Influences of the Pan-Maya Movement:

Education and Literacy Development of the Maya in Guatemala, 1940-2000

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Honours Program in History

University of British Columbia, Okanagan

(2010)

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Abstract

Guatemala over the past sixty years has experienced three dramatic political and cultural transformations: the military coup of 1954, the guerilla rebellion and the horrific counterinsurgency in the late 1970s and 1980s, and the recent incorporation of the indigenous issues within the national government political arena. The Maya people have been most affected by these changes as the struggle for indigenous rights and self-determination have been marked by violence and racial backlash by both Guatemalan society and the government. Mayan intellectuals have fought back, with the help of anthropologists and sociolinguists through cultural means to create a new identity in the form of a pan-Mayan movement.

Through an examination of how education and literacy development has impacted rural Mayan communities and the response of those communities to revitalization of Mayan cultural traditions and languages, this thesis addresses the question of what is indigeneity. *Influences of the Pan-Maya Movement: Education and Literacy Development* contends that the development of educational programs has enabled Mayan intellectuals to create a sense of what it is to be indigenous in the contemporary Guatemalan state.
Acknowledgements

First, thanks to Dr. Jessica Stites-Mor. Mentor, advisor and friend, Jessica has been an integral part of this project by coaxing me to finish it. Her patience is greatly appreciated in her examination of my work and in providing advice on creating a better project than I had imagined. I also extend a thank you to Dr. Ruth Frost for her editing and insights of the project at the last minute. Further, I would like to thank Ashley Black for her editing of the final copy. Lastly, many thanks to family and friends for their support throughout this project.
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**Acronyms**

Due to the large number of acronyms used throughout this thesis, the following list will be a handy reference list to the most common acronyms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ALMG</td>
<td>Academia de las Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala)</td>
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<tr>
<td>COMACH</td>
<td>Ch’orti’ region the Ch’orti’ Maya Regional Coordination</td>
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<tr>
<td>COPMAGUA</td>
<td>Co-ordination of Organizations of the Mayan People of Guatemala</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DIGEBI</td>
<td>General Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICUM</td>
<td>Maya Unity and Consensus Tribunal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IIN</td>
<td>National Indigenist Institute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NBE</td>
<td>National Bilingual Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLFM</td>
<td>Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquin’s</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRONEBI</td>
<td>Programa Nacional de Educación Bilingue (Program of National Bilingual Education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIL</td>
<td>Summer Institute of Linguistics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SIMAC</td>
<td>Sistema Integral De Mejoramiento y Adecuación Curricular (National System for the Improvement of Human Resources and Educational Curriculum)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URNG</td>
<td>Unidad Revolucionario Nacional Guatemalteca</td>
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<tr>
<td>USAID</td>
<td>United States Agency for International Development</td>
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Chapter One

Mayan Cultural Identity in Context

Education of both literacy and a group’s history is an element of cultural identity vital to the continuation and cohesion of its community, particularly when another group has suppressed their rights for a long period, such as the Spanish against the Maya. The growth of the pan-Maya movement, a cultural and political movement that aims to unify the different Maya groups of Guatemala in an attempt to gain indigenous self-autonomy, has provided the Maya people with a source of hope for future incorporation of their values and ways of life into the Guatemalan state. Descending from an ancient culture and including at least twenty-two different languages, the Maya today recognize the importance of incorporating their culture and educating themselves about their history. They serve as an example for indigenous movements around the world. Both non-Mayan Guatemalans and Maya can learn from their shared past through a bilingual education program. Thus the development of the General Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education (DIGEBI) by the Guatemalan government has been important for the growth of the pan-Maya movement over the past seventy years, because, as pan-Mayan leaders argue, the acknowledgement of their culture will enable Mayans to progress as a separate entity within the Guatemalan state.

The history of the Mayan people in Central America is comprised of both a rich culture, and complex political structures. However, the Mayan civilization nearly collapsed over six hundred years ago due to internal strife. With the arrival of the Spanish five hundred years ago, Mayan cultural practices have had to fight for survival amongst the non-Mayan and Spanish expansionist cultures. The various regional Mayan language groups that spread throughout the
Central American Isthmus reveal the complexity of Mayan culture. During the colonial period in the region that is now Guatemala, distinct Mayan groups with various languages and traditions spread, sharing a macro political structure and similar communal structures. Until the late twentieth-century, Spanish invaders and their descendents continuously repressed indigenous movements through various means, such as military massacres and government regulations, that benefited elite creoles.

The notion of a pan-Maya nationalist unity developed in the mid-twentieth century when, during of the worst periods of state repression, Mayan leaders and scholars sought to fight back through intellectual cultural education to retain Mayan identity.

**Methods and Thesis Statement**

The development of cultural education and native language literacy for the Maya that began in the 1940s enabled K’iche’ Mayans to develop the notion of a pan-Maya nationalist unity that brought about the question of indigeneity and what it meant to be Mayan in the contemporary Guatemalan state. By doing a comparison between the education and bilingual literacy development of the K’iche’ and the Ch’orti’ Maya, I will argue that the term Maya, as used today, is largely derived from the interactions of anthropologists and pan-Maya leaders and intellectuals. To understand the historical development of the pan-Maya movement, it is important to reflect on the historical background from the arrival of the Spanish in 1492 to the beginning of the civil war, which lasted from 1960 to 1996. This paper will be broken down into four sections. The first section will outline how the Maya culture suffered under repressive forms of first the Spanish government and the Catholic Church and then subsequent governments post-independence. The second section will examine relevant literature and how the different eras of

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scholars examined the historical process and what each deemed important. The third section will deal with the development of education for the Maya and how it influenced the origins of the pan-Maya movement. It will also consider the involvement of the K’iche’ Maya and how their status as the largest Maya group was vital for the development of the movement. The last section will examine the shortcomings of the pan-Maya movement by looking at the education development of the Ch’orti’ and how their status as a minority group in the Chiquimula region has been impacted by the Ladinization process, a term used to describe the assimilation of non-Spanish people into Spanish culture.²

This paper analyzes interdisciplinary scholarly research, such as sociolinguistic data and ethnographic accounts, to better understand the way that the pan-Mayan movement has been developed as an historical narrative of indigenous identity formation. The primary documents used, “Linguistic Differentiation and Mayan language Revitalization in Guatemala” by Rusty Barrett and The Status of Primary Education in the El Quiche in Relation to Other Departments served by DIGEBI and to Guatemala as a Whole: Improving educational quality (IEQ) project by Ray Chesterfield and Fernando Rubio, will reflect how anthropological research and sociolinguistic analysis have contributed to the pan-Maya movement’s educational development and how scholars are implicated in the growth of the pan-Maya movement and its contributions to the construction of cultural heritage within indigenous communities. The sociolinguistic data generated by ethnographic researchers in the 1990s enables a historical analysis of how the educational reforms and the creation of bilingual schools by both the pan-Maya movement and the Guatemalan government impacted rural Maya communities. By examining ethnographic accounts taken from researchers who studied the Maya throughout the 1990s, it will be shown

how their research influenced the articulation of the pan-Maya movement and its policy decisions.

**Background**

The culture of the Maya stems from over five thousand years of existence in what is now Central America. Although the Maya were spread over a large area ranging from the Yucatan peninsula to the Isthmus of Panama, the focus of this paper is the region of Guatemala. Guatemala is home to over twenty-two different groups of Maya ethnicity and a few other Indigenous groups. The Maya are considered by archeologists to have experienced four different time periods before the conquest by the Spanish. First was the pre-classic era, which was characterized by the development of the Mayan calendar and establishment of the basis of Maya culture, which lasted until about 200 A.D. At this point, the classic period began, when the Maya civilization reached its highest peak in terms of urbanization, cultural production of art, sophisticated political structures, deepened religious philosophies and involvement, and the construction of architectural temples for symbolic and religious means. The collapse of the Maya came about just after 800 A.D.; its causes are still debated, and a general decline lasted until around the eleventh century, at which point the Maya had become decentralized completely. From roughly 1000 A.D. to about the 16th century, the Mayans went through another developmental stage, this time revolving around the creation of individual city-states. These city-states, particularly in the north, then deteriorated due to internal competition prior to the arrival of the Spanish. In the southern regions of the Mayan Diaspora, states such as the

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5 Ibid, 5.
6 Ibid, 6.
K’iche’ were able to develop important texts such as the *Popol Vuh* (an important Mayan text that describes their cultural traditions). Thus, Maya culture was still unfolding at the time of the arrival of the Spanish conquistadors.

The persecution of Mayan people and its cultural identity stems from the arrival of the Spanish and the Catholic Church when Christopher Columbus arrived in the Americas in 1492. Mayans suffered considerable loses when the Spanish set foot on the shores of the Americas, as Europeans brought various forms of diseases which turned into epidemics that wiped out large portions of communities. Throughout the time period of the Spanish Republic in Guatemala, there existed both a core and peripheries of Spanish rule. The state divided the Maya and the Spanish colonists into two systems that enabled the Maya on the periphery to keep their cultural practices and political structures. Those Maya villages closer to the core of Spanish rule were more heavily affected by colonial rule and were subjected to a tribute system. This system continued in various forms until the independence period with the introduction of coffee in the 1850s. Maya cultural traditions and identity throughout this period also underwent transitions as the encroachment of Spanish culture threatened the communal structure that characterized Mayan society.

On the eve of independence in the Central American Isthmus, the Bourbon reforms initiated by the Spanish crown in the eighteenth-century set in motion changes to both the political and economic system of the Kingdom, directly affecting the Maya. The expansion of the industrial revolution prompted a response by the Spanish Bourbon monarchy to shift towards an

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7 Carmack, 9.
agro-export economy in the colonial areas of the empire. Thus, the colonial government pursued a policy of expansion of capitalist growth, which increased production of agricultural products and gave easier access to commercial organizations for acquiring land. The major change was that the land utilization led to an encroachment of Maya territory all over Guatemala, and furthermore put pressure on the Maya communities to produce more export commodities instead of subsistence agricultural products. This modernization of Guatemala would forever change the interaction of Maya communities with state authorities. Due to an encroachment of Ladino elites, and the formation of ayutamientos (municipal governments), control of Maya communal lands divided community members on how it should be utilized. However, the biggest changes would occur after independence was achieved in 1821 and two different political groups formed, the Liberals and the Conservatives.

Revolts or rebellions by various Mayan communities, who felt that their cultural traditions were being threatened, challenged the Spanish colonialists continuously from the 1500s until the present day. Several groups which had larger communities were able to withstand Spanish suppression and then ladino persecution throughout the 1800s. However, to understand the issue of the Maya’s ability to maintain some form of autonomy through geographical isolation from the Creole-controlled state, it is necessary to examine the Liberal and Conservative agendas of the nineteenth-century into the twentieth-century and its affect on rural Mayan communities. Maya under the new Liberal government were theoretically in a favourable position as new reforms, the System of Penal Law, initiated by the Liberal government granted

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10 Ladino: a term that came to encompass the mestizos of mulatto and Maya descent. Montejo, 3.
11 Woodward Jr, 54.
them equality before the law.\textsuperscript{12} However, this measure was not widely respected and only exposed the Maya to more exploitation, as they neither had the resources nor education to take advantage of new opportunities.\textsuperscript{13} The economic stranglehold of the Liberal reforms, which exploited Mayan land holdings, began to push the Maya to resist the state’s authorities. These rural uprisings which began in 1837 would bring a period of turmoil. In 1938, this turmoil ushered in Rafael Carreras’ Conservative government, which would last for the next three decades.\textsuperscript{14} Historically, the Carreras government has been given credit for defending Maya interests. Carrera achieved this reputation through the creation of separate methods of governance over the Maya. The Maya under Carrera were able to maintain their cultural traditions to a certain extent; however their economic and political structures were slowly integrated into the national economy.\textsuperscript{15}

Carol A. Smith argues that divisions amongst the Ladinos and Maya did not occur during the Carrera era; rather it was the new Liberals that overtook the government from Carrera who found it possible to divide the Maya as a useful tool to achieve their political ascendancy. By the mid-nineteenth century, the growth of the ladino population had made it the second largest cultural group to the Maya. Current politicians argue that today the predominant population of Guatemala is of Ladino descent, and thus recognition of a separate Mayan self-determinism is unwarranted.\textsuperscript{16} It is important to understand this distinction, as later on it would be these groups that would become stratified through the Liberal policies under the Barrios government and subsequent dictatorships into the twentieth-century.

\textsuperscript{12} Woodward Jr60.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, 60.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid, 61.
\textsuperscript{16} This figure is debatable as some reports argue that the Maya make up 60\% of the population.
The new Liberal era between 1871 and 1944 would have a profound impact on Maya communities. Economic growth in the area of coffee plantations in countries like Costa Rica and El Salvador pushed Barrios to take advantage of such a valuable crop. The increase in coffee production brought more foreign investors who took over the coffee economy. The new economic reforms implemented by the Liberals also re-introduced a debt peonage system for labour under draconian labour laws.\(^{17}\) Although encroachment of Maya territory varied due to regional and preferred lands for coffee plantation, the rural Maya communities could barely resist in the long term. The initial land acquisition of the coffee plantation owners did not necessarily threaten Maya communities; however labour recruitment and eventual political and economic control would devastate the Maya community in certain areas, namely the south and areas of the lower highlands.\(^{18}\) Labourers were expected to learn Spanish so that productivity could be increased and the foremen discouraged use of the Maya language.\(^{19}\) This had a profound impact, as Maya communities were encouraged to learn Spanish to increase their economic opportunities. Prior to this the Maya had been isolated and resistant enough not to learn Spanish. Throughout the term of General Justo Rufino Barrios’ rule, from 1873 to 1885, and the subsequent regimes which followed, the Maya were subjected to harsh treatment in terms of forced labour for either coffee plantation owners or government-sponsored infrastructure projects, such as roads and railways. This fragmented the communal structures of rural Mayan communities as Maya people were taken from their communities to other parts of the country.\(^{20}\) At the end of Jorge Ubico’s reign of terror, from 1931 to 1944, rural Mayan communities and

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\(^{19}\) Ibid, 99.

\(^{20}\) Ibid
ladino peasants who did not own property or were unemployed were subjected to hard labour under Ubico’s vagrancy laws, a form of debt peonage, but with crueler terms and no pay. After the end of his reign, Guatemala would experience what some have described as the ten years of spring between 1944 and 1954.

The era of the “spring revolution” saw the abolition of the vagrancy laws,\(^\text{21}\) which had replaced the debt peonage system under Ubico; this was welcomed in many communities due to the harsh treatment that many Maya had endured throughout the reign of Ubico. Furthermore, the new constitutional measures, such as Municipal Decree No 226 passed in April 1946, provided more power and substantial autonomy to municipal governments, giving rural communities a more decisive role in national politics.\(^\text{22}\) The Maya predominated in numbers, but the Ladinos predominated in terms of land ownership and economic clout. They represented twelve percent of the population, but owned upwards of sixty-six percent of the land.\(^\text{23}\) The rest of the land was community land, whereby each member owned or grew on small plots for subsistence agriculture. Due to this unbalance, Jacobo Arbenz Guzman, who was president from 1951-54, initiated a series of agrarian land reforms to develop a capitalist rural economy during his tenure.\(^\text{24}\) Although this plan was carried out successfully through the help of the campesino (farm worker) and rural workers, it also exposed the groups to violent resistance from Ladinos who held large tracts of land\(^\text{25}\) and set the tone for the next few decades after Arbenz’s rule was over.

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\(^{21}\) Vagrancy Laws: a law implemented under the presidency of Jorge Ubico that declared that every Indian who was not the titled owner of a certain amount of agricultural land was a vagrant and was required to work a certain number of days a year on the fincas (farms), usually coffee farms. Adams, 141.


\(^{23}\) Handy, 169.

\(^{24}\) Ibid, 168.

\(^{25}\) Ibid, 170.
The methods by which the power structure changed during the reform period were one of the causes for the overthrow of Arbenz’s government by June of 1954. Due to Cold War politics, external and internal factors put pressure on the Arbenz government to refrain from implementing his agrarian reforms. Landowners, opposition politicians, and the United States, which through the United Fruit Company owned large tracts of land, were concerned with the agrarian reforms, which they deemed to be a communist threat. The military, under pressure from all three groups and its own leadership, overthrew Arbenz in a move that led to instability for the next four decades. Arbenz resigned on June 27, 1954, and the plight of the Maya and the rural Ladino peasant workers was cemented in terror, as they became heavily affected by the ongoing fighting between resistance groups and the military.26

Since the introduction of the Spanish, Mayan communities have been under considerable state repression. However, until the late 1800s, Mayas enjoyed some autonomy in regards to their cultural traditions, as Colonial and later Liberal and Conservative governments recognized the differences of the Maya. What should be noted, and will be discussed later in this essay, is that each community had a different experience in its development and in its interaction with subsequent rulers of the Spanish and then later national governments. However, before continuing on and discussing the period of 1954 to the present, an examination of the roots of Mayan nationalism in its present form must be discussed.

From 1954 onwards, Maya communities suffered a complete breakdown of their communal structure. The military rule, which characterized Guatemala after the coup, saw the development of death squads and a return to the liberal reforms that had characterized much of Guatemala during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Furthermore, conflict began to grow within the community structure itself as the re-introduction of the Catholic clergy

26 Handy, 170.
introduced a challenge to the hierarchal status of the Maya community. Arturo Arias provides an interesting insight into how the church and the introduction of fertilizer would change the communities’ economic, political, and cultural traditions and introduce another violent aspect to the Maya’s already impoverished position. These cooperatives introduced new economic resources, such as commercial production, and developed autonomous local entities that threatened the community’s hierarchy, through means such as political, social and religious activities based on western values. Between the 1960s and the 1970s, Maya communities would experience considerable change of agricultural practices and upheaval as the national government’s policies began to infringe upon communal structures.

Before examining two different groups (K’iche’ and Ch’orti’) and their development or under-development during the Civil War, 1960-1996, I will examine the historiographical debate in order to illustrate how scholarship has impacted the growth of the pan-Maya movement.

28 Arias, 233.  
29 Ibid
Chapter Two

Scholarship of the Pan-Maya Movement

Historians and anthropologists in their respective fields hold different conclusions on the origins of the pan-Mayan movement based on their various approaches and scholarly work. Major players within the movement are Demetrio Cojti Cuxil, Dr. Alfredo Tay Coycoy, Raxche’ (Demetrio Rodríguez Guaján), and Rigoberta Menchu, all of whom are of Mayan descent although from the western part of Guatemala. The most notable figure of the group is the late Adrián Inés Chávez, who is considered by anthropologists to be the father of the modern movement for his work on the K’iche’ alphabet and his translation of the Popul Voh into K’iche’. Historians who have examined Mayan history, and more particularly Mayan efforts for autonomy or political representation in Guatemalan politics, have approached the issues from several angles. Cultural historians have sought to understand how religion has affected Mayan communities and the Catholic Church’s efforts to help Mayan groups gain a political voice. Political and economic historians, such as Greg Grandin, have argued that Mayan nationalism originated around the late nineteenth century, when the K’iche’ took the initiative and leadership for Mayan autonomy within the Guatemalan state. Historians such as George W. Lovell, Jim Handy, and John M. Watanabe have argued that the geographic position of the Mayan communities has enabled them to keep their autonomy throughout the past five hundred years and that today the Mayan community is still the strongest source of Mayan nationalism.

cultural anthropologists such as Kay B. Warren, have devoted their studies to a reinterpretation of the historical material of Mayan history and have applied it to the pan-Mayan movement. Other scholars of Mayan descent, such as Demetrio Cojti Cuxil, have begun to question the outside literature on Mayan history as being influenced by western Eurocentric origins. Thus, Mayan people themselves are writing new histories on Mayan history, as they believe that the Ladino history of Guatemala is a false and westernized version that does not tell the real story.

Socio-cultural historians have examined the role of Ladinos within Mayan communities and how Ladinos tried to justify their actions towards Mayans while trying to assimilate them into the Ladino culture. Richard Adams’ short essay “Ethnic Images and Strategies in 1944,” examines the role of racial discrimination in ethnic politics during the beginning of the revolution in the 1940s. Adams constructs his essay through the use of newspaper editorials to present the racial expressions of Ladinos and how “racialist” ideology led to national policies in regards to Mayan people during the era of the Spring Revolution (1944 – 1954). He argues that the events of 1944 to 1954 were the springboard for Mayan national identity and that reforms initiated by the successive socialist governments (1944 - 1954) helped the Mayans regain a consciousness of who they were. Thus, Adams’ argument follows the concept that the pan-Mayan movement began in the mid twentieth-century. Other historians such as David McCreery claim that the basis for the pan-Maya movement began in the early twentieth-century, but agrees with Adams that it did not fully develop until the mid-twentieth century.

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5 See Page 9.
7 Ibid, 158.
The socio-economic history of rural Guatemala is best demonstrated by David McCreery’s “Debt Servitude in Rural Guatemala 1876 – 1936,” which uses workers’ testimonies as a predominant method to expose the conditions of rural indigenous Guatemalans. McCreery argues that the system implemented by the Guatemalan government forced thousands of Mayan Indians to work on plantations, while also forcing them to adhere to the strict work and living conditions of landowners who treated them like serfs. Debt servitude forced the Mayan people into debt with their employers, thus today there is reason for animosity amongst Mayans toward Ladino plantation owners. As noted below in Grandin’s work, K’iche’ Mayan leaders were able to band together to form a political movement that challenged the Ladino ‘debt servitude’ structure.

Richard Wilson’s book, *Maya Resurgence in Guatemala*, focuses on the socio-cultural development of the Protestant and Catholic churches’ influence in Mayan communities in the 1960s. Although historians have examined this process from the colonial period, the important era for this paper occurred during the 1960s through to recent years. Wilson contends that the evangelical Protestant church provided an alternative method for Mayan communities to voice their concerns over economic and cultural repression by the nation state. He contends that Mayan resurgence began with the help of the Catholic and Evangelical churches, whose priests and ministers practiced forms of liberation theology, which encouraged the creation of guerilla movements in areas such as Alta Verapaz. The Maya community in Alta Verapaz eventually suffered large blows from the military dictatorship during the civil war for support of guerilla

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9 Liberation Theology: a movement that began in Latin America in the 1950s - 1960s, primarily it acted as moral reaction to the poverty and injustice that occurred in the region. It used Catholic and Christian beliefs to critique regimes that failed to alleviate the poverty and helped the impoverished recognize their rights as citizens within their own countries.
Wilson approaches Mayan histories from a similar standpoint to that of the anthropologists, yet his conclusions are different. He concludes that the Catholic and Evangelical churches have been instrumental in Mayan cultural resurgence. The underlying argument that Wilson presents is congruent with other historians whose analysis argues that the community has been an important political and cultural part of the revitalization of Mayan nationalism.

Jim Handy’s work, “The Corporate Community, Campesino Organizations, and Agrarian Reform: 1950-1954,” argues that the historical development of the political structure of Guatemala’s communities was an important development for Mayan nationalism. Handy argues that the relationship between Mayan communities and Guatemalan national society has affected the development of the community and the role the community has played in “determining” national history. Handy states an alternative narration to that of Carol A. Smith and George Lovell, by suggesting that communities opened and closed to adapt to the political and economic sphere of the national society, which the national government used as an excuse for unprovoked attacks by the military. Handy’s approach from a political history perspective reveals that the dynamic instrument of the Mayan community enabled it to survive and resist the proletarianization of the state and that communal structure is a central part of the scholarship on Mayan communal structures.

12 Handy, 165.
the geographical position of Mayan communities in an attempt to argue the importance of the community in Mayan history. The geographic positions of Mayan communities in remote rural areas provided them distance from the Ladino cultural infringement and allowed them to keep their own cultural traditions while they adapted a form of political structure to enforce the communities’ importance.\[16\]

Greg Grandin argues in his books, *The Last Colonial Massacre: Latin America in the Cold War* and *Blood of Guatemala: A History of Race and Nation*, that Mayan nationalism historically developed alongside capitalism. Grandin approaches the historical record from a political and socioeconomic standpoint and uses the larger political background of Guatemala’s history to argue his point. Grandin emphasizes that the political and economic history of Guatemala’s capitalist development in the late nineteenth century was a basis for why Indigenous Mayan groups like the K’iche’ were seeking autonomy within the political and economic sphere in Guatemala.\[17\] Scholars of Mayan nationalism tend to examine the political structure of Guatemala and how it affected the Mayan communities and vice-versa.

John T. Way in his dissertation “The Mayan In the Mall: Culture, Development and Globalization in Guatemala 1920 – 2003” presents a subaltern view of the political and cultural development of Mayan people within Guatemala City and the effect that the development of the nation state has had on various groups and communities. Way uses a variety of sources for his work, including personal accounts of market vendors of Mayan descent and is influenced by Grandin’s scholarship. To argue his point, Way uses a comparison of the 1920s, 1940s, and the modern day to demonstrate how Guatemala has become “undeveloped”: “La Sexta avenue in

\[17\] Grandin, 133.
Guatemala City was formerly a teeming, wide open boulevard with expensive shops for the elite in the 1920s and now is a dismal area of vendors and hawkers with a nightlife of violence."18 Guatemala’s formerly wealthy areas have become desolate since the civil war, an indication of the real change brought on by the military governments that neglected social services to the poor.

Anthropologists in the past several decades, most notably Kay B. Warren, have conducted extensive studies of Mayan culture and the origins of the pan-Mayan movement from a cultural anthropological approach that focuses on the socio-cultural production of Maya history. These anthropologists argue that the movement began under Adrián Inés Chávez (a K’iche’ Mayan) who wrote out the first alphabet of the K’iche’ language and hence began what is known as the Mayan regeneration.19 Kay B. Warren’s works are among the most cited scholarship on Mayan cultural activism, and her analysis has provided great in-depth knowledge on the local level of Mayan communities. She argues that the goal of the Pan-Mayan movement is a two prong approach: 1) work for the conservation and resurrection of Mayan culture while 2) promoting governmental reform within the framework of the current Guatemalan constitution and international law.20 Her major argument perceives that Mayan nationalism is more of a modern development that has developed over the past few decades, beginning with Chávez. Her views are shared across the table with other anthropologists like Edward F. Fischer (Induced Culture Change as a Strategy for Socioeconomic Development: The Pan-Maya Movement in Guatemala), Brent E. Metz (Ch’orti Survival in Eastern Guatemala: Indigeneity in Transition), and R. McKenna Brown (The Mayan Language Loyalty Movement in Guatemala), to name a few. Brent E. Metz, who has done extensive fieldwork with the Ch’orti’ Mayans, is another

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19 Fischer, 57.
20 Warren, 7.
anthropologist whose recent studies of eastern Mayan groups has provided an analysis of how Mayans suffered under military dictatorships. He further argues that this was how the Ch’orti’ almost lost their culture through the violence.\(^{21}\) The production and control of Mayan history before and after European contact is a central component of the movement’s cultural promotion; therefore, Mayan people themselves have decided to rewrite the history of the past few centuries, including recent modern history.\(^{22}\) This set of anthropologists’ argument and approach towards Mayan nationalism provides a different angle on how to interpret the current situation of the field. Cultural anthropologists have concluded that the Mayan national movement developed from communal efforts to retain land from Ladino expropriation.

Thomas Benjamin, in his article “A Time of Reconquest: History, the Maya Revival, and the Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas,” argues that historians previously thought of the Indigenous groups of Central America as a cultural society without a history due to the lack of written transcripts in the modern period.\(^{23}\) Benjamin uses a combination of firsthand accounts and secondary sources that include both anthropological arguments and historical perspectives on the state of Mayan history. Benjamin bases his argument around Erica Wolf’s concept that Indigenous history did not disappear, but rather that the Indigenous people were not perceived as “participants in the same historical trajectory.”\(^{24}\) His approach yields an important point in the historiography of Guatemalan history, that around the world the histories of Indigenous peoples have been written by westernized academics from a Eurocentric cultural standpoint. His analysis


\(^{22}\) Ibid, 10.


\(^{24}\) Benjamin, 418.
concludes that the histories of the Mayan people have been incorrectly written by Eurocentric academics following the same argument of the cultural anthropologists.

Historians of Mayan nationalism have no solid agreement as to when the movement began. The historian scholars’ works that will be researched have strongly emphasized the Mayan communal structure as an integral part of the development of the pan-Mayan movement. While anthropologists have attributed the pan-Mayan movement to academic work done by Mayan scholars from outside Guatemala, there is no doubt that the movement is attracting more and more scholarship within the Maya community and across the globe. Although the different approaches of cultural, political and economic researchers have all yielded different conclusions regarding how the Mayan movement began, they agree that the pan-Maya movement has influenced Guatemala’s historical development since the nineteenth-century. The pan-Mayan movement began initially as a movement to keep Mayan communal structures together in the 1800s. However, conflict over land and political autonomy has been a continuing struggle for the Mayan people since the invasion of the Spanish over five centuries ago and the movement has evolved to become a combination of political and cultural struggle.

The aim of this thesis is to contribute a new perspective on the historical trajectory of the Maya culture and to illustrate how education is an important element in cultural identity formation. Furthermore, the thesis intends to discern what constitutes the reasons for a culture to revitalize its identity for both political autonomy and identity. By using interdisciplinary research, this thesis contends that historians who examine Maya history must examine ethnographic and sociolinguistic, and non-traditional sources for the field of history, in order to develop an historical narrative of this complex process.
Chapter Three

Education Development for the Maya in Guatemala

Since the mid-1980s, studies on Maya culture and its revitalization have exploded within the realm of anthropological and comparative literature scholarship. Few sources have provided a historical analysis of the pan-Mayan movement and how it has historically influenced the development of education for the Maya community. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the historical development of the linguistic and literary development of the Mayan people since the 1940s, focusing on the development of bilingualism\(^1\) in the form of government acts that were created in order to assimilate the Maya into the Ladino society. Furthermore, the chapter aims to connect the development of Mayan literary development to cultural revitalization in areas of Guatemala that have become predominantly Ladino. The K`iche’ Maya\(^2\) have become a focal point of the pan-Mayan movement, as both K`iche’ elites\(^3\) and intellectuals of this largest Mayan group have become increasingly influential in the movement’s development. K`iche’ Mayans currently number over one million, making them the most powerful Indigenous group in Guatemala. Before examining the development of the current K`iche’ Mayan group, it is important to understand their historical importance in Guatemala before the arrival of the Spanish.

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\(^{1}\) Bilingualism: A policy or system, which promotes the use of two languages among a community or population. Oxford Dictionary Online, s.v. “Bilingualism,” http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/50022041?single=1&query_type=word&queryword=bilingualism&first=1&max_to_show=10 (accessed March 26, 2010).

\(^{2}\) K`iche’ or Quiché is a term in fact that specifies a certain geographic area in this context it means “forest” or literally many trees. M. Paul Lewis, “Real Men Don’t Speak Quiché: Quiché Ethnicity, K‘iche Ethnic Movement, K`iche’ Nationalism,” Language Problems & Language Planning 17, no. 1(1993): 44.

\(^{3}\) K`iche’ Elites: The ruling class of the Maya group, those who hold wealth and traditional roles as leaders of their respective Maya group.
Pre-Conquest to Pan-Mayanism

Prior to the conquest of the Spanish in Central America, over twenty-five Mayan groups roamed from the Yucatan peninsula to the southern reaches of Honduras. Within Guatemala itself, over twenty-two groups held on to separate territories; two of the largest groups, the K’iche’ and the Kaqchikel, were traditional enemies who fought to take control of their own territories and to expand their influence over other groups, such as the Ch’orti’. Pedro de Alvarado, the Spanish conquistador of the Mayan, recognized the dominance of the K’iche’ Mayans and used this to his advantage by employing their traditional enemies the Kaqchikel against them to wipe out both groups. Although this tactic worked in the period of colonial rule, this idea of competing factions would wither under the leadership of the pan-Maya movement in the twentieth century. This happened for several reasons, as prominent indigenous leaders saw the value in a united front against the Guatemalan state and their Ladinization process and appealed to the historical similarities between the groups. The languages of both the K’iche’ and the Kaqchikel both stem from the mother tongue of K’ichee’, thus providing similarities between them.4 However, groups such as the Ch’orti’, one of the older Mayan groups whose importance to the Maya stems from their development of the Maya calendar and architectural designs, has a different origin: their language stems from the Ch’ol branch of Maya languages.5

Focusing on the K’iche’ and the development of the literary revival within the pan-Mayan movement, this chapter will examine how Maya activists acted under assimilation policies of the Guatemalan government. Anthropologists cite Adrián Inéz Chávez as the father of the current Mayan activist movement; his work on the K’iche’ alphabet in the 1940s, and the

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5 Ibid, 100.
translation of the *Popol Vuh* in the 1950s are seen as the pillars for the movement.\(^6\) Maya activists over the next several decades had to operate discreetly, and although the government began to concede some concessions by the 1970s, it still wanted to follow a policy of assimilation rather than recognize the differences between the Maya. Chávez’s influence extended across political boundaries as well, as various grassroots agencies advocating for Maya rights sprung up in the 1970s in the western highlands. In 1972, K’iche’ professionals organized a political party, Xel-hu’. This is the K’iche’ name for Quetzaltenango, Guatemala’s second largest city, whose majority population is of K’iche’ descent. By 1976, their success culminated in the election of their candidate for the position of Mayor in San Juan Ostuncalco.\(^7\) Despite this early success, Maya activist groups would have to go underground by late 1970s until the late 1980s due to the extreme violence of the military and paramilitary groups against indigenous people and groups.\(^8\)

**Government Programs**

Throughout the period from the mid-1940s to mid-1980s, Guatemala’s government continued its assimilation program with the Mayan people, instituting educational programs in rural communities to integrate Mayan children into the Ladino society. By the 1940s, Guatemala’s governance of the Mayans increased in the form of institutional dominance in rural communities that were accessible by road. Throughout the period from 1944 to 1954, Guatemala experienced what some call the “revolutionary” period, a brief interlude between dictatorships and military regimes. Government leaders, borrowing ideas from America’s New Deal and

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\(^7\) Fischer, 87.

\(^8\) Ibid
socialist integrationist policies, established a national education system.\textsuperscript{9} This program aimed at increasing the literacy rate among rural populations.\textsuperscript{10} The literacy program installed by the Guatemalan government sought to implement a model that followed a bilingual education system to incorporate rural Mayans better into modern society and the Guatemalan state.\textsuperscript{11} This program followed the same ideas of the \textit{Castellanización}, a program which aimed to Latinize the Maya population, of the previous governments. However, the program was set up for increased education, as opposed to its predecessor, which aimed at only teaching informal Spanish for physical labour uses.\textsuperscript{12} In 1945, the Guatemalan government established the National Indigenist Institute (IIN) to address the “Indian problem,” a racist term, used to characterize the belief that the Maya were a hindrance to Guatemala becoming a modernized state.\textsuperscript{13}

Beginning in 1949, the IIN organized Guatemala’s first Congress of Linguists to establish a universal Mayan language alphabet to avoid the confusion and irregularities that could have developed otherwise with the unknown number of Mayan languages.\textsuperscript{14} The Mayan alphabet that was created included similar or identical sounds found in the Spanish language, thus a continuation of \textit{Castellanización} was unavoidable.\textsuperscript{15} One more program that would have significant impact on the Mayan language taught in school was the creation of the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) in 1952, consolidating the work of Protestant ministers who had moved to rural communities to study Maya linguistics in Guatemala.\textsuperscript{16}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{10} Richards & Richards, 196.
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Ibid
  \item \textsuperscript{12} Ibid
  \item \textsuperscript{13} Ibid
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Ibid
  \item \textsuperscript{16} Richards & Richards, 197.
\end{itemize}
became an advisor to the IIN and published large quantities of Mayan primers that included folktale narratives and even excerpts from the New Testament of the Bible.\textsuperscript{17} The racial assimilation program provided the Guatemalan government with a legal and educational framework to incorporate and Latinize the Mayan population. This program became an inspiration and provided education to future Mayan activists. After the ascension to power by Castillo Armas in 1954, the program was shut down until the 1960s, which saw the beginning of the Civil War and further aggressive acts by the government to assimilate the Mayans into the Ladino culture.\textsuperscript{18} Until recent years, the Guatemalan government justified its integration policies by claiming rural Mayans hindered national economic development.\textsuperscript{19}

By 1965, integration of the Mayans into Guatemala’s modernization program became the focal point of government legislation. Under Guatemala’s 1965 Constitution, the government declared Spanish to be the official language of Guatemala, shutting out at least 22 other indigenous languages (both Mayan and non-Mayan).\textsuperscript{20} Furthermore, the new constitution directed the state to play an integral role in fomenting the economic development of the indigenous groups to further integrate them into the ‘national culture’.\textsuperscript{21} The Bilingual Castellanización Program and the Education Law enacted in 1965 were designed to ease the transition from the mother tongue to Spanish.\textsuperscript{22} This law allowed Mayan languages to be used as a conduit to teach Mayan peoples about health issues, Spanish, and civic matters.\textsuperscript{23} The education system implemented a Mayan-language alphabet that was similar in sound and writing to Spanish. This was chosen on the basis of the 1962 alphabet created by IIN with help of the

\textsuperscript{17} Richards & Richards, 197.
\textsuperscript{19} Richards & Richards, 197.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 196.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid, 197.
\textsuperscript{22} Helmberger, 71.
\textsuperscript{23} Richards & Richards, 197.
This law opened the door for the use of Mayan languages in the school curriculum. An unintended consequence was that this law also provided the window for Mayan language and culture to revitalize and to be incorporated into education of Mayan children in a formal educational setting.

Although the government institutionalized this education system for rural communities, the reality was that many parents could not afford to send their children away to school due to the migratory patterns of their work. In order to survive, Mayan parents had become reliant on seasonal work that shifted to various areas around Guatemala, especially in the highlands, thus making it hard for Mayan children to attend school. However, teachers of the bilingual schools were undertrained and provided poor education to those who were able to attend. At the height of the program in 1982, it is estimated that it incorporated over 1,200 bilingual promoters and 57,000 children attended the bilingual schools. Thus, what can be taken from the historical development of formal education in Guatemala was that it aimed to assimilate the Mayan population, but it did not account for the Mayan revitalization through the education of future Mayan activists. Important Mayan leaders such as Adrián Inéz Chávez, along with both Kaqchikel and K’iche’ elites, encouraged young Mayan scholars to attend school and helped develop the framework for the post-civil war development of Mayan activism and education. Major roles for Mayan activism in the 1970s also stemmed from young Mayan intellectuals who had taken advantage of access to both national and international academic study. These young

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24 Richards & Richards, 197.
25 Helmberger, 73.
26 Ibid
27 Ibid, 74.
28 Richards & Richards, 198.
29 Grandin, 226.
leaders demanded emphasis on linguistic and cultural rights of the Mayas, thus their work could be seen as the origins of the pan-Mayan movement that sprung up in the late 1980s.

**Civil War and its Consequences on Education for Rural Guatemala Mayans**

Events between 1976 and 1986 changed how Guatemala would interact with its indigenous inhabitants, primarily the Mayans. The earthquake of 1976 had a profound effect on the Mayan rural communities, as thousands of Mayans migrated to the larger cities of Guatemala City and Quetzaltenango. This increase in urbanization of Mayans also created a demographic shift within Guatemala as illiteracy dominated in the countryside and educated Mayans sought urban lives. Additional worrisome developments began to take place in 1978 as counter-insurgency operations by government and paramilitary groups began their violent campaign, eventually resulting in the massacre of tens of thousands between 1978 and 1984. These counter-insurgency operations attacked Mayan villages which were deemed communist threats, especially in areas where Maya-inspired activism had begun to develop.\(^{31}\) The implications of this violence led to thousands of Mayans escaping to Mexico and the mushrooming of shantytowns outside of Guatemala City, where survival strategies included adopting non-Mayan clothing and traditions as camouflage.\(^{32}\) Despite the persecution of Maya communities, which reached its peak between 1983-1985, the Guatemalan government led by General Rios Montt and then General Mejia Victores created the political opportunity for Mayan cultural expression, political power and indigenous languages to be used within the educational sector.\(^{33}\) As a former evangelical minister, Rios Montt was advised by the SIL to continue the recently implemented National Bilingual Education (NBE) project launched in 1980.\(^{34}\) Funded by United States

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\(^{31}\) Carmack, 369.
\(^{32}\) Ibid, 370.
\(^{33}\) Richards & Richards, 198.
\(^{34}\) Ibid,199.
Agency for International Development (USAID) as a means to increase literacy in the rural areas of Guatemala, the NBE was a vital program for the development of Mayan people within Guatemala.\textsuperscript{35} However, the project suffered severe setbacks as counter-insurgency troops assassinated sympathetic teachers and advocates of Mayan languages. Internal and external factors eventually pressured the military to ease off its hold on political power. The upper and middle class pressed the military to hold elections in 1985, which resulted in the installation of a civilian president, Vinicio Cerezo, who led a campaign to achieve a temporary cease-fire with the guerilla movement, Unidad Revolucionario Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) and a reduction in the role of military in national affairs.\textsuperscript{36} Further pressure on the military came from the United States Congress, which cut off US funding for the Guatemalan military, by 1984.\textsuperscript{37} Thus, international and domestic pressure and sanctions generated a democratic discourse that saw Guatemala draft a new constitution in 1985 that included recognition of multicultural rights and the pluralistic nature of Guatemalan society.\textsuperscript{38}

**Beginning of Recognition of Mayan Identity**

By 1985, infrastructure that would enable Maya participation within the education system was implemented under the program of *Programa Nacional de Educación Bilingue* (*PRONEBI*).\textsuperscript{39} This program integrated both Spanish and Ki-che speaking personnel to develop a transitional program that was similar to its predecessors the SIL and IIN, but the training of young Mayan educators and linguists resulted in a growth of awareness of the value and viability

\textsuperscript{35} Helmberger, 74.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid, 238.
\textsuperscript{38} Richards & Richards, 200.
\textsuperscript{39} Helmberger, 74.
of Mayan languages.\textsuperscript{40} By the end of 1993, over 1,000 bilingual schools were operating, where Spanish and eight Mayan languages were used for instruction.\textsuperscript{41} Despite the success of the development of Mayan schools, incipient groups of Mayan intellectuals believed that PRONEBI by the late 1990s had become a colonialist instrument of the Guatemalan state.\textsuperscript{42} Raxche’ (Demetrio Rodríguez Guaján), a prominent Kaqchikel Mayan, stated that cultural rights were not just restricted to language, but that other traditions of Mayan culture had to be incorporated into the educational program, such as traditional trade, the practice of traditional medicine, and other cultural and social traditions of Mayan culture.\textsuperscript{43}

From the introduction of coffee plantations in the mid-nineteenth century, Mayans have dominated the rural work force. Due to increasing factors of abject poverty and restrictions on the Maya’s ability to advance in the modern economy, Mayan parents preferred that their children learn Spanish in school in order to escape poverty.\textsuperscript{44} The result of the parents’ preference for Spanish as opposed to their local Mayan languages resulted in disagreements between Mayan educators and the families as to what language should be used in the school.\textsuperscript{45} The pan-Maya movement developed due to its aims to do away with the discrimination associated with the Ladinization process led by the government. However, throughout the civil war, especially between 1978 and 1983, the guerilla war was fought more for the political and economic marginalization of the peasantry rather than to combat ethnic cultural discrimination.\textsuperscript{46} A slow transition developed after the end of the major fighting; included were key developments in legislation by the Guatemalan government, which allowed for partial recognition of the

\textsuperscript{40} M. Paul Lewis, 46.
\textsuperscript{41} Helmbberger, 75.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid
\textsuperscript{44} Heckt, 327.
\textsuperscript{45} Ibid
\textsuperscript{46} Ibid, 331.
different Mayan languages through programs such as PRONEBI. PRONEBI was a major catalyst for the development of future Mayan literacy programs that included important government acts and recognition such as the legislation of a Unified Mayan Language Alphabet (1987), the professionalization of 808 Bilingual Promoters as instructors in PRONEBI sponsored schools, and the establishment of the Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala (ALMG), the declaration of the Specific Rights of Maya Peoples, and a new Education Law in 1991.47

One of the first major successes of the current pan-Maya movement was the establishment of the ALMG in 1986.48 In its first act, the ALMG proposed to create an alphabet that could represent all Mayan languages.49 The creation of a single alphabet that held only Maya symbols was a major indicator that the goal of the movement was to separate the alphabet as a distinctly Maya entity.50 In June of 1987, a three-day seminar was held that included representation of over 28 different institutions involved in Mayan languages and linguistics, with eighty percent of the participants Mayan.51 The official alphabet chosen was a modified version of the Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquin’s (PLFM), which had sought to eliminate the sound similarities of Spanish.52 Although the government officially recognized the Unified Alphabet in November of 1987, there were discrepancies between Mayan groups over representations of graphics and use due to the major differences between Mayan groups and communities themselves. The K’iche’ vowel system, which had been at the heart of this argument due to its wide reach as the majority language group amongst the Maya in Guatemala, dominated the structure of the alphabet. By early to mid-1989, after the official implementation

47 Richards & Richards, 203.
48 Lewis, 48.
49 Ibid
50 Ibid
51 Richards & Richards, 203.
52 Ibid, 204.
of the new alphabet, the ALMG had an exposition of over 200 materials that had been published by 14 different institutions.\textsuperscript{53} This massive release was an indication of the magnitude that the Mayan movement would have over the next decade in terms of inspiration and importance of moving forward for Mayan communities, especially in literacy.

The pan-Maya movement by the mid-1990s had begun to see its efforts bear fruit with the signing of agreements that included the peace accords and the recognition of Mayan rights by the Guatemalan government. In addition, the movement saw the appointment of the first Maya politician and intellectual to a cabinet post within the government, Minister of Education, Alfredo Tay Coycoy, in 1993.\textsuperscript{54} The progression of the linguistic and educational promotion of Mayan cultural revival culminated in the signing of the Accord on Identity and the Rights of the Indigenous Peoples through the co-ordination of the Co-ordination of Organizations of the Mayan People of Guatemala (COPMAGUA) in 1996 alongside the Peace Accords of that same year. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education transformed PRONEBI into DIGEBI (General Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education), which made the bilingual education program a permanent part of the ministry, rather than a temporary institution program.\textsuperscript{55} This program now moved forward with an emphasis on education that promised Mayan children’s instruction in their heritage languages as the primary instructing language and Spanish as secondary.\textsuperscript{56}

### Qualitative Analysis and Results of Mayan Educational Development

Mayan intellectuals have been skeptical about the management and delivery of education to the rural areas of the Mayan population around Guatemala throughout the past twenty years.

\textsuperscript{53} Richards & Richards, 205.
\textsuperscript{54} Heckt, 332.
\textsuperscript{56} Maxwell, 85.
Their criticisms point to western and Ladino influence on Maya ability to fully develop their own culture or continue their cultural practices. Dr. Waqi’ Q’anil Demetrio Cojti Cuxil, a major proponent of this camp, argued widely that the PRONEBI, now DIGEBI, was in the past too Ladino, as the programs initiated by the Ministry of Education resembled those of the Ladino curriculum. However, his appointment as Minister of Education under Alfonso Portillo in 1994 provided him the opportunity to promote Mayan education, but not to the point of a sweep of non-Indian administrators and teachers. Even though his appointment provided him with a further opportunity at a higher level to implement more Mayan education into bilingual schools, reports indicate that the results of his influence did not extend to lower divisions. The creation of SIMAC (Sistema Integral De Mejoramiento y Adecuación Curricular [National System for the Improvement of Human Resources and Educational Curriculum]) sought to overcome this problem by integrating a teaching program designed to respect Mayan, Garifuna, and Xincan cultures, but the approach that was taken was rather essentialist and folkloric. Mayan intellectuals argued that the delivery of Mayan values were viewed with prejudice, especially in areas such as cosmology, and treated as folktale, which took away from recognition of cultural differences and the metaphysical beliefs of the Maya.

Other Mayan intellectuals and proponents of the pan-Mayan movement professed that the institution was Mayan enough and recognized the importance of bilingualism as a means to aid their recognition and promotion of Mayanism. Thus, through an examination of reports from outside sources, regarding how the development of DIGEBI-run schools in rural areas between 1991 and 1997 had impacted the educational proportion of those communities, it become clear

57 Maxwell, 93.
58 Ibid, 94.
59 Ibid, 89.
60 Helmberger, 77.
that education was a central component of the development of the pan-Maya movement and its impact on children. A report by the Improving Education Quality (IEQ) compiled by Ray Chesterfield and Fernando E. Rubio F. in collaboration with The Academy for Educational Development Education Development Center, Inc., Juárez and Associates, Inc., and the University of Pittsburgh examines the quality of the education and its effects on rural populations in the El Quiché area. There is a significant difference between rural and urban education quality in terms of the number of teachers provided to those schools and districts. This affected the number of students attending school throughout this period and has provided insight to the completion to drop out ratio. In the El Quiché area, there is a significant difference regarding how many teachers were present in the urban versus the rural region, with a ratio of 10 more teachers in urban areas to 2.1 teachers in rural communities in 1996. However, when examining the teacher-to-student ratio in urban areas as compared to rural areas, there are more students in urban than in rural areas. The ratio was roughly 39.4 to 33.1, but this does not tell the whole story regarding development in terms of quality and completion rates. Although rural areas had a lower ratio of teachers to students, the completion rate was far lower for students completing their sixth grade education in six years, with only 9.1% of students in rural areas completing their sixth grade in the allotted time. Urban students experienced a far higher completion rate with 37.0% students who completed their sixth grade in six years.

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62 Ibid, Appendix D, 16.
63 Ibid, Appendix C, 14.
65 Ibid

Another important statistic is the percentage of students held back each year and those who returned to school in 1997. This study further analyzed graduation rates between boys and girls, based on Maya cultural traditions, and revealed that because girls were forced to work at a younger age than boys, girls sacrificed their education whereas boys had more time to achieve educational instruction resulting in higher completion rates.  

From 1992 to 1997 in the urban centre, the percentage of students who were held back but returned in the sixth grade was 41.7% for boys and 37.5% for girls, while it was much lower in the rural areas with 24.0% versus 15.3% of boys and girls who returned. This indicator shows that rural students were more likely to completely drop out by the sixth grade. However, the DIGEBI schools had a higher percentage of students attending compared to their mono-lingual counterparts across the country. Thus, on a country-wide basis, the success of DIGEBI was that it improved the literacy rate in the rural and urban areas where the historical population was primarily Mayan and education was communicated in a bilingual fashion, with emphasis on the communities’ Mayan language.

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66 Heckt, 325.
67 Chesterfield & Rubio, Appendix D, 16.
68 Ibid, 6.
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<th>El Quiché</th>
<th>Return Rate</th>
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<td>41.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural (Boys)</td>
<td>24.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban (Girls)</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural (Girls)</td>
<td>15.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The impact of the growth of bilingual schools has shown a historical reverse in the acceptance of the Mayan languages in the school curriculum. DIGEBI, from 2001 to 2004, opened up 24 new bilingual-intercultural schools.69 Furthermore, community committees began to hire their own teachers, while the government took into consideration placement of bilingual teachers either in their communities of origin or within the same language area.70 The recognition of Mayan languages in each individual community as the official language was ratified by the Guatemalan Congress when it passed the Ley de Idiomas Act of 2003.71 Different Maya groups throughout Guatemala have been affected to various extents by the oppression of the Spanish and their descendent. Certain villages, due to their geographical location, were able to retain purer forms of their language and traditions compared to larger communities such as Quetzaltenango. The geographical location of villages in the highlands where there was less arable land for cultivation of culture and language enabled communities to remain isolated from the Ladinos and from the conquest to the present day.

Further investigation reveals that certain communities that were more isolated from Spanish influence had a greater percentage of younger generations that conversed in a more pure
form of their Mayan language. This was due to the lesser influence of Spanish and the efforts of
the Mayan revitalization movement. Geographical location has had a large impact on the
development or continuation of different Mayan languages. The community of Sipacapa, which
is located roughly 20 hours by bus from Guatemala City boasts a population of roughly 12,000
people where over 9,000 speak their traditional language, Sipakapense, which is a form of
K’iche’. Because the language of the Sipacapa was not discovered until the 1970s, it is possibly
one of the strongholds of traditional Mayan concept words and cultural values. Reports have
indicated that in historical geographic locations over the past twenty years, there has been a
strong move towards keeping Mayan cultural values; Sipacapa as a marginalized community has
withstood the Ladinization process.

However, there is a difference in the use of language in terms of pure Sipakapanse,
between the three most recent generations of speakers. Generation one speakers, born between
1914 and 1934, spoke with a higher percentage of code-switching than the other two
generations. Furthermore, through the influence of the Mayan Academy, in the 1990s there
developed a push among those involved in the revitalization program to use strictly Sipakapense
or to increase use. However, reports indicate that children did not follow this pattern as Spanish
became more useful outside of the community, especially in the case when families were forced
to work on coastal fincas (coffee plantations) during the harvest season. Generation three,
encouraged by their parents (generation two) to use Sipakapense at home developed a clearer

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73 Ibid, 278.
74 Ibid, 281.
distinction between Spanish and Sipakapense. Furthermore, the impact of the Mayan movement by as late as 2008 indicated that there had been a switch to a stronger differentiation between the Spanish and Sipakapense. This report was based on the fact that the younger generation produced less forms of code-switching that incorporated elements of Spanish grammar.

Further developments that could have hindered the isolation of the Sipacapa community included the discovery of a gold mine in 2004, which brought economic development to the area. However, due to the high level of the maintenance of the Sipakapense language and the influence of the language and cultural revitalization efforts inspired by the Mayan Academy, the community of the Sipacapa has withstood the encroachment of globalization in terms of cultural development. Community development and efforts of those involved indirectly with the Mayan revitalization have protected the cultural elements of smaller Mayan communities over the past sixty years. The development of the pan-Mayan movement over the past sixty years has provided individual Mayan communities with the ability to protect their cultural heritage against the assimilation efforts of the Guatemalan government that has been practiced since the conquest. K’iche’ Mayans have been at the forefront of the movement, beginning with Adrián Inéz Chávez, the most prominent Mayan over the past sixty years. Education assimilation programs by the government that took over the original Castellanización structure that had been in place since the conquest followed a similar direction, however they incorporated the ability for Mayans to further educate themselves at a higher level (university and high school). This ability created the basis for the current pan-Mayan movement and those involved early on became influential in

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77 Barrett, 283.
78 Ibid, 288.
79 Ibid
80 Ibid, 299.
encouraging future generations to take pride in and to appreciate the preservation of Mayan culture. Although the civil war lasted from the 1960s until 1996, the worst violence against the Maya was from the late 1970s to 1983. The involvement of the Mayan community in the civil war was an indication that they were willing to fight for their cultural heritage and rights.

Studies conducted by anthropologists investigating the pan-Maya movement strengthened the legitimacy of the movement’s direction and helped to shape its future policy in recognizing the historical context of their culture. Recognition of their separate culture and language was finally acknowledged beginning in 1985 and since then has progressed to the point where the Guatemalan government recognized individual community languages as the main language. Mayan intellectuals’ influence and the growth of participation of indigenous movements has created a more plural state in Guatemala as evident by the last four policies of Oscar Berger’s administration (2004-2008).\(^8\) These policies included acts such as the Policy for Integral Rural Development and the Public Policy for the Elimination of Racism and Discrimination, an indication that the Guatemalan state was beginning to listen to Mayan intellectuals and sought to implement the proposed legislation as official laws.\(^8\) Furthermore, the idea of indigeneity has strengthened within communities as Maya leaders have drawn on situated and contingent forms of ancient Maya culture to lay claims to authentic indigenous culture, material resources and social status that are afforded to them through the current democratic system in Guatemala.\(^8\)

The leaders of the pan-Mayan movement who have come from educational and business backgrounds are generally higher educated individuals. Although Mayan activists originate from rural Maya communities, they have taken advantage of the educational opportunities and moved

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\(^8\) Marta Elena Casaus Arzu, “Reformulating the Guatemalan State: The Role of Maya Intellectuals and Civil Society Discourse,” Social Analysis 51, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 162.

\(^8\) Ibid

to either Guatemala City or Quetzaltenango to further educate themselves and work for non-
governmental organizations to promote cultural rights. These pan-Mayanist leaders have been
trained at the university level in the social sciences. At Universidad San Rafael Landivar and
Universidad Mariano Galvez have developed specific programs in linguistics aimed to train
young Mayan scholars. Thus, academically the pan-Maya movement has grown to become
more inclusive of higher levels of education while attempting to tap the notion of Maya identity
on a peasantry level.

The pan-Maya movement spread its influence to communities that have become largely
Ladino but retain significant amount of Mayan speakers. On Guatemala’s eastern borders, one of
the oldest Mayan cultures, the Ch’orti’, became inspired by the Mayan movement and have over
the past twenty-five years sought to regain their Mayan culture. The influence of the pan-Maya
movement has enabled it to promote Mayan identity through educational and literacy reforms.
Regional differences have played a major role in the success and failure of the movement. Due to
the lack of historical documentation on the Ch’orti’ Maya throughout the 1990s, the next chapter
will attempt to historicize how educational reforms sponsored by the pan-Maya movement
through government agencies of both the ALMG and DIGEBI impacted the socio-economical
livelihood of the Ch’orti’ Maya.

84 Edward Fischer, “Beyond Victimization: Maya Movements in Post-War Guatemala,” in The Struggle for
85 Ibid, 99.
Chapter Four

Educational Development within the Ch’orti’ Speaking Region of Eastern Guatemala

Contemporary historical analysis of eastern Guatemala has focused on the impact the state had on violence throughout the civil war. Minimal research has produced evidence of the linguistic development and cultural revitalization movement that western Mayans have encouraged through a national dialogue of Mayanism. Eastern Guatemalan indigenous peoples have received minimal attention from historians. Historians such as Stephen Brewer and Lawrence Feldman have focused their research of the Ch’orti’ Maya from the colonial period to early independence. The archival evidence has indicated that the indigenous groups of eastern Guatemala experienced massive assimilation due to their smaller population and to larger migration waves of Spanish colonialists to the area. Thus, the impact of colonization was more profound, and the process of Ladinization of the indigenous population was more totalizing in the interior region. Mayanism has not succeeded in the Chiquimula region due to population, as the majority of the population is Ladino. The term Ladino traditionally refers to the mixed blood of indigenous and Spanish ancestry; however in the case of eastern Guatemala it also refers to direct descendants of the Ch’orti’ Indians. Ch’orti’ Maya experienced a very different transition under the Spanish than the western Highland Mayans, becoming a very small and practically invisible minority within a century of Spanish invasion.¹

Pre-conquest to Spanish Invasion, the Colonial Period, Independence, and the Ubico Regime

The Ch’orti’ Maya stem from the ancient Classic Maya, thus their language has significant historical value as major contributions both culturally and scientifically were

produced by the Classic Maya between 250 and 900 A.D. Prior to contact with the Spanish, the region of the Ch’orti’ group extended from northern El Salvador through western Honduras and into their current location in southeastern Guatemala. However, historical documentation is lacking regarding the activities of the Ch’orti’ for large areas and thus this paper argues that the region that the Ch’orti’ people controlled centered on a city-state political structure upon contact, a common trend throughout the Central American Isthmus. Pedro de Alvarado arrived in the Central American Isthmus in 1524, beginning five hundred years of pillage, colonization, and destruction upon an already fragile society. Within six years, the Spanish had subdued any resistance from the Indigenous population and the Ch’orti’ Maya were compelled to live with a growing Spanish population and forced to work for Spanish encomenderos.6 Ch’orti’ Maya continued to resist in small pockets within the Chiquimula district, despite the importation of Spanish colonial settlers and growth of encomiendas, which also contributed to the decline of the indigenous population.4 An estimated fifty percent of the Ch’orti’ Maya population died out between 1549 and 1589.5 The impact that the Spanish had was tremendous, as the out-migration and slow urbanization throughout the colonial period saw Ch’orti’ Maya migrate either to the Spanish city where they lost touch with their culture and language or move to remote communities that were far enough away from Spanish influence.6 The indigenous populations were also forced to pay a tribute and for subsistence relied on small-scale agriculture.7

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22 Brewer, 139. (Encomenderos: were captains of war and lords who were rewarded with encomiendas: royal grants which gave them full title to the Indian serfs living on the land, which became Spanish estates. (Victor Monetjo, “The Multiplicity of Mayan Voices: Mayan Leadership and the Politics of Self-Representation,” in Indigenous Movements, Self-Representation, and the State in Latin America, ed. Kay B. Warren and Jean E. Jackson (Austin: University of Texas 2002), 147.
3 Encomiendas: see above.
4 Ibid, 141.
5 Ibid, 145.
6 Ibid, 147.
7 Ibid, 140.
The Ladinization of the Ch’orti’ Maya from the early period of colonial rule through independence had a negative effect on the economic production of the Chiquimula region for as population figures continued to decline, so did overall production.\textsuperscript{8} Cacao production dropped dramatically, a subsistence and export agricultural product that had been essential to the cultural traditions of the Ch’orti’, and further became an important export commodity for the Spanish.\textsuperscript{9} Slowly but surely, the impact of Ladinization began to shape the future of the Ch’orti’ region as it saw a majority of the indigenous population assimilate completely into the Ladino culture in almost every aspect. Throughout the period of the three dictatorships that ruled Guatemala from 1890 until 1944, Ch’orti’ Maya suffered greatly due to various laws that conscripted them to hard labour with little or no pay. The most brutal dictator for the Ch’orti’ Maya and most indigenous groups was General Ubico. Ch’orti’ Maya suffered more severe consequences from Ubico’s vagrancy laws than their brethren to the west. Due to complete political and economic domination, Ch’orti’ Maya were subjected to crueler treatment on Ladino plantations or by Ladino bosses. Lower class K’iche’ Maya, on the other hand, were controlled by their own indigenous leaders.\textsuperscript{10} Ch’orti’ Maya were pessimistic of the revolutionary government’s promises of agrarian reform from 1944 to 1954. The majority of Ch’orti’ Maya were fearful of repercussions from Ladino landowners when agrarian reform granted them licenses to land formerly owned by those Ladino owners.\textsuperscript{11}

\textbf{Civil War Impact}

The impact of the civil war, although severe throughout all of Guatemala, affected the Ch’orti’ Maya on a larger scale due to the closeness of association they had with guerrilla

\textsuperscript{8} Brewer, 145.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid, 146.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 62.
groups. To understand the current educational and literacy development of the Ch’orti’ from a historical perspective, it is important to examine how civil society groups and government sponsored death squads psychologically affected the Ch’orti’. Similar policies took place in western Guatemala as in the eastern Indigenous communities, but the affects were more potent in the East as the minority population of Ch’orti’ Mayans who supported Arbenz’s agrarian reforms of the early 1950s eventually were forced to flee from their homes. The many Ch’orti’ families that benefited from the reforms under Arbenz were either assassinated or forced to flee to neighbouring Honduras as counterinsurgency death squads terrorized the countryside after the CIA-sponsored overthrow.12

Religion has played a large role in the Ladinization of the Ch’orti’ Maya, both positively and negatively. Upon colonization, religious orders of the Catholic Church performed the task of conversion for the purpose of saving the indigenous populations’ eternal souls. However, throughout the 1960s and most of the civil war, both Catholic and Evangelical protestant groups were involved in efforts to protect the rights of the Ch’orti’ Maya in preserving traditional culture through the practice of liberation theology.13 Belgian priests in particular were central to the creation of a variety of developmental programs into the Ch’orti’ regions, education and liberation theology being one of the central pillars of their work.14 The priests’ liberation theology affected the leadership of elder Ch’orti’ men after the end of the civil war, as elders spoke out against the government’s actions. Emboldened by the bitterness of witnessing the various strong “laws” implemented and carried out by successive governments throughout the civil war and witnesses to the destruction it brought to their communities, many elders were

more outspoken against the Peace Accords. Ch’orti’ Maya did not recognize any of the brokers of the Peace Accords and held little trust in any political party in the post-war period. They held a deep psychological distrust of any programs set forth by the government, including education. 15

The pan-Maya Movement and Ch’orti’ Participation

Although the Maya movement improved the educational and linguistic abilities of the K’iche’ Mayans in western Guatemala, an historical analysis of anthropological research proves that the limited resources after the end of the civil war and the Peace Accord signings had minimal impact on the overall social improvement of the Indians in the Ch’orti’ region. The Maya movement may have emotionally improved the outlook for indigenous rights of the Ch’orti’ Maya, but it failed to adequately improve the subsistence and economic conditions of the majority Ch’orti’ population. 16 There were several reasons for the failure. Although the enthusiasm of the pan-Maya leaders was not one of them, access to resources and a continuation of Ladinization through economic and political marginality of the Ladinos were major contributing factors. Furthermore, this chapter will also examine the question of indigeneity, whether the growth of the Maya movement was an organic form of indigenous identity or a political tool for the marginalized Maya to create a separate oppositional political identity.

Even though Ch’orti’ Maya are located all over the province of Chiquimula, the majority of speakers are located in the communities of Jocotán and Olopa. 17 As noted by Brent Metz, a few Ch’orti’s were exposed to the concept of pan-Maya and pan-Ch’orti’ unity in the 1970s and 1980s through the Catholic Radio Ch’orti’. This tool was also used for guerilla activity, and thus

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16 Ibid, 338.
its position and projects have been viewed with suspicion.\(^\text{18}\) Their earlier movements were the basis for future pan-Mayan activity, however due to the civil war and the fear of repercussion from the Ladino population, many Ch’orti’ Maya still approached these agents with caution.\(^\text{19}\)

Furthermore, the Catholic and Evangelical churches’ involvement in uprisings against the Ladino owners and the subsequent arrest of some of its clergy by the army resulted in an image of the church as a force of revolution and resistance.\(^\text{20}\)

The lack of government funding held back the quality and capacity of educational programs, as many children and even adults were unable to attend schools due to lack of resources and seats. The issue of identity has been tightly contested in the Ch’orti’ speaking regions, as indigenous speaking peoples have fought for recognition of their language rights against their Ladino neighbours. Until the rise of the Maya movement, the indigenous people were referred to as Indians and not by their linguistic identity, as Ch’orti’. An important development that occurred in the early 1990s was the rejection of the education system by many Ch’orti’s as indicated by low attendance numbers. Only 17 percent of school-age children attended school.\(^\text{21}\)

Sadly, due to the economic marginality of the Ch’orti’ Maya, many were unable to attain economic security and thus most had minimal power in regards to political decisions. In the areas of Jocotán and Olopa, where Ch’orti’ Maya traditionally held a majority upwards of 80 percent, only twice throughout the 1990s was a Ch’orti’ elected to the position of mayor. The reasons for this were economic marginality, lack of opportunities, and political

\(^\text{19}\) Ibid, 329.
\(^\text{20}\) Ibid
\(^\text{21}\) Ibid, 331.
intimidation by Ladino candidates who threatened the Indian candidates through corruption, violence and hit men.\textsuperscript{22}

**Education Evidence of Ch’orti’ Marginality and the Slow Growth of the Pan-Maya Movement**

The percentage of schools operating and graduation rates of the Ch’orti’ Maya in bilingual schools show that the pan-Maya movement provided minimal growth in the improvement of the illiteracy of the Ch’orti’. From 1991 to 1997, the average figures for students to teachers in the whole department of Chiquimula was at 61.5 students overall to one teacher.\textsuperscript{23} Furthermore, low attendance figures indicate that the literacy rate barely improved. Ch’orti’ also considered the educational system as anti-Indian, thus attendance at the primary school level between 1992 and 1997 always figured in at roughly 17 percent.\textsuperscript{24}

The initial involvement of the Ch’orti’ in the pan-Maya movement was a failure, due to the already mentioned reasons of economics, political marginalization, psychological damage and minimal participation from the Ch’orti’ Maya. For those children that attended primary schools in rural areas, graduation rates indicate that there was marginal improvement, but in some cases there was a decrease. For instance, graduation rates in rural areas of six grades in six years were at a low rate of 17.2 percent as compared to the urban rate of 52.4 percent.\textsuperscript{25} This indicated that the student to teacher ratio was too large due to the lack of funding for schools and that the economic subsistence of Ch’orti’ families was put ahead of education. Furthermore, Brent Metz points out that in the rural regions, especially in towns such as Jocotán and Olopa, teachers worked on a part-time basis.\textsuperscript{26} Compounding the issue was the low figure of teachers

\textsuperscript{22} Metz, “Without Nation, Without Community,” 331.
\textsuperscript{23} Chesterfield & Rubío, Appendix C.
\textsuperscript{24} Metz, “Without Nation, Without Community,” 330.
\textsuperscript{25} Chesterfield & Rubío, Appendix G.
\textsuperscript{26} Metz, *Ch’orti’- Maya Survival in Eastern Guatemala*, 282.
per school per department: in the urban areas in Chiquimula there was a ratio of 9.4 teachers per school, while in the rural districts the rate was 1.8.\textsuperscript{27} Dropout rates within the rural regions were also high, with over 74.5 percent of grade six boys failing to return, and an even higher figure for girls at 87.2 percent.\textsuperscript{28}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chiquimula</th>
<th>Teacher Ratio Per Area</th>
<th>Graduation Rates</th>
<th>Return Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>81.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>37.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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The use of Ch’orti’ or other indigenous languages in the PRONEBI or DIGEBI sponsored schools accounted for only 24-54 percent of all interactions throughout the early period from 1992 to 1996.\textsuperscript{29} This figure would be worrisome for Maya leaders, as it indicated that the education system for Ch’orti’ Maya was failing, however, the graduation rates were higher in PRONEBI schools than the non-PRONEBI schools, thus it provided an argument for the continuation of bilingual educational schools.\textsuperscript{30} Pan-Maya leaders throughout the 1990s pointed to the reduced use of the Ch’orti’ language as a reason for increased activism in the Ch’orti’ region, which they saw as a direct result of the Ladinization process. Within the Jocotán core, Spanish became the primary language while Ch’orti’ was reduced to the sixteen contiguous areas within Jocotán, Olopa, and La Unión municipalities.\textsuperscript{31}

The movement did have some positive developments by the mid 1990s. Majawil Q’ij, under the auspices of the Maya Unity and Consensus Tribunal (ICUM), a group formerly

\textsuperscript{27} Chesterfield & Rubio, Appendix D, 16.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid, Appendix H, 24.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid
\textsuperscript{31} Metz, “Without Nation, Without Community,” 343.
connected to the CUC (see chapter two) and the Academy of Maya Languages established in the Ch’orti’ region the Ch’orti’ Maya Regional Coordination (COMACH) in 1994.\textsuperscript{32} From 1994 to 1998, the COMACH assisted in the development of rural promotion, funding wages of the executive committee, offices, seminars, and to a minor extent the training of Ch’orti’ leaders.\textsuperscript{33} By 1998, regional promoters of the Maya initiative held an educational level of 4.1 years, a higher number compared to the general population, where 68 percent of households held an education of year or less.\textsuperscript{34} Low education figures throughout the 1990s in the Jocotán and Olopa region indicates that the pan-Maya movement had initially provided minimal improvement in increasing the literacy rate. As the education programs developed in eastern Guatemala, social welfare increased for participants. Financial restrictions, such as cuts in state funding or lack of seat availability, restricted participation on a large scale. The pan-Maya movement and the reach of its education programs offered the chance for examination of indigenous cultural roots on a basic academic level, promoting the continuation of a specific variety of Maya culture.

Issues of identity have also played a role in the development of the pan-Maya movement and have afforded a marginalized culture the chance to protect its image and traditions against a dominant social structure that emphasizes western European values. Although the Maya movement played a large role in bridging the gap between Ch’orti’ and the state, it was met with criticism from both sides and was viewed suspiciously by indigenous groups.\textsuperscript{35} However, the Maya were encouraged to speak out against the actions of the state as education about their rights was delivered to them by pan-Mayanists.\textsuperscript{36} Furthermore, the Maya movement provided educational opportunities, a right that Ch’orti’ Maya never experienced. But the majority of

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{32} Metz, \textit{Ch’orti’- Maya Survival in Eastern Guatemala}, 282.
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid, 283.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Metz, “Without Nation, Without Community,” 341.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Ibid, 340.
\end{itemize}
\end{flushright}
Ch’orti’s throughout this period could not afford to devote time to Maya activism due to their impoverishment. The question of identity was also questioned throughout this period as elders saw the pan-Maya activists as a threat to their traditional position within the community, as younger educated Ch’orti’ Mayas questioned the actions of the elders. Ladinos’ reaction to the Ch’orti’ throughout the 1990s did not change with the end of the civil war, as the majority of the community distanced itself from the “dirty Indian pigs” (cochinos). While western Mayans suffered similar experiences with Ladinos, Ch’orti’ autonomy and pride was more severely threatened due to the dominating presence of the Ladinos in the region. Economic and political marginalization from the colonial period all the way through to the end of the civil war saw Ch’orti’ Maya lose their cultural autonomy to a great extent, forcing the need for outside help from the Maya movement to regenerate their sense of indigeneity.

The notion of a pan-Maya unity and the search for indigenous rights within the contemporary Guatemalan state was set forth by Mayan intellectuals and developed from a basic necessity of survival to a political and cultural force that shaped Mayan and Ladino relations over the last half of the twentieth-century. The pan-Maya movement among the Ch’orti’ Maya was less influenced by the involvement of academic scholars, and was, thus, less engaged with the intellectual currents of the national movement. Furthermore, the development of the pan-Maya Movement was hampered by disagreements amongst the various activist organizations that promote Mayanism, as intellectuals disagreed over the goals of the movement. Intellectuals, such as Mario Morales and Enrique Zapeta, have argued that the Maya movement should use resources available to them through increasing globalization to promote the movement, although both differ on the actual goals. The biggest split has come from leaders such as Rigoberta

38 Ibid., 342.
Menchu and Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil who moved into the political arena, which brought criticism from various pan-Maya leaders who saw Cuxil’s appointment as vice-Minister of Education (2003) into the government party that included the former General Rios Montt as a betrayal to Mayans. Thus, disagreements amongst the pan-Maya leaders has brought the whole movement into question and strengthened the anti-indigeneity group’s stance and even Mayans themselves, such as the Ch’orti’.

The Ch’orti’ Maya also held less credibility in the eyes of the Ladino government, due to the lack of academic scholarship. Younger Ch’orti’ Maya, inspired by the pan-Maya movement, have sought to challenge the communal structure by questioning their elders’ decision to disregard Ch’orti’ Maya culture in favour of a Ladino lifestyle. The initial foray of the pan-Maya movement into the Ch’orti’ region failed, due to the lack of participation of the majority of the Ch’orti’ population in bilingual schools, and thus the movement failed to improve the socio-economic conditions in the region. Although this is due to the lack of economic mobility, the initial goals of the pan-Maya movement in creating awareness among the Ch’orti’ Maya of what it means to be indigenous can be seen as a success and the basis for future growth of indigenous self-determination.
Conclusion: What is Indigeneity?

History of a culture is important to the future evolution of that culture and its survival against the potential dominating presence of another culture. For the Maya, outside influences from anthropologists, linguistic researchers, archeologists, and historians have all shaped the current pan-Maya movement. Internal strife also created a means for Maya people to search for their identity before it was completely assimilated by the Spanish. The issue of identity to a culture group such as the Maya begs the question of whether the current process that they have undertaken is largely due to outside influence of academic research and whether the creation of the term Maya is a cultural identity or a political force mobilized from without. This research indicates that the pan-Maya movement grew substantially after the 1980s and held a large influence in education and literacy programs where the Maya are the majority. It also showed that the assimilation process of Ladinization largely influenced the decisions for educational attendance in areas where the Maya were a minority. Education and literacy are important indicators of a culture’s development and one key to the formation of a cultural identity.

The notion of pan-Maya unity developed through the exposure of Maya leaders to education and literacy development that began in the 1940s. Elder K’iche’ Mayas who had been trained in Western schools asked the question of what it meant to be Mayan in a contemporary Guatemalan state. The development of educational and bilingual literacy programs in both the K’iche and Ch’orti’ communities afforded the pan-Maya movement to gain an identity in a state
that had repressed the rights of its indigenous population for the past five centuries. The term Maya developed under the auspices of anthropologists and pan-Maya leaders as both parties sought to strengthen the cultural identity of indigenous people in Guatemala.

This examination of the pan-Mayan movement’s influence on the socio-economic development of Maya communities has indicated that the historical impact of Ladinization has been prevalent in the stagnation of the recognition of indigenous identity. The western Maya experienced transformation due to the greater success of the pan-Maya movement compared to the east, but this was mostly due to economic and demographic reasons. Educational success depended on the economic ability of Mayan communities and the political structures of each region. The process of Ladinization had greater impact on the Ch’ortí in eastern Guatemala, compared to the K’iche’ in western Guatemala, in terms of cultural loss. Furthermore, population figures and demographic spacing also affected the pan-Maya movement’s ability to influence educational reforms and programming.

The Maya had a far greater input in the development of educational programs in communities where the majority of the population was of Maya ancestry. Students who attended bilingual schools (PRONEBI, later DIGEBI) attained higher scores in various subjects and the rates of completion were slightly higher compared to students who attended non-PRONEBI schools. The success of the program was that it ignited a sense of indigeneity among its students. Initial aims of PRONEBI’s rural primary school improvement project were deemed successful in the four major Mayan language groups of Guatemala, and it created the basis for future infrastructure to disseminate the use of Mayan languages in education. Mayan children who attended school in more urbanized areas achieved higher completion rates than their rural counterparts, however, this was due to lower funding for rural areas and higher student to teacher
ratios. The critical development, however, was that education was made available to those rural Maya communities, which prior to the civil war had received minimal attention from the government in recognition of their separate indigenous identity. In regions of Guatemala where Mayans constituted a minority population, access to bilingual education was limited as prejudiced regional governments tended to emphasize monolingual education.

The Ch’orti’ Maya were subjected to far greater restrictions on their mobility, both in economic and political arenas. Both Maya groups, the Ch’orti and the K’iche’, experienced severe repression throughout the civil war, however the Ch’orti’ were affected on a larger scale in terms of lives lost and the amount of violence, which stymied cultural development, specifically in the education sector. The introduction of the pan-Maya movement provided the Ch’orti’ the ability to question the state’s action and demand that their rights as an indigenous group become respected. Internal strife between elder Ch’orti’ and younger generations has hindered the process. The pan-Maya movement must now examine its goals differently in the eastern part of Guatemala and adapt its program to address the leadership of the Ch’orti. Regional differences of demographic proportions and economic security have played a large role in the success of the pan-Maya movement. As evident with the growth of the movement in the K’iche’ speaking region, the question of what is indigeneity and what constitutes Mayan identity is no longer a repressed idea, but a strong political and cultural idea. The Ch’orti’ Maya, on the other hand, as a minority group in their ancestral region, have struggled to overcome the Ladinization process and question the validity of the pan-Maya movement as a representation of their cultural values.

Despite the regional differences, the notion of a pan-Maya movement is strong in the academic scholarship, as evident in the amount of anthropological and sociolinguistic research.
The commitment of researchers to the pan-Maya movement has strengthened its validity as both a cultural and political entity. Further research is required to historicize the movement’s impact in other regional areas of Guatemala and to compare its importance as a cultural representation of Mayan communities in comparison to both the K’iche’ and the Ch’orti. The research of this thesis would further benefit from greater attention to the role of the political aspect of the pan-Maya movement and how it has promoted its own political voice in national political decisions, and prompting Maya intellectuals to seek political seats in the Guatemalan government. Future research should also incorporate a more extensive study of archival material from both pan-Maya archives and official state material only available in Guatemala.
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