

# Fading Mayan Identity in Belize

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## Abstract

The country of Belize is increasingly becoming more globalized and dependent on tourism for the economic development of the country. Belize has a fairly large population of indigenous people some of which have been forcefully relocated from other countries in Latin America. I examine shifts in Mayan identity as an indigenous people and at what expense tourism contributes to the indigenous communities' economic development. 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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**Index terms**— tourism, maya, belize, identity, culture.

in rural areas and about one fourth of the population living in Belize City ([www.governmentofbelize.gov](http://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 interview 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).

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

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

57 Tallal Asad (1987) challenges Wolf's work because a capitalist analysis of history denies precontact societies.  
58 What happened in the past 500 years prior to contact? "The concept of mode of production articulates an  
59 integrated totality containing economic, political, and ideological instances in which the economic is always  
60 determinant but not always dominant (as it is in capitalism)" (597). Asad argues that other modes of power  
61 besides capitalism must be taken into account. Asad specifically discusses the role of the state, explaining that  
62 "the state and other forms of coercive power have been fundamental at various points in the operation of profit-  
63 making capitalist enterprises, that the historical development of capitalism is inseparable from political and legal  
64 preconditions" (598).

65 Asad, therefore, challenges primitive accumulation as the original sin. The inequalities between the weak and  
66 strong may be constructed not only between class lines but racial and ethnic lines. This racialized inequality  
67 tells a different story of colonialism such that hegemony and power are carried forward by constructions of race  
68 and ethnicities. Also the traditions and histories of people cannot be reduced to a commodification of labor or  
69 commodification of culture in the case of tourism, both of which are modes of productions. Urry (2002) also  
70 discusses the commodification of culture and how the tourism industry systematizes to perpetuate the "tourist  
71 gaze." As a result, capitalism systematizes and controls tourists to the extent of the "tourist gaze" described by  
72 Urry (2002, 1). I will discuss how this "tourist gaze" is systematized and socially constructed and consequently,  
73 the impacts it has on the Maya. f) Exploitation Ramos (1998) explains how development engages with indigenous  
74 knowledge at the grassroots level. Indigenous identity as a commodity then becomes a subset in the capitalist  
75 mode of production. Ramos (1998, 218) states that "the supposed respect for indigenous wisdom in handling  
76 unruly ecosystems such as Amazonia's is in fact good old economic exploitation in humanist disguise." Despite  
77 the contradictions that perpetuates in this mode of production, "Indians and other 'forest people' must develop  
78 some sort of economically feasible production in order to justify occupation of their lands. The argument is  
79 that market forces will sooner or later evict the inhabitants of territories that are deemed "exploitative" (219).  
80 Urry (2001, 15) also discusses the exploitation process in the context of a lack of conservation efforts stating  
81 that "Neglect of conservation and quality of life issues threatens the very basis of local populations and a viable  
82 and sustainable tourism industry."II.

## 83 2 Mayan History, Lifestyle, and Economy

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

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

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

104 Today, the Maya have come to utilize tourism to their own economic benefits. a) Mayan Tourism La Ruta Maya,  
105 the ancient Mayan Route passing through the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico, Guatemala, Belize, and Honduras

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

112 The Mundo Maya Organization (MMO) developed the Mundo Maya program which "is a historical  
113 collaboration of five countries (Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Belize, and Mexico) that aims to standardize  
114 and distribute information on the Maya World" (Fig. ??) ([http://www.belizetourism.org/belizetourism/mundo-](http://www.belizetourism.org/belizetourism/mundo-maya-organization.html)  
115 [maya-organization.html](http://www.belizetourism.org/belizetourism/mundo-maya-organization.html)).

116 The main objective of the Mundo Maya Organization is "to promote the sustainable development of the  
117 Mayan zones in the respective countries through tourism. This implies understanding the promotion of  
118 sustainable tourism as a form of development that allows the appropriate use of the natural and cultural  
119 resources, the participation and the improvement of the quality of life of the local communities, the economic  
120 contribution to other programs of national and regional development, and the optimal satisfaction of tourists"  
121 ([http://www.belizetourism.org/belize-tourism/mundo-ma](http://www.belizetourism.org/belize-tourism/mundo-maya-organization.html)  
122 [ya-organization.html](http://www.belizetourism.org/belize-tourism/mundo-maya-organization.html)).

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

127 This organization also collaborates with UNESCO's World Heritage Center as an advisory and advocacy  
128 establishment that assists in project design, planning, and implementation at Mesoamerican World Heritage  
129 sites. Zurick (1995) discusses how the needs of tourism often conflict with the needs of local people, leading to  
130 detrimental impacts on local society, especially culturally. The increasing monetization of the Belize economy as  
131 a result of tourism development has caused a threat to some cultural components such as religion. Zurick points  
132 out that even though tourism may help to safeguard certain cultural artifacts or contribute financially through the  
133 reconstruction of cultural buildings, for example, it may destroy the spirit that initially created them. However,  
134 a limit to what a culture can 'absorb' is difficult to measure because it depends on the resilience of the culture  
135 among many other factors. Zurick further believes that the result of exceeding that limit include increases in  
136 social inequity, changes in values, customs, lifestyle, and increased frustration, confusion, and antagonism. Some  
137 of the environmental degradations which are affecting Mayan communities are prevalent near the Western Border,  
138 along the Cayo/Orange Walk and the Toledo Borders section where tourism has been particularly high. The  
139 Maya in the Toledo District were in fact forced to live in reserves that were put aside for them to practice the  
140 milpa, a community system of agriculture. However, high rates of tourism and pollution have affected the Mayan  
141 water supply source in this area.

### 141 3 III.

142 How Tourism is Justified as a Threat to Mayan Culture Hobsbawm (1983) discusses the notion of invented  
143 tradition, which could be applied to the tourism industry's recreation of Mayan history. Hobsbawm states that  
144 "a set of practices ... of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour  
145 by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (1983, 1). He explains that traditions are  
146 invented by applying fictitious continuity that is correlated to inaccurate historic customs. Hobsbawm argues  
147 that some of the most erroneous traditions are those based upon a largely fictitious history. Urry (2002) further  
148 explores this concept, developing the theory that such fictitious histories lead to the development of a "tourist  
149 gaze." He illustrates how the gaze is constructed, reinforced, and most importantly, who authorizes it. In order  
150 to understand this concept, it is crucial to understand "what the consequences are for the places which are its  
151 object and how it interrelates with a variety of other social practices" ??Urry 2002, 1). Douglas G. ??earce  
152 (2001) relates this concept to how tourism in Belize is legitimated in the context of destroying a culture. For  
153 example, Belizean architects emphasize the creativity of the Maya to attract more tourists. Generally however,  
154 architects, archaeologists and other Belizeans position the Maya in a malicious light, giving the impression that  
155 they were/are dangerous, violent, sadistic people. This contributes to the legitimization of Mayan eradication.  
156 Architects portray them as primitive and warlike people by placing emphasis on their primitive lifestyle and wild  
157 habitat in the open jungle.

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

164 Along with the general public, architects from the Architecture and Project Management partnership program  
165 led by Alex and Sylvia Laasner in 2004, tend to disagree about the misrepresentation of Mayan culture. ??earce  
166 (2001) shows how the general public believes that top architects (i.e. the Lassners), leaders, and guides in Belize  
167 give the most accurate information and portray the Maya in the most historically precise way as possible. a)

## 5 A) ARCHEOLOGISTS

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

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

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

## 184 4 IV.

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

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

## 193 5 a) Archeologists

194 After a Mayan named Francisco Cruz Reyes discovered bones wrapped around an unbroken painted vessel while  
195 digging a well to water his cancuco, a milpa on "a patch of fertile soil, left by Maya settlements" ??Sutherland  
196 1998, 13), a group of archaeologists from Texas came to explore the site. They located other sites near the area  
197 and despite the presence of Mayan communities like Chac Balaam, at the Bacalar Chico Canal, which is a natural  
198 border line for Mexico and Belize, they began archeological digs. They returned for a more elaborate dig the  
199 next year, this time bringing students and volunteers to work the two sites. They used Reyes who built them  
200 a cooking cottage and cleared two acres of land for fifteen tents to house the volunteers who included teachers,  
201 lawyers, filmmakers, and an advertising executive (Sutherland 1998). However, Reyes was not compensated for  
202 all that he had done for the archeologists and when disaster struck on the last week of the dig due to one of the  
203 smoke-fires (built to reduce clouds of mosquitoes) flaring up, Reyes lost his canuco. This included fruit trees and  
204 vegetables, his livelihood.

205 More recently, archeologists have become even more intrepid and not only exploit the Maya during their  
206 archeological digs, but further belittle them through distorting their discoveries. This was demonstrated at the  
207 investigated site of Cahal Pech, above San Ignacio in the Cayo District, which rose to preeminence in the Preclassic  
208 Period (Dobson 1973). This means it rose to supremacy before surrendering its dominion to the neighboring  
209 people of Buena Vista and later, during the Classic Period, to that of Xunantunich (Sutherland 1998). However,  
210 pictures skewed by Belizean archaeologists portray them as warring people to resemble the fiefdoms of Medieval  
211 Europe. Atkinson, et al (2005) emphasizes how significant the 'aesthetically pleasing' "visual possession" is to  
212 the average tourist. Some of the earliest archeological sites, like Cuello in Orange Walk and even the more recent  
213 discovery of glyphs at Caracol in the Cayo District, portray small territorial victories as militant wars to take  
214 control over Tikal. Sites by Belizean archaeologists and pictures of the sites, such as at Xunantunich, have been  
215 made out to depict fiefdoms, estates or domains of a feudal lord, which ostensibly did not occur in Belize (Dobson  
216 1973).

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

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

226 Artifacts from David Pendergast's series of excavations from 1964 to 1971 were carried out under the support  
227 of the Royal Ontario Museum, which broke antiquity laws by stealing Mayan artifacts, an embezzlement for the

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228 museum to display Mayan artifacts. To improve the situation, Dr. Pendergast and Graham of the Royal Ontario  
229 Museum organized rescue archaeology to "rescue" and solve some of the archeological puzzles caused by looters.  
230 Although damage made by looters is irrevocable, Dr. Pundergast and Graham attempted to understand the  
231 relationship of archeological site B-5 to the rest of the structures (Rapp 2002).

## 232 6 b) Architects

233 Although Belizean architects emphasize the creativity of the Maya to attract more tourists, generally, architects  
234 portray the Maya in a malicious light, giving the impression that they were/are dangerous, violent, sadistic  
235 people. This contributes to the legitimization of Mayan eradication. Architects portray them as primitive and  
236 warlike people by placing emphasis on their primitive lifestyle and wild habitat in the open jungle. In 1961, after  
237 a hurricane hit Belize City, the former capital of Belize, architects focused on developing the current capital,  
238 Belmopan, which is renowned in Belize as a great architectural achievement (personal interview with Sequi,  
239 the co-owner and manager of In the Jungle Restaurant in the Mayan community of Nuuk Chel, on January 9,  
240 2008). The natural destruction of Belize City gave nationalists an opportunity to further condemn the Maya for  
241 not only contributing to the damage, but also to compare the new construction of Belmopan to the 'primitive'  
242 living conditions the Maya had resided in. The national movement also perceived the Maya as 'war-like' savages  
243 and developed Belmopan in a way that would exclude the Maya in order to radically transform the settlement  
244 pattern. c) Mayan Community i. Customs "Maya traditional art is embroidery skills" (personal interview with  
245 Sequi, January 9, 2008). Characteristics of the Maya use to include the way they dressed. "The women wore  
246 embroidered dresses and blouses which were always hand sewn." However, with the new changes of tourism in  
247 the community, the women use sewing machines and modified traditional Mayan clothing. "The Ketchi Maya  
248 wore square, checkered skirts and the Maya in the Yucatan wore colorful, embroidered dresses, now the women  
249 wear any long dresses."

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

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

273 Atkinson et al describes how "'pseudo-events' shows and exhibits [are] created especially for the tourist"  
274 (2005,37). As a result, "this sets up romanticstyle tourism or travel as a quest for the authentic" (2005,37).

275 Mayan communities are told that folkloric forms of art that romanticize their culture will sell best to tourists.  
276 This also pervades Mayan performing arts such as drama and dance. Urry (2002, 12) describes the tourist  
277 psychology behind this, explaining that "tourists almost delight in the inauthenticity of the normal tourist  
278 experience." In some communities, the Maya have come to love Punta rock music, a cultural expression created  
279 by the Garifuna during the national culture movement in the 1980s (personal interview with Sequi, January 8,  
280 2008). This is just one example of how a culture can evolve and challenge the 'authentic'.

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

286 The Maya traditionally listened to two types of music; 'pleasure music' and 'group music'. "We listen to  
287 pleasure music to celebrate marriages and get together. Group music is not just for pleasure but goes back to  
288 when the Spaniards came" (personal interview with Sequi, January 9, 2008). As a result, the Maya would not  
289 only listen to group music but also make their own music and instruments such as the marimba, guitar, violin,

## 7 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

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290 flute, and drum as a form of empowerment. "The young generation has different perceptions of the culture and  
291 different priorities like wanting a better house." I asked Sequi, "So what do the elders do to enforce their culture?"  
292 He replied, "We don't want the young ones to forget our dialect, music, or culture so we continue the traditions"  
293 using the example of embracing their traditions by making corn tortillas and always thanking the corn god.

294 ii. Marriage Mayan men and women traditionally start their conjugal lives before age eighteen. Their culture  
295 also held the tradition of holding arranged marriages. However, not only do the Maya choose who they marry, but  
296 they also tend to intermarry (leading to the new race known as Mestizo). In addition, they start their conjugal  
297 life a few years later and do not always keep long-lasting unions. Although there are strict requirements for  
298 divorce, partners of broken marriages often live with others in common-law unions. "Separation is more common  
299 than ever before even though people choose who they want to marry" (personal interview with Sequi on January  
300 8, 2008). The more traditional Maya perceive this rate of separation as "disrespect" to the culture and marriage  
301 system.

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

304 iii. Language Not only are most Maya bilingual now (fluent in English) but their own Mayan language has  
305 become diluted through Spanish words being fit into the language. As a result, the Mayan dialect has evolved  
306 into a completely new language. "I am glad that the original Mayan language was documented because it is  
307 an important part of our history," Sequi said. iv. Positive Change-Mayan Community "We are using symbols  
308 and music to stronger represent us and to keep our traditions going." Some of these symbols include the jaguar  
309 which represents power, the turtle (symbolizing love) and the rooster. Music and symbols become intertwined in  
310 Mayan culture. For example, the harp is used to attract chickens and roosters. "The environment also continues  
311 to play a major role in our culture so it is important to spread these symbols and practice our music." (personal  
312 interview with Sequi on January 8, 2008).

313 V.

## 314 7 Concluding Thoughts

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

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

339 As a result, the Maya can promote ethnic diversity through developing stronger relationships with the  
340 government and various organizations. Therefore, the state and all sectors of society will have to be receptive  
341 and understanding towards Mayan territory as a "space in nature that is under the cultural influence or control,"  
342 (Grefa 1996, 72) through tourism in order for their rights to become the law of the state. Indigenous  
343 people must represent themselves in public policy for their rights to be protected. In conclusion, through  
344 self-determined development, incorporating cultural customs and economic traditions in self-subsistent activities  
345 and management, the Maya could improve their living conditions and exercise their own way of life as a free  
346 people. <sup>1</sup>

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## 7 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

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