

Education in Ixim Ulew (Guatemala): Maya Indigenous Knowledge and Building New Citizens

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Original research conducted in Ixim Ulew with 17 Indigenous Maya educators illustrates that the current education system promotes a citizenship that endeavours to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the mainstream. The need to discuss the role of Maya Indigenous knowledge in education for countering a homogenizing citizenship is relevant on the heels of the end of a 36-year civil war in 1996. This event catalyzed normative advances that recognize cultural difference today and, yet, the divide between rights discourse and domination is a fine line. This article discusses the implications of centering Maya Indigenous knowledge in nation building and education, such as the concept Jun Winaq, for promoting a model inclusive of Indigenous citizenship.

Introduction

Ixim Ulew is part of a larger Mayab' (Maya territory) that extends from the southern Mexican states of Chiapas and Yucatan to Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador. Presently, 21 different sociolinguistic Maya groups represent over 60 percent of Guatemala's population (Tzian, 1994, p. 82). The other Indigenous groups represented are the Xinka and Afro-descendant Garífuna. Also, there are the *mestizos* or mixed-blood peoples, and the *ladinos*, who are a minority but control most of the political, economic, and social power (see Tzian, 1994). Although the term *ladino* refers to Spanish descendants and *mestizo* refers to mixed-blood people who, in addition to having Spanish blood, also have Indigenous blood, both terms erase Indigenous identity and are used interchangeably today¹. They also are a reflection of the state-controlled regulation of identity that promotes a nationalist agenda but denies the validity of struggles for land and territory and collective rights.

Unlike Indigenous peoples in former colonies such as Canada and the United States, Indigenous peoples in Guatemala have never negotiated with the state on issues pertaining to land and territories. Not having any treaties to rely on has made discussing issues with government difficult. However, Maya Indigenous groups have historically made alliances with the political left in an effort to participate in social transformation, albeit with very little gains regarding specific Indigenous issues such as political participation, self-determination, repatriation of stolen objects, and land claims (Adams, 1995; Smith, 1990).

In spite of a lack of treaties, Indigenous peoples in Ixim Ulew have worked towards advancing self-determination within the context of the Peace Accords signed in 1996 and in the context of the International Labour Organization's *Convention No. 169*, a legally binding agreement that deals with the rights of Indigenous and tribal peoples. This historical event marked the beginning of the participation of Indigenous peoples in political processes aimed at democratizing the country and bringing peace. However, this contested situation calls for further consideration of the extent to which issues of exclusion have been resolved, and how the application of Maya Indigenous knowledge (MIK) may be of benefit.

The purpose of this paper is to foreground the need to shift the current colonial citizenship paradigm towards an Indigenous one, and the important implications for education. I propose that this model moves beyond the material confines of an individual rights discourse, given that Indigenous understandings of relationships encompass our spiritual connection and collective responsibilities to the universe. For this purpose, when I discuss Indigenous rights, I also allude to the responsibilities that arise from claiming those rights. In addition, I refer to Jaimes-Guerrero's conceptualization of land rights, which "need to be understood in a context of culture and territoriality ... [which] differs from what we traditionally understand as proprietary rights" (Jaimes-Guerrero, 1997, p. 101).

I address concerns about citizenship in three sections. In the first section, I provide the background leading to Maya Indigenous demands for self-determination, and discuss the implications for education. Here, I illustrate the views of participants in my PhD study, specifically those focused on the implications of MIK for Guatemalan education. From this, I argue in favour of advancing an Indigenous position on citizenship based on Indigenous knowledge. In the second section, I illustrate how the Maya concept of *Jun Winaq* provides the basis for this new kind of citizenship, as it encapsulates a rich and relevant proposition for creating new citizens that transcend geo-political boundaries and ascriptions to leftist or right-wing political affiliations that often conflict with land and territory struggles. This examination leads to the final section, where I conclude with some thoughts regarding the role of Maya Indigenous Knowledge (MIK) in education as a means to foster Indigenous self-determination. I focus on current debates regarding the development of Maya content within existing educational paradigms and discuss the possibilities for Maya education within communities. The debates highlight some relevant issues that bring to light the current contested terrain of Indigenous identity and Indigeneity, and the need to better understand how these relate to "strategic essentialisms" (Spivak, 1990) in self-determination and the goals for Indigenous sovereignty.

Data and Methodology

I write as a Maya scholar of mixed blood ancestry who, following from the choices my family made in order to survive colonization, am compelled to honour my Indigenous relations by meeting my responsibilities to further the goals of privileging, protecting (Battiste, 2000a, 2000b), and passing down MIK to future generations (Brant-Castellano, 2000; Dei, 2000). I engage in these actions in order to advance a political project that seeks to critically question and collectively face the challenges preventing the self-determination of Indigenous Maya peoples.

This article is based on the stories shared with me during my PhD fieldwork, undertaken from 2006 to 2008. Following the path of other scholars who refer to their distinct research methodologies based on their tribal and Indigenous knowledge (Kovach, 2009, Smith, 1999; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Wilson, 2003, 2008), I base my work on Maya Indigenous research grounded on the *Ceiba*, or Tree of Life² (Jiménez Estrada, 2005). Primary data comes from informal, semi-structured interviews (conversations) and a focus group (talking circle) with 17 Maya professionals who live and work in Ixim Ulew's capital city. I also base my analysis on Critical Indigenous frameworks (Bishop, 1998, 2003; Smith 1999, 2005) and from the assumption that Indigenous knowledges are dynamic, heterogeneous, and diverse (Dei, 2008; Nakata, 2002; Martin, 2011).

Synopsis of Maya Organizing until the Peace Accords (1996)

Guatemala gained independence from Spain in 1821 in an effort to better control its resources and national wealth. The foundations of the new Guatemalan nation state replicated the Spanish government system and social organization model, thus marginalizing Indigenous peoples and knowledge. During the first years of the liberal government, the goal to absorb *difference* in order to create and conceptualize a homogenous, non-Indigenous nation prompted institutionalized efforts to rid the country of Indigenous peoples. First, this annihilation began as physical extermination, either through direct massacres or through the enslavement of Indigenous Maya peoples. For other Maya, their exploited labour provided the physical infrastructure necessary for the modernization project to go forward. Second, hand in hand with colonialism was the Catholic Church's intent to *protect* Indigenous peoples from themselves through eradicating their Indigenous ways through processes of Christianization. Christianization has worked to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the national culture. The colonial period, similar to the post-independence period, saw the integration of Indigenous peoples through their participation as labour or as "products" to be used and sold (Rickemberg, 1987). During the transitional period from independence to the liberal regime (1821-1831), the creation of a modern nation-state took, as its basis, the Spanish model of governance, language, and territorial divisions. Historical documents describe how the new independent nation benefited the dominant *ladino* elite, and mixed-bloods or *mestizos*.

The situation aforementioned describes a pathway of social progress, premised on assimilation and acculturation. This history of Western domination continues to act as a barrier to promoting Indigenous knowledge, whether in fostering a new model for citizenship or of a Maya Indigenous education system (MIE) that is independent of the state, which I discuss later in the article. Virginia Ajxup describes the need to revitalize Maya Indigenous knowledge (MIK) in connection to the pursuit of self-determination:

After 10 years [of armed conflict] we returned to our communities but with new eyes, another gaze, to live and be with the Elders, the wise people. Today, I can attest that this is the best university. This is the great university. It is here where we find culture. [And] our political agendas move forward because of the knowledge acquired through these processes. (Virginia Ajxup, personal communication, July 1, 2007)

As a Maya indigenous leader, educator, and spiritual guide, Ajxup's story of resistance to colonization centres the importance of speaking to the Elders, remembering MIK, and the important connections this has for achieving any measure of self-determination. Self-determination implies the application of the knowledge that has allowed Maya peoples to adapt to different contexts, while always retaining their core values, traditional practices, and a relationship to the land and to the knowledge it embodies. Her story illustrates aspects that differentiate Maya culture from non-Indigenous culture, reminding us of Blood scholar Leroy Little Bear's (2000) concept of a *collision of worldviews*, and how, despite a clash of cultures, history did not completely erase Indigenous life ways that contemporary Maya continue to pursue on a daily basis. In particular, Maya political struggles for land and territory continue to demonstrate concepts and values inherent to maintaining relationships, respect, diversity, balance, and reciprocity—aspects of complementarity and features central to becoming *Jun Winaq* (a whole being). These values also demonstrate Maya peoples' resilience and resistance to assimilation.

Maya Resistance to Amputation of Indigenous Identity

Western education has traditionally represented a space that has marginalized Indigenous identity and knowledge. Today, it also represents a potential site of transformation (Battiste, 1998; Mihesuah, 2004; Smith, 1999, 2005). However, it is important to remember Black scholar Audrey Lorde's proposition that the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house (1981). Lorde argues that we have to understand how the system "may allow us temporarily to beat [it] at [its] own game, but [it] will never enable us to bring about genuine change" (Lorde, 1984, p. 113). Chickasaw educator Eber Hampton (1995) contends that an education for assimilation, as compared to one that merely acknowledges difference, merits the question: Is reform a viable way to attain self-determination? What else is needed?

During my research, participants talked about various ways in which contemporary Maya have resisted historical amputation of their Indigenous

identity (Fanon, 1967). These stories highlight the conflict that arises between those who work for change within the existing governing and social structures, and those who work towards creating autonomous structures based on MIK. It is argued, on the one hand, that working within existing structures limits the application of Indigenous epistemological foundations in education (Hampton, 1995). Some, on the other hand, argue for reform leading to a Maya Indigenous education system (MIE) within the current Eurocentric educational system, including a valuing of MIK on its own merit (del Valle Escalante, 2009). The participants seemed to agree that a focus on MIK has the potential to deconstruct essentialized notions of Indigenous identity(ies), history, and politics. For example, in the latter case, for students who have been taught that *authentic* Indigenous peoples have vanished and that today's Indigenous peoples are an aberration compared to those of the grandiose Maya empire, MIE can potentially reverse this view by creating critical spaces in which students can grapple with their own identity and relation to Guatemala's non-Indigenous elite. Teaching from the concept of becoming whole, or *Jun Winaq*, permits the questioning of socially accepted and limited parameters of *authenticity*. Therefore, through MIE, the issue of identity politics and liberal multiculturalism can be addressed in ways that go beyond merely claiming aspects of a culture that are fashionable and offer little more than superficial recognition of difference (del Valle Escalante, 2009, p. 110).

In Ixim Ulew, claiming an Indigenous identity is taking a political stance (Fischer & Brown, 1996) that engages the realities that Indigenous peoples face in relation to the encroachment and appropriation of Indigenous lands and territories, and the decimation of languages, cultures, and spiritual practices (Alfred, 2011; Cannon, 2011; Grande, 2004; Jaimes-Guerrero, 1997; Lawrence, 2003). In this manner, MIK addresses the power differential that exists between, and within, Maya society. This critical Indigenous discursive framework (Dei, 2011) emphasizes a decolonizing imperative that allows for a recovery of that complement that has been lost: the elements in MIK that have allowed Maya culture to thrive for centuries, and that are important for resolving the pressing social and political issues facing all peoples in the 21st century. As I will explain in the next section, creating a new citizenship based upon MIK is an important part of honouring a Maya past and building a new future.

Building a Nation of Peoples

... We have to question whether we want to educate citizens as dictated by the current structures because this [position] only benefits the powerful [elite] sector of the country What is the position of the State and what is the type of citizenship that we are building as Indigenous Peoples? [And within this structure] what Maya elements would be included? What are the characteristics that we want in this citizen? (María Alicia Telón, personal communication, March 2007).

María Alicia Telón questions the relationship between Maya Indigenous knowledge, education, nation building, and citizenship. As already suggested, MIE has certain characteristics and goals that make it different from

the mainstream Western education imparted in schools today. The main differences centre on understandings of our relationship to one another and to the land (values inherent to MIK). These understandings also come via blood knowledge (Holmes, 2000), through ceremony, and as revealed knowledge or dreams (Brant-Castellano, 2000). These factors are crucial in understanding the vision—albeit heterogeneous—of the elements necessary to unify as a different nation. Borrowing from and expanding upon Oren Lyons' concept of a Nation of Peoples, this proposes a new direction for the role of MIE: to contribute to creating a new kind of citizenry that can support the unification of Maya peoples while enabling us to arrive at a place where we can negotiate with the state on a nation to nation basis. Notwithstanding this, there are myriad implications surrounding a change in teaching about nation building and citizenship, particularly given the role that education has played in the construction and upholding of the *ladino* nation. Based on current debates regarding the kind of nation Maya peoples envision, and stemming from proposals based upon the stories collected here, the time for a new citizenship that centers on the Creator has come.

*Maya Indigenous Knowledge and Education: The Jun Winaq
as a Citizenship Model*

Maya Indigenous epistemology acknowledges the centrality of wholeness. In Maya K'iche' language, this understanding is embodied in the concept of *Jun Winaq*. As Maya people, we understand that in order to become *Jun Winaq*, we must accept that living beings, as well as social organizing, are multifaceted. In turn, we must also accept that some of these parts require balance if they are to complement one another. This balance ensures that all parts are valued in the same manner, even if they are not valued at the same time. Following this, I address the application of *Jun Winaq* in building a new kind of citizenship based on the revitalization of MIK.

The K'iche' word *jun*, which translates as *one*, and *winaq*, which translates as *being* or *person*, alludes to the process of becoming a complete being or of completing a cycle. Becoming whole also applies to the construction of societies and the social relations that guide them. *Jun Winaq* is inextricably tied to processes of constructing national identities based not on race or gender relations, but on spiritual understandings that surpass alliances to material constructs (Camey Huz et al., 2006). In other words, given the current complicities to nationalist discourses founded upon colonial myths of democracy (Grande, 2004; Smith, 2007, 2008) at the exclusion of Indigenous forms of organizing and self-determination, the *Jun Winaq* is useful for critically analyzing the disadvantaged positions in which most Indigenous members of society find themselves. It is both a political and spiritual undertaking that assumes that the nation and its citizens are accountable, not only to human beings and the material world, but also to the universe in all of its complexity.

Thus, I argue for MIE as a viable way to educate and foster a new kind of Indigenous citizenship. In this, I borrow from Scott Lyons (2000, p. 454) who states that, "it has always been from an understanding of themselves as a people that Indian groups have constructed themselves as a nation". Lyons' distinction of a people as a "group of human beings united together by history, language, culture ... a community joined in union for a common purpose: the survival and flourishing of ... itself" (Lyons, 2000, as cited in Grande, 2004, p. 169) is central in this proposition. Lyons' assertions are useful for illustrating the characteristics of this new citizenship model for Maya peoples. To do this, I focus on four central values inherent in Maya philosophy: balance, respect, healing and reconstruction. Centring Creator in all that one does and applying these values within the *Jun Winaq* makes the process inherently cyclical, thereby emanating from the centre to all of our relations: the individual in relation to her or his community; the community in relation to the nation of peoples; and the nation of peoples in relation to the universe.

Citizenship Based on Respect

Deborah Yashar (2005) has argued that Indigenous movements today in Latin America challenge existing homogenous models of citizenship and statehood that often exclude Indigenous peoples. She explains how the demands of these well-organized Indigenous groups include equality within the context of a democracy, civil rights, greater involvement in the sociopolitical arena, and a revamping of existing socioeconomic systems. Under Scott Lyons' (2000) citizenship model of a "Nation of Peoples", "equality" implies balance and respect for all forms of life and all nations living in Ixim Ulew. A participant in this study corroborates this:

I believe that we cannot speak of only one nation [of peoples] but rather, [we have to speak] of many. [We have to speak of] different nations and understanding this does not mean we are rebelling and want independence [from the nation-state] but rather, we are alluding to [the concept of] multiculturalism. [This is] because if we have our own way of seeing the world, of being in the world, of speaking, then we have the right to [follow it]. This does not mean that we do not value other nations. (José Yac Noj, personal communication, May 12, 2007)

Multiculturalism, for Yac Noj, is grounded in knowing where one comes from, and in strengthening individuals in their knowledge of their own culture, language, and relationship to the universe. He also posits that, without this, one cannot enter into intercultural relations, which for him means, "an equal, balanced and respectful exchange of knowledge and social relations" (José Yac Noj, personal communication, December 2010). This distinction is important, since much of the discourse in political documents, and including the stated goals for education reform, seek to enhance and promote interculturalism (MINEDUC, 2005, 2006). However, it is clear from my PhD interviews that the current education system continues to focus on the assimilation of Indigenous peoples into the dominant culture. The following quote summarizes this issue:

It is the same assimilation [strategy], except that it is more subtle now. It is not about taking away [one's culture] by force. It is slow, and when you least realize it, it is too late. (José Yac Noj, personal communication, May 24, 2007)

This participant alludes to another issue that prevents the institution of MIE: co-optation. The state is subtle in how it incorporates Indigenous peoples into its systems. The respondents are aware that co-optation is a major issue among Indigenous professionals working within the state. Related to this, Pedro Us suggests that perhaps the reason Indigenous Maya peoples are not advancing is because they are thrown into a system in which they are not capable of functioning:

I believe that one skill we are lacking is our ability to engage in political work [within the system]. Most of us do not have the training or the skills to engage in these issues. (Pedro Us, personal communication, January 16, 2008)

Indigenous peoples' token participation (meant to fulfill equity quotas) in a system that does not allow for the engagement of different worldviews and languages is part of a strategy used by government to create the appearance that they value and actually listen to Indigenous peoples. It is clear from the participants' observations that the inclusion of Indigenous peoples in state posts does not preclude a change in policy or real benefits to the Indigenous Maya. Participating in this system has resulted in merely co-opting Indigenous Maya peoples into a system that does not grant them the right of self-determination (Bastos & Camús, 2003a, 2003b; Cojtí Cuxil, 2009; Montejo, 2005). There is a need to create a new kind of citizenship, one that ensures that Indigenous peoples' involvement in the state is structured in ways that are closely aligned with community aspirations. However, as Bastos (2010) explains, the autonomy issue is clearly absent from national debates regarding strategies to advance Indigenous rights. To achieve this dialogue, the inception of a new way of engaging politics is proposed. During our conversation in 2007, Daniel Domingo stated that, although the Peace Accords do not contain all the demands made by Indigenous peoples of Guatemala, they do open a door to addressing these. However, in order for these demands to be met, Indigenous peoples need to participate in the political processes inside the system:

As Indigenous peoples, we do not have the authority to execute the Peace Accords The state is responsible for implementing them and we are not [participating from] within the state. Therefore, we are always going to demand their fulfillment and [the state] will always tell us that they will even as they are finding ways to prevent them from becoming a reality. Therefore, I believe this is where I see the historical importance of what we today know as the Winaq [a political party]. (Daniel Domingo López, personal communication, June 29, 2007)

Daniel Domingo López's position regarding the lack of Indigenous politicians inside the government structure highlights the need for Indigenous political parties like Winaq. The creation of Winaq resulted from certain Mayan intellectuals' desire to have a party that did not abide by left or right party politics. It deals with the state from what the members envision

as a Maya Indigenous position that promotes self-determination and collective rights (see Morales López & Bá Tiul, 2009). Working within the state, as well as looking for spaces to work outside of it, is difficult given that such an inside/outside position recognizes that the path towards becoming sovereign is still far away. However, I believe that Winaq's proposals offer the best hope at this time to carry out MIE that, while within the state system, allows for pursuing Mayan goals. We have yet to see how this proposal would perform.

The differences between the two proposals are that one posits the establishment of an education system outside of the state, while the other, as presented in the following quote from Pedro Us, advocates for working within the structure of the state but only if there is a guarantee that Indigenous peoples will occupy enough seats in Congress to ensure that their proposals are heard and implemented. This guarantee is in stark contrast with the present reality in which there are only two Indigenous people in all of Congress. For education, representation is necessary to be able to implement Indigenous proposals. But there are also other factors that prevent reform from becoming a reality:

First, we have the gap between the two visions [of education. And second,] we have the power game within the system that is also another factor. There are also other factors [such as] the lack of agreement in opinion between Indigenous peoples and organizations [involved with Indigenous education]. What I am referring to is that here at the Ministry, we had two Maya people working, and on the outside there were other Maya people and Indigenous organizations, and we did not agree on many issues. Some just judged our work without understanding that it was not up to us two to approve anything. What I mean is that, we would have liked for the Minister to approve more issues affecting Indigenous bilingual education and Indigenous education ... and although we advanced on some issues, [we didn't achieve] what we and the people expected and so they would judge us and say that we did not do our jobs as Indigenous peoples. Therefore, the lack of cohesion between and within the Maya Movement is a challenge we need to confront and resolve. (Pedro Us, personal communication, January 14, 2007)

The resistance by the state and non-Indigenous peoples compounds the challenge of education reform that promotes even a few of the characteristics of Indigenous education. The understandable multiplicity of demands Indigenous peoples are making in regard to education, and uncertainty about the path to take to fulfill these demands, are only two issues that prevent the development and implementation of Maya Indigenous education in Guatemala. The quote from Pedro Us also raises another issue: how the political process now and in the past has damaged the spirits of Maya peoples. There is a need to continue to heal from the experience of colonialism, for students or as workers, and education has an important role to play in this. MIE and its focus on spirituality has the potential to address not only the effects of assimilation, but also the denigration of the people who are working at various levels of government and yet are perceived to be not fulfilling their responsibilities when proposals for Maya education do not go through.

New Citizenship to Focus on Healing

Assimilation by force or by subtle means, such as the denigration of Indigeneity within the national discourse of citizenship, creates harm for Indigenous peoples. Healing broken spirits from colonialism, genocide, and exclusion means strengthening the identity and self-esteem of Indigenous students, particularly the Maya but also students of other Indigenous groups. It is evident that MIE could help counter the trauma of many generations who were devalued for being Maya, and for speaking a Maya language:

I am telling you, it was very difficult for me because my first language is Maya K'iche' and I practically did not speak Spanish. I could understand it more or less, but when I came here [to Guatemala City] with my father and brothers, I experienced discrimination against me at school. I remember that my schoolmates would call me *maxquil* ... this is the name they would call me ... it is like calling you "trash", or the worst a person can be, and all of this only because I am [an] Indigenous [woman]. (Lajuj Toj, personal communication, September 14, 2007)

The racial slurs and stereotypes against Indigenous peoples are part of everyday life, as Lajuj Toj shared in her story. I witnessed and heard stories about Indigenous women being more likely than men to wear the *uk'* (traditional skirt) and *p'ot* (traditional, woven, and embroidered blouse), and thus being targeted with increased levels of public scorn, part of the burden they bear for identifying themselves as Indigenous. My grandmother's choice to live in the city and not wear the traditional dress also highlights this situation. I experienced racial abuse when I chose to put on the dress my grandmother left behind. Though I do not speak the language and have been away from the country since I was 11 years old, when I went out wearing traditional clothes, I was called *María* (the name they use for Indigenous women) by non-Indigenous people (or people who deny their Indigenous roots) on the buses or on the street. Even my own family, whether living in the city or in rural areas, scolded me for wearing traditional clothing, calling me *indita*. This is a pejorative name directed at Indigenous women, the patronizing overtones meant to belittle us. Irma Alicia Velásquez Nimatuj (2004) discusses the complex issues concerning those who wear traditional dress and those who do not, and calls the wearing of traditional dress an important identity marker as well as a sign of resistance. In Spivak's (1990) terms, this is referred to as strategic essentialism, a way to distinguish the Maya from non-Maya.

As Lajuj Toj suggests, Indigenous Maya women face racism daily. I can attest that this racialized and gendered way of treating Indigenous women is sanctioned and normalized, and at the core of Guatemalan society. My own maternal family, who still live in very remote areas of the country, live by the saying, *better to be poor than Indigenous*. Of course, there are many complex historical and social relations that make the claiming of an identity a slippery slope, and some people have chosen to adapt to Westernized, *mes-tizo* ways of being in order to *save* future generations from being mistreated.

MIE has an important role to play in providing the tools with which to strengthen the identities of Indigenous peoples in Guatemala. It also has the potential to create critical thinkers who are aware of how colonial history and government policies aimed at “improving the race”³ of the country have effectively robbed the Indigenous majority of their identity. This is not to say that there are not communities and peoples that have not fought for and still hold onto their identity as Indigenous. However, the aim to build citizens who belong to a homogenous nation-state needs to be deconstructed. One way to begin to do this is by making MIE a reality:

I believe it is important to broaden and strengthen the concepts; we need to engage in respectful and equal relations between women and men according to their biological, spiritual, and energetic traits not only in theory but also in practice so that the political system in Guatemala changes in so far as recognizing the rights of Indigenous peoples and of the Maya in particular Therefore, an important aspect of your research is that it points to the need to make the current education system truly multicultural where there will truly be a Maya education for the Maya peoples. And this does not mean there will not be intercultural exchanges, but it means that it must be based on our own knowledge. This will allow us to understand and reclaim the philosophical base of our Maya nation so that we can live it and make it real. (Daniel Domingo, Workshop, January 30, 2008)

From what participants have said, it is possible to infer that the proposal to build Indigenous nationhood within the nation state begins from the understanding that we are all interconnected, and that every human being has the right to live their identity and be entitled to respect.

Tensions and Possibilities of Creating a New Citizenship

Non-Indigenous analysts and allies of the Maya Movement have opened up spaces in which to discuss issues of citizenship and Indigeneity at an international level. However, while the arguments centre on a new model of citizenship, they fall short of addressing the epistemological standpoint of centring MIK as the conceptual framework in which to create this new form of citizenship. In this section, I outline how this new model can catalyze decolonization as part of fostering a new form of citizenship that transcends material and state boundaries.

For Maya peoples, the importance of Creator, or *Ajaw*, is particularly evident during ceremony. Ceremony, whether centred on Maya spirituality or a mixture of non-Maya and Maya beliefs, is an important aspect of life in Guatemala. A number of participants in this study believe in the importance of transforming educational practice, from a repetitive and memorizing ritual to a pedagogy that builds sensitized human beings with all our relations at the centre. Thus, it is the state that needs reform to include new understandings of Maya citizenship if Indigenous peoples are to fully and culturally participate in the building of a new nation:

The refounding of the state requires a refounding of the nation. But this needs the agreement of all four Nations of Peoples that make up this nation. (Pedro Us, personal communication, January 14, 2008)

Pedro Us provides an insight into the factors required for reformulating the nation-state. First, he discusses the imperative for the state to rethink what *nation* means. He suggests that refounding Guatemala requires the state's recognition of all of the nations that comprise it and, accordingly, a restructuring of the education system. In this hypothetical situation, he makes clear that Maya and other Indigenous peoples in Guatemala will need to learn how to effectively engage in a system that would recognize the differences that each group represents. He shares his view:

I think that one of the skills we [Indigenous groups] lack [is how] to engage in political work. We do not have the skills or the abilities required to perform in these areas. Therefore, there are many factors [to think about] Therefore, we can say that we have an opportunity with the children and the new generations. So, we have to strengthen our bilingual education programs right now so that children start to value their culture and identities, and to have access to quality education that will allow them to live according to their culture, in their own language. And that will then extend into any other social context. (Pedro Us, personal communication, January 14, 2008)

In this excerpt, Pedro Us voices the issues—mainly, the issue of how to implement an education that will foster cultural and linguistic competency in both the dominant language and in Indigenous languages— that are prevalent in societies where the colonizer's language and systems of governance prevail, with the purpose of providing the tools necessary for cultural survival within multiple contexts. This approach to reforming education to fit the needs and responsibilities of a multicultural or pluricultural state does seem to offer hope for the future.

Pedro Us's insights offer a basis for discussing how decolonization does not necessarily mean separation and isolation from mainstream and whitestream education and institutions. But it does involve a different way of taking power. For example, there have been many theorists and political scientists who "exculpate all social actors and finally named the state as inherently racist and exclusionary" (Bastos & Camús, 2003a, 2003b; Bastos & Cumes, 2007; Casaús Arzú, 1992; Cojtí Cuxil, 1998, 2005, 2009; Cumes, 2004; Smith, 1990; Velásquez Nimatuj, 2004). This act of calling the state racist is a first step and becomes an important element in holding it accountable and making it responsible for changing the power structures.

Following Tewa educator Gregory Cajete (2010), Pedro Us's proposition reflects the way in which Indigenous educators attempt to address "how Indigenous cultural studies can deepen Indigenous political possibilities, by establishing pedagogical practices that inform and support Indigenous people in the social, political, economic and spiritual struggles" (Cajete, 2010, p. 128). Cultural practices such as ceremony comprise foundational elements of Indigenous Maya cosmology and epistemology. Thus, it must also become a site where struggle will continue to take place. I want to repeat that the spiritual dimension of Indigenous Maya knowledge cannot be divorced from education. I also want to emphasize that centring

spirituality is a political act. Political transformation from an Indigenous standpoint implicates a spiritual process necessary to identify the path that must be taken to achieve it:

Ceremony was a way to get to know our reality ... our Grandmothers and Grandfathers got to know our cosmos through ceremony in order to see the knowledge embedded there. [Therefore] it is not a matter of faith but of cultivating knowledge through the practice of ceremony [in order] to reach our potential to see and use our energy for the benefit of all peoples. (Pedro Us, personal communication, January 16, 2008)

MIK, the centreing of spiritual practices and ceremony, are important means of knowledge acquisition and meaning making (Cajete, 2010; Brant-Castellano, 2000; Dei, 2000; Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000). Building a nation of Indigenous peoples requires strengthening the spirits of those who, for years, have been told that they are inferior and subhuman, and that their connection to the Creator is witchcraft (Battiste, 2000a, 2000b; Dei, 2000, 2011; Dei, Hall, & Rosenberg, 2000; Shahjahan, 2005; Smith, 1999; Wane, 2006). Education for a strong Maya nation needs to strengthen people's spirits, which have been broken by repressive colonial institutions. This provides hope for future generations (Grande, 2004) but also means that everyone must take up the challenge of undoing the damage done by the devaluation of Indigenous students who retain Maya language and culture.

Final Thoughts: Decolonizing Education and Building New Citizens

The complexities and relationships between nation building, citizenship, democracy, and development tie back to the issue of knowledge production: what knowledge and voices are respected, valued, and acted upon. The education currently offered in Guatemala, as a space for imparting, replicating, and producing knowledge, needs to be challenged. The curriculum needs to change to focus on creating critical thinkers who will not only recite and repeat *facts* but who will also be engaged in the decolonizing project of deconstructing colonialism and reconstructing new possibilities, based on the historical failures of the nation state. This is crucial work for academics, researchers, and practitioners if students are to be taught in ways that go beyond the current material discourses, to propose alternative frameworks to the largely Eurocentric male ones that are couched in non-Indigenous voices and visions. Maya epistemological, ontological, and axiological premises as a basis for national laws, policies, projects, and programs, along with MIK centred within education, will encourage Indigenous peoples to become true allies in the nation-building process, meaning they would not have to adhere to or begin from positions that are foreign to their own. This is important given that significant valid knowledge and wisdom remains and is still being lived in Indigenous communities. It is also crucial to recognize the shortcomings of implementing reforms and changes that propose to benefit the majority of Indigenous peoples. One has only to examine the extent to which the government con-

sults with Indigenous communities regarding resource exploration and extraction to see the lack of regard for Indigenous voices and opinions.

The connection between identity and building a new model of citizenship, as the participants in this study have demonstrated, cannot be separated. Identity building, as part of the new citizenship project that centres on strengthening Indigenous identity and knowledge, is not something new. Peoples in the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as in Bolivia, Panama, Colombia, and Peru, have made strides in this area, albeit with some challenges⁴. In this article, I have discussed a few of the characteristics of citizenship that Indigenous Maya peoples in Guatemala are pursuing. For the most part, the focus is on creating a citizenship based on spirituality, or placing Creator and the universe at the centre, in order to uphold and respect all relations. Indigenous Maya peoples, like other Indigenous nations in the world, have suffered from being denied the inherent right to control their lives, and they have endured the demonization of spiritual and cultural practices, particularly the use of Indigenous languages, ceremony, and forms of organization. Western knowledge and values have been imposed on countless generations. This has, in turn, has caused a significant breakdown in individual self-esteem, which has repercussions for the breakdown of the identity of some, if not all, communities. This situation illustrates the significance of the cultural and political conditions created by an enduring colonial legacy and by a lack of recognition and political autonomy. The continued strength and sense of worth passed down from Elders and other families that have resisted integration and assimilation into a nation that refuses to take care of its citizens, let alone those who are different and who uphold a collective and specific rights discourse, are at the core of MIE. The voices of the individuals here are examples of what can guide future generations in accepting and respecting difference and truly living in harmony. In addressing questions of educational relevance, quality, and access in the context of collective and cultural demands, one moves away from conservative claims that Indigenous peoples will improve their quality of life when individual members of Indigenous groups improve their material circumstances. This position reflects the posture of most people in Guatemala who believe the neoliberal and racist view that hard work will always result in an improvement in one's socioeconomic status. This view ignores the institutional processes and philosophical foundations that continue to marginalize Indigenous and other groups.

The refusal to accept current models of citizenship, based on a false version of democracy that has allegedly come about since the signing of the Peace Accords in 1996, demonstrates clearly that, regardless of the political ideology of the government at the time, many Indigenous peoples remain unwilling to assimilate into a model of citizenship that foregrounds an individual rights discourse and leaves out Indigenous knowledge and

practices. The exclusion of Indigenous peoples in the nation-building process, other than in co-opted ways without real power to make changes and, thus, ability to advance self-determination, leaves Indigenous peoples vulnerable. Centreing Indigenous spirituality to advance Indigenous Maya peoples' political goals and Indigenous identity requires that education build upon existing ancestral knowledge. It also requires the promotion of critical thinking, self-reflection, and avenues to challenge ways of being that contradict Indigenous philosophies.

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Notes

¹ For further illustration of the inception of the term *mestizo*, see Arturo Taracena Arriola (1997), *Invencción criolla, sueño ladino, pesadilla Indígena: los Altos de Guatemala, de región a estado*, 1740-1850.

² The *Ceiba* is a place-based research methodology that seeks to apply the relational values inherent in Maya culture to the organization and presentation of the voices that produce the knowledge in my research. The *Ceiba* is also a teaching tool through which the Maya transmit lessons, knowledge, and values to new generations.

³ For a historical review and discussion of the structure and development of Guatemala under the liberal reform government of Justo Rufino Barrios and the relationship to land, national identity building, and the whitening of the nation, see McCreery (1976).

⁴ The Canadian government's introduction of Bill C-45 exemplifies the constant violation of Indigenous rights through its proposed amendments to the Indian Act, which are designed to give the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs access over First Nations' lands and provides the government with the authority to determine the surrender of any portion of any First Nation territory at any given time. It contravenes the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous peoples regarding the "free, prior and informed consent" of all Indigenous peoples exercising their right of self-determination.

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