2000 Housing and Population Census, about 34% of the population is of mixed Mayan and European descent (Mestizo), 25% are Kriols, 15% Spanish, and about 10.6% are Mayan. Contrary to the popular belief that a large portion of Belize's population is Garifuna (personal nterview with Irma Ramos, resident of La Democracia and certified tour guide in Belize and Bacas, La Democracia resident) only about 6.1% are Afro-Amerindian (i.e. Garifuna). The remaining population of Belize consists of European, East Indian, Chinese, Middle Eastern, and North American groups (Belize Central Statistical Office, 2005).

d) Culture

Although Belize was a British colony from 1862 until 1981, the first encounter the Maya had with European settlers was during the Late Classic (around A.D. 900) Period of their civilization (Sutherland 1998). Trade routes were developed by the colonizers through the Belizean cayes into the interior. Starting in the beginning of the seventeenth century, British colonizers began to exploit the Maya to develop their economy, which was primarily based on trade (Wilk and Chapin, 1990). Not only did they use the local Maya, but the colonizers also began to import African slaves into the country. As a result, African slaves began intermarrying with many other African ethnic groups living there. This mixture created the Belizean Kriol people (Wilk and Chapin, 1990). The Garifuna, a mix of African, Arawak, and Carib ancestry, all settled in the south by way of Honduras not long after the arrival of African slaves into the country (Sutherland, 1998). In addition, after 1800 Mestizo settlers from Mexico and Guatemala began to settle in the North (Sutherland 1998). The three Mayan groups that now inhabit the country are the Mopans, the Yucatecs, and the Kekchi (Stone 1994).

e) Capitalism, Colonialism, Tourism, and Indigenous People

Some theories suggest that the nature of capitalism makes it more difficult for Mayan people to gain rights to their own land and creation of own landscapes, such as the *milpa* agricultural landscape practiced by the Maya on a local scale. "Capitalism-with which the very idea and practice of landscape is so inextricably bound-has really never been localist, and so capitalist landscapes have never really been incorporated locally" (Atkinson, 2005, 53). This dates back to the political economy of the Spanish empires'

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demand for labor and goods savagely brought violent changes to the indigenous people in the New World.

Eric Wolf (as cited in Asad) believes that "Capitalist accumulation thus continues to engender new working classes in widely dispersed areas of the world. It recruits these working classes in wide variety of social and cultural backgrounds, and insets them into variable political and economic hierarchies." (Asad 1987, 295).Therefore, the capitalist mode of production creates a brutal class system in the new world in which indigenous people are at the bottom and who once were colonizers at the top of the class hierarchy, are now the tourism industry and foreigners. This class creation is the outcome of primitive accumulation. This specifically dates back to the Spanish presence in South/Central America, which was driven by the search for valuable commodities such as silver. He traces the mode of production of capitalism to the dispossession of indigenous people. Wolf (1982, 157) explains that "[t]o control the Native American population, the [Castilian Crown] fashioned their communities into institutions of indirect rule, their autonomy always determined by the workings of the Spanish sector. To that sector the Indians supplied cheap labor and commodities, and from it they purchased, often under duress." The indirect rule is shaped by the mode of production. Therefore, the histories of the natives are shaped by the political economy at the macro level.

Tallal Asad (1987) challenges Wolf's work because a capitalist analysis of history denies pre-contact societies. What happened in the past 500 years prior to contact? "The concept of mode of production articulates an integrated totality containing economic, political, and ideological instances in which the economic is always determinant but not always dominant (as it is in capitalism)" (597). Asad argues that other modes of power besides capitalism must be taken into account. Asad specifically discusses the role of the state, explaining that "the state and other forms of coercive power have been fundamental at various points in the operation of profit-making capitalist enterprises, that the historical development of capitalism is inseparable from political and legal preconditions" (598). Asad, therefore, challenges primitive accumulation as the original sin. The inequalities between the weak and strong may be constructed not only between class lines but racial and ethnic lines. This racialized inequality tells a different story of colonialism such that hegemony and power are carried forward by constructions of race and ethnicities. Also the traditions and histories of people cannot be reduced to a commodification of labor or commodification of culture in the case of tourism, both of which are modes of productions. Urry (2002) also discusses the commodification of culture and how the tourism industry systematizes to perpetuate the "tourist gaze." As a result, capitalism systematizes and controls tourists to the extent of the "tourist gaze" described by Urry (2002, 1). I will discuss how this "tourist gaze" is systematized and socially constructed and consequently, the impacts it has on the Maya.

f) Exploitation

Ramos (1998) explains how development engages with indigenous knowledge at the grassroots level. Indigenous identity as a commodity then becomes a subset in the capitalist mode of production. Ramos (1998, 218) states that "the supposed respect for indigenous wisdom in handling unruly ecosystems such as Amazonia's is in fact good old economic exploitation in humanist disguise." Despite the contradictions that perpetuates in this mode of production, "Indians and other 'forest people' must develop some sort of economically feasible production in order to justify occupation of their lands. The argument is that market forces will sooner or later evict the inhabitants of territories that are deemed "exploitative" (219).

Wearing (2001, 15) also discusses the exploitation process in the context of a lack of conservation efforts stating that "Neglect of conservation and quality of life issues threatens the very basis of local populations and a viable and sustainable tourism industry."

II. Mayan History, Lifestyle, and Economy

All Mayan tribes in Belize experience a shared history of exploitation. Even the Mopans, who are indigenous to Belize, were forced out by the British after serving as slaves, and later returned from Guatemala in 1886 to evade slavery there (Cho 2007). The Yucatecs, who came from the Yucatán peninsula in Mexico, came to Belize to escape the Caste War. The Ketchi also fled from slavery in Guatemala. The formation of a national culture and emphasis on national awareness in the 1950s corresponded to the growth of the nationalist movement which sought to eradicate Mayan culture and move towards independence and the formation of a national identity. The Maya continue to have the highest levels of poverty in a country where 33.5% of the population was below the poverty line in 2002 (www.cia.gov). The Maya are also the least active group in the political and socioeconomic arenas (www.cia.gov).

The Maya have used a highly advanced agricultural technique in which they use raised fields, the greatly effective *milpa* shifting-cultivation system that was sufficient to support a dense population consisting of three to five million people by the Classic Period, A.D. 300-900 (Sutherland 1998). Another significant aspect of Mayan economy is their position as accomplished traders, developing great trade routes throughout the Yucatan, Belize, and Guatemala (Dobson 1973). Their celestial knowledge of astronomy, specifically their use

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of the sun, moon, and stars, contributed to the Mayan development of a highly accurate calendar which also played a role in their *milpa* shifting-cultivation agricultural system.

The Maya practiced a city-state form of government with regional centers that cooperated with one another. The period in which Mayan civilization reached its peak, politically, socially, and commercially was during the Early Classic Period, A.D. 300 to 600 (Sutherland, 1998). Cities such as Altun Ha, Carcol, Lamanai, La Milpa, Xunantunich, and Lubaantun, had an estimated 30,000 Maya living on the cayes (Guderjan 1993, 2).

Today, the Maya have come to utilize tourism to their own economic benefits.

a) Mayan Tourism

La Ruta Maya, the ancient Mayan Route passing through the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras is located in a tropical jungle region and consists of archeological sites and ancient Mayan ruins, becoming one of the most popular tourist destinations (Anderson et al. 2006, 77). In fact, "La Ruta Maya include[s] more cities than ancient Egypt, traditions, and crafts that have survived millennia, endangered plants and animals living in the wild, the longest barrier reef in the Americas, and underscores the economic and population pressures poised to threaten all of these treasures" (Anderson et al. 2006, 77). There are several tourist guide books and Internet sites about La Ruta Maya.

The Mundo Maya Organization (MMO) developed the Mundo Maya program which "is a historical collaboration of five countries (Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico) that aims to standardize and distribute information on the Maya World" (Fig. 2) (http://www.belizetourism.org/belize-tourism/mundo-maya-organization.html). The main objective of the Mundo Maya Organization is "to promote the sustainable development of the Mayan zones in the respective countries through tourism. This implies understanding the promotion of sustainable tourism as a form of development that allows the appropriate use of the natural and cultural resources, the participation and the improvement of the quality of life of the local communities, the economic contribution to other programs of national and regional development, and the optimal satisfaction of tourists" (http://www.belizetourism.org/belize-tourism/mundo-maya-organization.html).

One smaller scale example of Mayan tourism is The Maya Village Indigenous Experience tourism program created by Yvonne and Alfredo Villoria. This program takes place throughout Southern Belize "to enable the native people to participate in the tourism industry without undermining their identity, dignity or economic security" (Steinberg 1, 1994).

This organization also collaborates with UNESCO's World Heritage Center as an advisory and advocacy establishment that assists in project design, planning, and implementation at Mesoamerican World Heritage sites.

Zurick (1995) discusses how the needs of tourism often conflict with the needs of local people, leading to detrimental impacts on local society, especially culturally. The increasing monetization of the Belize economy as a result of tourism development has caused a threat to some cultural components such as religion. Zurick points out that even though tourism may help to safeguard certain cultural artifacts or contribute financially through the reconstruction of cultural buildings, for example, it may destroy the spirit that initially created them. However, a limit to what a culture can 'absorb' is difficult to measure because it depends on the resilience of the culture among many other factors. Zurick further believes that the result of exceeding that limit include increases in social inequity, changes in values, customs, lifestyle, and increased frustration, confusion, and antagonism.

Some of the environmental degradations which are affecting Mayan communities are prevalent near the Western Border, along the Cayo/Orange Walk and the Toledo Borders section where tourism has been particularly high. The Maya in the Toledo District were in fact forced to live in reserves that were put aside for them to practice the *milpa*, a community system of agriculture. However, high rates of tourism and pollution have affected the Mayan water supply source in this area.

III. How Tourism is Justified as a Threat to Mayan Culture

Hobsbawm (1983) discusses the notion of invented tradition, which could be applied to the tourism industry's recreation of Mayan history. Hobsbawm states that "a set of practices ... of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1983, 1). He explains that traditions are invented by applying fictitious continuity that is correlated to inaccurate historic customs. Hobsbawn argues that some of the most erroneous traditions are those based upon a largely fictitious history. Urry (2002) further explores this concept, developing the theory that such fictitious histories lead to the development of a "tourist gaze." He illustrates how the gaze is constructed, reinforced, and most importantly, who authorizes it. In order to understand this concept, it is crucial to understand "what the consequences are for the places which are its object and how it interrelates with a variety of other social practices" (Urry 2002, 1).

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Douglas G. Pearce (2001) relates this concept to how tourism in Belize is legitimated in the context of destroying a culture. For example, Belizean architects emphasize the creativity of the Maya to attract more tourists. Generally however, architects, archaeologists and other Belizeans position the Maya in a malicious light, giving the impression that they were/are dangerous, violent, sadistic people. This contributes to the legitimization of Mayan eradication. Architects portray them as primitive and warlike people by placing emphasis on their primitive lifestyle and wild habitat in the open jungle.

To refute this common image, Indigenous Rights Activist Rigoberta Menchu stated "We are not myths of the past, ruins in the jungle or zoos. We are people and we want to be respected, not to be victims of intolerance and racism" (Farah 1992, 1). Urry explains the psychology behind this, explaining "assumption[s] [of] investigating deviance can reveal interesting and significant aspects of normal societies" (2002, 2). This is why various tourist activities portray violence and are "treated as deviant [which] can illuminate how different societies operate much more generally" (Urry 2002, 2).

Along with the general public, architects from the Architecture and Project Management partnership program led by Alex and Sylvia Laasner in 2004, tend to disagree about the misrepresentation of Mayan culture. Pearce (2001) shows how the general public believes that top architects (i.e. the Lassners), leaders, and guides in Belize give the most accurate information and portray the Maya in the most historically precise way as possible.

a) Reshaping Mayan History

"Essential to this [reshaping Mayan history] is a two way interactive process between host and guest, and therefore the culture of the host society is as much at risk from various forms of tourism as physical environments" (Sofield 1991, 56).

Irving Goffman (1959, 31) discusses how "dramatization of one's work does constitute a problem." The motives behind the tourism industry in Belize could be applied to how "the individual's activity is to become significant to others" by "mobiliz[ing] his activity so that it will express during the interaction what he wishes to convey" (Goffman 1959, 30). The "problem" of dramatization by the tourism industry in Belize is expressed by Pearce, who also describes the effects this has on the threat to Mayan identity. These include impact on population structure (size of population, modification of family size, and rural-urban transformation of population), transformation of types of occupation, transformation of values (political, social, religious, moral), influence on traditional ways of life (art, music, and folklore, habits, and daily living), and modification of consumption patterns (qualitative alterations, and quantitative alterations).

Through certain strategies, pivotal figures that have come to shape some of Mayan history, have not only been able to make archeological sites compelling to the general population of tourists, but they have also been able to appeal to certain target tourist audiences, a problem that has caused other countries' tourism industry such as Uganda to result in complete failure (Victurine, 2000).

IV. How the Maya are Portrayed and the Potential Loss of Mayan Cultural Identity

"If we just think about this [tourism] we can see that categories need to acknowledge, at least, how those who are tourists one day are the toured the next or how 'locals' often use global connections themselves" (Atkinson et al, 2005, 39). Because the Maya are 'making global connections themselves' and are involved in the processes of globalized tourism and globalization in general, it is important to consider not only how other people are portraying the Maya, but how the Maya, themselves, are contributing to the shift in their own identity. Although many times the Maya are not involved in their own misrepresentations, in many cases, they are involved in a mutual exchange of cultural and lifestyle choices, including the use of advanced technology.

a) Archeologists

After a Mayan named Francisco Cruz Reyes discovered bones wrapped around an unbroken painted vessel while digging a well to water his cancuco, a *milpa* on "a patch of fertile soil, left by Maya settlements" (Sutherland 1998, 13), a group of archaeologists from Texas came to explore the site. They located other sites near the area and despite the presence of Mayan communities like Chac Balaam, at the Bacalar Chico Canal, which is a natural border line for Mexico and Belize, they began archeological digs. They returned for a more elaborate dig the next year, this time bringing students and volunteers to work the two sites. They used Reyes who built them a cooking cottage and cleared two acres of land for fifteen tents to house the volunteers who included teachers, lawyers, filmmakers, and an advertising executive (Sutherland 1998). However, Reyes was not compensated for all that he had done for the archeologists and when disaster struck on the last week of the dig due to one of the smoke-fires (built to reduce clouds of mosquitoes) flaring up, Reyes lost his canuco. This included fruit trees and vegetables, his livelihood.

More recently, archeologists have become even more intrepid and not only exploit the Maya during their archeological digs, but further belittle them through distorting their discoveries. This was demonstrated at the investigated site of Cahal Pech, above San Ignacio

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in the Cayo District, which rose to preeminence in the Preclassic Period (Dobson 1973). This means it rose to supremacy before surrendering its dominion to the neighboring people of Buena Vista and later, during the Classic Period, to that of Xunantunich (Sutherland 1998). However, pictures skewed by Belizean archaeologists portray them as warring people to resemble the fiefdoms of Medieval Europe.

Atkinson, et al (2005) emphasizes how significant the 'aesthetically pleasing' "visual possession" is to the average tourist. Some of the earliest archeological sites, like Cuello in Orange Walk and even the more recent discovery of glyphs at Caracol in the Cayo District, portray small territorial victories as militant wars to take control over Tikal. Sites by Belizean archaeologists and pictures of the sites, such as at Xunantunich, have been made out to depict fiefdoms, estates or domains of a feudal lord, which ostensibly did not occur in Belize (Dobson 1973).

Entire archeological places in Belize have been structured to match Medieval European sites in order to cater to tourists from Eastern Europe. These perceptions of the Maya legitimate other acts such as embezzlements of Mayan artifacts. For example, archaeologists have excavated Mayan remains from the Rio Frio cavern, but claim there is no trace of Mayan history due to natural causes (the Rio Frio has formed a natural tunnel through the limestone opening the mountain spur at both ends) (Rapp 2002).

Altun Ha was the first archeological site recognized by A.H. Anderson who in 1957 did a follow up report on questionable mounds in the area. In 1961 W.R. Bullard examined portions of the site which were ignored until 1963 when villagers' work uncovered an elaborately carved jade pendant (Rapp 2002). This discovery led to several long-term, full-scale archaeological projects in Belize.

Artifacts from David Pendergast's series of excavations from 1964 to 1971 were carried out under the support of the Royal Ontario Museum, which broke antiquity laws by stealing Mayan artifacts, an embezzlement for the museum to display Mayan artifacts. To improve the situation, Dr. Pendergast and Graham of the Royal Ontario Museum organized rescue archaeology to "rescue" and solve some of the archeological puzzles caused by looters. Although damage made by looters is irrevocable, Dr. Pundergast and Graham attempted to understand the relationship of archeological site B-5 to the rest of the structures (Rapp 2002).

b) Architects

Although Belizean architects emphasize the creativity of the Maya to attract more tourists, generally, architects portray the Maya in a malicious light, giving the impression that they were/are dangerous, violent, sadistic people. This contributes to the legitimization of Mayan eradication. Architects portray them as primitive and warlike people by placing emphasis on their primitive lifestyle and wild habitat in the open jungle. In 1961, after a hurricane hit Belize City, the former capital of Belize, architects focused on developing the current capital, Belmopan, which is renowned in Belize as a great architectural achievement (personal interview with Sequi, the co-owner and manager of In the Jungle Restaurant in the Mayan community of Nuuk Chel, on January 9, 2008). The natural destruction of Belize City gave nationalists an opportunity to further condemn the Maya for not only contributing to the damage, but also to compare the new construction of Belmopan to the 'primitive' living conditions the Maya had resided in. The national movement also perceived the Maya as 'war-like' savages and developed Belmopan in a way that would exclude the Maya in order to radically transform the settlement pattern.

c) Mayan Community

i. *Customs*

"Maya traditional art is embroidery skills" (personal interview with Sequi, January 9, 2008). Characteristics of the Maya use to include the way they dressed. "The women wore embroidered dresses and blouses which were always hand sewn." However, with the new changes of tourism in the community, the women use sewing machines and modified traditional Mayan clothing. "The Ketchi Maya wore square, checkered skirts and the Maya in the Yucatan wore colorful, embroidered dresses, now the women wear any long dresses."

Atkinson et al describes how "the authentic is judged in contrast to artificial displays such as genuine local artefacts rather than souvenirs especially produced for tourists or festivals for local people rather than performances staged for tourists" (2005 36). Even though the gift shop at Nuuk Chel sells some of these "traditional" forms of art, most of the 'Mayan' souvenirs include glass and ceramic figurines as well as jewelry made out of hemp. Belizean tourist guide Irma Ramos expressed her feelings about tourism and the number of people that visit Belize. "Most tourists don't come or like to visit this place [La Democracia], they want to go to Tiger Cave and the jungle right away and miss all these small communities" (personal interview with Ramos, January 7, 2008). Urry (2002, 7) also touches on this phenomena, explaining "isolated from the host environment and the local people, the mass tourist travels in guided groups and finds pleasure in inauthentic contrived attractions, gullibly enjoying 'pseudo-events' and disregarding the 'real' world outside."

Not only has the tourism industry promoted a certain type of art and standards for the Maya to follow, but the National Arts Council promotes training of specific forms of art. According to the National Arts

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Council, the best developed graphic arts are a particular style of painting and sculpture. This includes the use of wood, whereas traditionally, the Maya used stucco, jade, and obsidian (Rapp 2002). In discussing environmental impact assessment, Ewart Robateau (External Relations Officer at the University of Belize) compared some traditional practices to some of the tourism's present forms, explaining that not only were the traditional handy crafts (practiced by the Maya) more environmentally friendly, but they were also an expression of 'women empowerment' (personal interview with Ewart Robateau, January, 9, 2008). Urry describes the relationship between tourists and the indigenous people and their 'traditions' that the tourists are visiting as a 'game' instigated by the tourists. "Tourists find pleasure in the multiplicity of tourist games. They know that there is no genuine tourist experience, that there are merely a series of games or texts that can be played" (Urry 2002, 12). This could also be applied to architecture and the type of material the Maya use to build their houses: "now we build our houses out of concrete" (personal interview with Sequi, January 8, 2008).

Atkinson et al describes how "'pseudo-events' shows and exhibits [are] created especially for the tourist" (2005, 37). As a result, "this sets up romantic-style tourism or travel as a quest for the authentic" (2005, 37).

Mayan communities are told that folkloric forms of art that romanticize their culture will sell best to tourists. This also pervades Mayan performing arts such as drama and dance. Urry (2002, 12) describes the tourist psychology behind this, explaining that "tourists almost delight in the inauthenticity of the normal tourist experience." In some communities, the Maya have come to love Punta rock music, a cultural expression created by the Garifuna during the national culture movement in the 1980s (personal interview with Sequi, January 8, 2008). This is just one example of how a culture can evolve and challenge the 'authentic'.

Sequi organizes Mayan performances as entertainment for the tourists. Although the dances reflect Mayan culture, the music tends to be more modern and low key to "compliment the food" (personal interview with Sequi on January 8, 2008). This becomes an endless cycle in which "tourist entrepreneurs and the indigenous populations are induced to produce ever more extravagant displays for the gullible observer who is thereby further removed from the local people" (Urry 2002, 7).

The Maya traditionally listened to two types of music; 'pleasure music' and 'group music'. "We listen to pleasure music to celebrate marriages and get togethers. Group music is not just for pleasure but goes back to when the Spaniards came" (personal interview with Sequi, January 9, 2008). As a result, the Maya would not only listen to group music but also make their own music and instruments such as the marimba, guitar, violin, flute, and drum as a form of empowerment. "The young generation has different perceptions of the culture and different priorities like wanting a better house." I asked Sequi, "So what do the elders do to enforce their culture?" He replied, "We don't want the young ones to forget our dialect, music, or culture so we continue the traditions" using the example of embracing their traditions by making corn tortillas and always thanking the corn god.

ii. *Marriage*

Mayan men and women traditionally start their conjugal lives before age eighteen. Their culture also held the tradition of holding arranged marriages. However, not only do the Maya choose who they marry, but they also tend to intermarry (leading to the new race known as Mestizo). In addition, they start their conjugal life a few years later and do not always keep long-lasting unions. Although there are strict requirements for divorce, partners of broken marriages often live with others in common-law unions. "Separation is more common than ever before even though people choose who they want to marry" (personal interview with Sequi on January 8, 2008). The more traditional Maya perceive this rate of separation as "disrespect" to the culture and marriage system.

Sequi described some of his own observations of people who intermarry. "Maya who marry outside the culture become acculturated and forgetting some of their own culture is inevitable."

iii. *Language*

Not only are most Maya bilingual now (fluent in English) but their own Mayan language has become diluted through Spanish words being fit into the language. As a result, the Mayan dialect has evolved into a completely new language. "I am glad that the original Mayan language was documented because it is an important part of our history," Sequi said.

iv. *Positive Change-Mayan Community*

"We are using symbols and music to stronger represent us and to keep our traditions going." Some of these symbols include the jaguar which represents power, the turtle (symbolizing love) and the rooster. Music and symbols become intertwined in Mayan culture. For example, the harp is used to attract chickens and roosters. "The environment also continues to play a major role in our culture so it is important to spread these symbols and practice our music." (personal interview with Sequi on January 8, 2008).

V. Concluding Thoughts

If the Maya desire to preserve their culture and identity as well as political autonomy, they must gain rights to become incorporated into the law of the state. Mayan political activism and empowerment in Guatemala should be an act for the Maya in Belize to

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emulate. The Maya in Guatemala have made impressive strides over the past couple of decades in fighting for their cultural and political rights. They have forged powerful cultural-political organizations, contesting racism, and demanding recognition from dominant institutions who only one generation earlier, "espoused a naturalized scorn for 'lo indio'" (Hale 2005, 5) of all, the government must become receptive and understand Mayan culture and Mayan language, not as "forms of folklore" (Demetrio Cojti Cuxil, 51) to perpetuate tourism. First, the Belizean government must recognize and incorporate indigenous cultural practices, beliefs, traditions, and customs into government and state policy. Cuxil states "channels and rules of negotiation, administrative procedures, impact measurement systems have to be changed or devised" (Cuxil, 51). Cooperation agencies and donors can also play a role in indigenous development not only through supporting Mayan rights, but also through understanding the importance of preserving their culture and protecting their ways of life.

In the context of economic development, the indigenous right to manage their own economy, which includes some forms of tourism, through the use of existing natural assets and resources should be protected. In order to "sustain the well-being of local communities" in every way including their culture, history, and traditions, "tourism can be viewed as a development strategy leading to sustainable development and centering on the conjunction of natural resource qualities, host community and the visitor that all benefit from tourism activity" (Wearing 2001, 14). The Maya should be able to farm their *milpas*, build their houses, reservoir systems (such as at Caracol), canucos (*milpa* patches), and canoes. They should resort back to other ways of developing their own economy and traditions such as using canals and stelae to make murals and monuments. The importance of relationships between human society and the natural world, the Maya being connected to nature, should also be understood and protected. Therefore, the right for the Maya to rely on their knowledge about the natural world, herbs, animals, and their surroundings in addition to preserving their language, traditions, and culture should be a crucial aspect of their autonomous economic development.

As a result, the Maya can promote ethnic diversity through developing stronger relationships with the government and various organizations. Therefore, the state and all sectors of society will have to be receptive and understanding towards Mayan territory as a "space in nature that is under the cultural influence or control," (Grefa 1996, 72) through tourism in order for their rights to become the law of the state. Indigenous people must represent themselves in public policy for their rights to be protected. In conclusion, through self-determined development, incorporating cultural customs and economic traditions in self-subsistent activities and management, the Maya could improve their living conditions and exercise their own way of life as a free people.

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