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GUARDING BORDERS, OPENING WINDOWS

Mayanization and strategies of everyday life.

The case of a local school in San Antonio, Guatemala

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Abstract

Guarding borders, opening windows – Mayanization and strategies of everyday life. The case of a local school in San Antonio Aguas Calientes, Guatemala.

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Notions of cultural identity and its importance have changed significantly during recent decades, affecting everything from state politics and public debate to conflicts and war. This is very much true for the cultural identity of people perceived as indigenous, either by others or by themselves. My field site for exploration of these issues is Guatemala. The question I pose is: *How do local people adopt or resist the rethinking of indigenous identity that has taken place in Guatemala?*

The thesis is based on fieldwork in a school of a local indigenous community in Guatemala, as well as studies of and interviews with representatives of the so-called Maya movement. The Maya movement is an important actor in the changed notion of cultural identity in the country. My main conclusion is that there is a large discrepancy between how cultural identity is perceived and treated among the politically-organized people and among the people in a local setting. The “local” people in my study both adopt and resist the changed role of indigenous cultural identity. They adopt it in that they know they now “should” relate to and identify as Maya, but they resist it in that they act in a different way when it comes to practical choices. People are more concerned with bettering the life-chances of their children, than with regaining a cultural past. I also observed stratifications within the indigenous group, where those with education, mobility, and power associate with the Maya-identity, while people with less resources are more pragmatic in their approach.

Using the theories of Friedman, Barth, Cumes, and Bastos, amongst others, I try to understand the process of changed cultural identity that is still underway in Guatemala and how it affects the lives of the people in the small community of San Antonio.

Key words: Indigenous, Maya, Cultural Identity, Multicultural discourse, Guatemalan school

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What are indigenous politics?

Immediately after lunch the principal of the school in San Antonio ordered all the children to go home quickly. There would be no more classes today. She had received a call saying that *maras*, criminal gangs, were out on the streets and because previously there had been incidents of child-kidnapping to blackmail their parents, it was not safe to be in the streets or school. Standing behind the locked school gates I also decided to go home. It was probably not a good idea to be alone on the streets of San Antonio today. Just as I was leaving, the domestic science teacher appeared, and we decided to go back to the town of Antigua together. Right outside the gate she hailed a *microbus*, something I never did; I always took the slow public buses because I had heard that robberies are common on minibuses around Antigua. The teacher was my age and worked part-time at the school and part-time in a tourist store in Antigua that she ran with her parents. Her one-year old son was at the store with her parents while she was working at the school. She wore the traditional clothes, the *traje*, and kept her hair long in the way indigenous women often do. She was a little shy, as are many of the indigenous women initially, but with a high level of integrity, sharp ways of expressing herself, and with eyes that could see right through you.

Sitting in the packed microbus, our conversation turned to politics. Of course the talk of the day was the insecurity in Guatemala. The problem appeared to be worsening each day and was disrupting people's daily lives. The teacher told me she was disappointed with the new government. Not only because they were unable to stop the violence and crime, but she had voted for the social democratic president because he had promised to prioritize the questions most important to the indigenous population: he was going to be their president. She indignantly stated that this had proven to be untrue. She looked out the bus window. The people had been fooled. I wondered "What could be the core political question for an indigenous woman of my age in Guatemala," and now felt I was close to learning something important. Would she tell me about the right to use the language spoken by her parents, or the problems with discrimination towards people - such as herself - dressed in traditional clothing? "What is the most important issue for the *indígenas*?" I asked, expecting an intriguing answer filled with cultural pride and opinions about the dominant society. She looked at me now. - "*El precio del pan*," the price of bread, she answered decidedly.

1 Introduction

1.1 Aims and research questions

This study is based on fieldwork carried out in a school of a Guatemalan community defined as indigenous and on meetings with important players in the so-called Maya movement. These two scenes of my fieldwork demonstrated completely different approaches in relating to cultural identity. I observed representatives of the Maya movement guarding the borders between different ethnic groups in Guatemala in order to defend the linguistic and cultural traits of what they now call the Maya people. At the same time I observed the people, defined as Maya by the Maya movement but not self-defined as such, opening windows to other ethnic groups in order to give their children opportunities that they never had.

Since the 1980s, the effects of the multicultural discourse have been visible in Guatemala. Today, more than ever, this discourse is setting the agenda for identity-politics and the politically correct way of perceiving your own cultural identity. In Guatemala the discourse has been communicated mainly through the so called Maya movement, which promotes a certain way of relating to culture, identity and history. I here ask the question of how this affects “local” people.

The goal of my research is to study reactions to and effects of the multicultural ideology and its expressions in a specific context, and to understand the situation in relation to the local conditions and history. That is, not just study the political actors or institutions involved in the development of this ideology, but to understand the position of the people in the street and the corn fields (or as in this case, a school), towards whose identity and culture the ideology is directed. In this thesis we will get to know some of the people in the community of San Antonio, in order to understand their life and priorities.

There is nothing simple to be said about the multicultural discourse and cultural identity of the indigenous population in Guatemala - no easy conclusions, no dominant direction to which the thinking leans. Despite the complications, this thesis deals with just this issue, because when it comes to the consequences of discourse and politics in particular contexts and the everyday lives of people, there are definitely things to be said.

After meeting with local researchers, reading the up-to-date published research not accessible in Sweden, and talking to some Maya activists and anthropologists working with these questions, I noticed that so much was already said and done when it came to local and national expressions of the Maya movement. It appeared that there was no big need, for yet another investigation

about the relationship of the Maya movement to the multiculturalist discourse and how this is expressed through the movement's work. What *was* needed though was an investigation examining the influence of the discourse, both through the movement and through institutions such as the state and the international community, on local settings and everyday life of Guatemalan people not engaged directly in the movement.

The questions examined in this thesis are thus:

- **Does the multiculturalist discourse, including that of Maya cultural identity, influence everyday life in a local setting and, if so, how?**
- **What are the opinions and thoughts of the people in a local setting with regards to the discourse, the Maya movement and its ideology?**

In other words:

**How do local people adopt or resist the rethinking
of indigenous identity that has taken place in
Guatemala?**

In my opinion, an even bigger question underlies this research; a question concerning the consequences of identity politics for society as a whole. It is the same as that posed by Deborah Yashar:

What are the conditions under which strong ethnic identities are compatible with, and supportive of, democracy?
(Yashar 1996:87 cited in Warren 1998:9).

In my opinion, democracy is the development of society towards equality, influence, and better conditions of life for all citizens. An underlying assumption is that strong identity politics are hard to combine with this kind of democratic development. This is a question I cannot answer in this thesis. However, I hope that my investigation will form one small part of the puzzle we must lay in order to get closer to an answer to this over-arching question.

The subject for this thesis is a controversial one in Guatemala. Everyone has an opinion and many are afraid to express what they believe. A challenge for anthropology here is, as Kay B Warren writes, to study these matters without either silencing the Maya movement, speaking for its proponents, or romanticizing its politics (Warren 1998:xii).

1.2 Data and disposition of the text

To achieve the goal of my investigation - understanding the local context of the people attending and working at the school in San Antonio, in relation to the larger situation of multiculturalist discourse, cultural activism, and competing perspectives in academia - I needed to do several things. One component of the investigation, and probably the most important, was the fieldwork conducted in San Antonio Aguas Calientes and the interviews carried out with researchers and activists around the town of Antigua. Another component was to investigate and map the positions of the researchers in this field and their relations to the discourse expressed by the Maya movement. This understanding and definition is part of my research project itself, because the research field is closely connected to the movement and the political positioning. I also took part of the history and ideology of one of central Maya organizations, OKMA, working with Maya language revival and vitalization and the politics imbedded within.

The thesis starts with an account of the methods used and an explanation of the fieldwork and methodological and ethical problems encountered. This is followed by the contextualization of what it means to be indigenous in Guatemala today, after which I present the theories and discussions I find most relevant in understanding the subject matter. I then introduce the area where my fieldwork was conducted and the part of the Maya movement that I studied. This is followed by a closer examination of the community of San Antonio and some of its habitants and an account of my experiences in the school in San Antonio related to my research questions. Finally I present my conclusions.

2 Methods used in the field: ethical and practical issues.

2.1 Thoughts on methodology...

In their book on methodology, *Tolkning och Reflektion*, Alvesson and Sköldberg (1994) state that good qualitative research is an *intellectual* project, not a *technical* one. That is, your relationship with the empirical material should inspire you to reflect, be creative, and formulate questioning of established understandings, rather than letting the technicalities of data collection take the lead and rule the research process (Alvesson, Sköldberg 1994:358). I believe this is a good starting point for social science, but it does not mean that I do not have any methodological choices to make or declare. The starting point for my work is a hermeneutical approach where the material and experiences from fieldwork forms the basis for the interpretations I make and the conclusions I draw.

The effects of the linguistic turn in the social sciences are evident when it comes to ethnography. Today it is a given that a researcher should *not* appreciate the conversations in field as unproblematic conveys of facts or truths. They do not directly correspond to objective phenomenon or the true opinions of people (Alvesson 2003:66). Implicitly there is an understanding that the way we use language *creates* specific social situations. In this thesis the use of the word “Maya” is an example of this. It will later be shown how the effects of using or not-using this term, was crucial. This is something of which I should have initially been more aware.

All science is in its base a critical project; that is, nothing is to be accepted without being scrutinized and investigated. But the critical school and tradition in research is more specific. It is a method and a way of using research that I feel much inspired by. Alvesson and Deetz (2000) give examples of what critical research can be, and this includes identifying different and subtle forms of social dominance, identifying and questioning established ways of perceiving and understanding, to recognize the influence of history, culture, and social position on actions and ideas and to be sceptical of solutions to a problem that are presented as the only solution (Alvesson, Deetz 2000:12). Within the critical school of research there is also potential for creativity. When we question dominant ways of thinking and use of language, we open up the potential for a dialog where change is possible.

It might also be claimed that I have a postmodernist starting point. This is true in that I question universal reason as a foundation for all human affairs, see all narratives - , including my own - as partial, and critically evaluate scientific,

cultural, and social texts as they are products of political and historical contexts. I do not believe that one of these perspectives have to exclude the other, so I do not see this as a problem.

The way I see it, there might be no Truth to “reveal” behind discourses and discursive practices of race, culture, and ethnicity in Guatemala; so to go out seeking such a truth was not my objective.

2.1.1 ... and research ethics

It is always important to be aware that “our” analyses of “their” culture have histories, modes of production and politics (Warren 1998:84); my work is not carried out in a vacuum. Research in general, and perhaps anthropological research in particular, is inextricably connected to imperialism and colonialism. When conducting my fieldwork in Guatemala I am a part of this and consequently I need to be conscious of it. The opportunity for me to undertake this fieldwork, and the impossibility for most of the people I met to do the same, is an effect of this ever-present history. The asymmetry is always there. Is it at all possible to justify this type of research? I believe that the *epistemological brake with the knowledge of everyday life* of which Alvesson and Skjöldberg (1994:358) write, is the basis for the justification of this type of work. As a Swedish anthropology student in Guatemala I am a natural stranger to the ways of life here. This can be a handicap - but is in these circumstances an advantage.

It would not be possible to discuss research methodology and indigenous peoples without an understanding of how knowledge is deeply embedded in the layers of imperial and colonial practices. It cannot be taken for granted that people such as myself, studying indigenous communities, aim to serve a greater good and work for the benefit of oppressed people. Such a view is more a reflection of ideology than of academic training. And more importantly, when it comes to research, indigenous people across the world have their own stories to tell - this goes not least for the indigenous people of Guatemala. “The word itself: “research”, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary.” (Smith 1999:1). However, the ethical, political, and historical problems surrounding research must not prevent us from attempting research. The questions we ask about our world are important: research helps us formulate answers.

A common “western” assumption about people in the developing world (or as indigenous communities are called sometimes; the Fourth World) is that they are passive victims of poverty and oppressive regimes and thus do not have the capability to care about politics, morality, or complex development issues (Warren 1998:83). My investigation shows that, at least in this study, this assumption is completely incorrect. I am astonished by the way “common people” can discuss these matters. Most people I met have a very conscious relationship with the questions of cultural identity and development of their country and are fully aware of the complexity of the issue. In short, my thesis strongly contradicts the old assumption.

Foreign anthropologists have generally been very bad at returning the knowledge accumulated in research to the places of the fieldwork in Guatemala (Warren 1998:77). The obvious and justifiable questions from the people who had contact with researchers include: what happens to the all the data you bring home about us? What do you do with it? I was asked these questions by many of the people I met during my fieldwork. In addition I felt great scepticism from activists and other researchers about whether I really would return anything to the people I met while conducting my work. What did I have to offer them? Actually, of course, it was not much. To many I constituted a possibility of contacts to a world of resource: perhaps I could keep their school, their organization, or their children in mind the next time I happened to stumble over a bag of money in my home country? I always made it very clear that I did not represent any organization or institution that could provide financial support. Even though this was clearly stated I often had the feeling that they did not truly believe me. And in some respect, of course, they were right. I had actually bought a ticket for an airplane flight all the way from Europe and my Swedish shoes had probably cost me half a month's salary by Guatemalan standards. However, I did try to contribute what I could. For example, paying the school fee for the girls in the family where I spent most of my time in the village, giving my laptop to the school because I think it could be useful to the administration, trying to help out at the school as an "extra teacher," and also being a constant source of information about how things looked on the other side of the planet.

Behind my outward display as an anthropologist, I often felt like a fraud during fieldwork. For example when visiting the highly professional organisation OKMA, constituted of educated people from the indigenous groups now working to promote the native languages of their people. I came with thoughts about cultural essentialism built into their everyday work and wanted to know about their views on all this, maybe without asking right out, because I knew it could be provocative. I experienced a very polite reception and I was well taken care of. But I also felt, and it was also verbally expressed in the interviews conducted there, that as an anthropologist I was not totally trusted upon. And of course, why would they trust me? Warren writes:

Pan-Mayanists see social science as profoundly political by definition and consequently doubt the motives and intentions of foreign researchers who act as if their verbal support for indigenous issues should be accepted at face value. (Warren 1998:79)

What gives me the right to study this? Where does anthropology end and disrespect begin? Just the thought makes me a little pale. Could the type of investigation I am undertaking actually be counterproductive to the political goals of the Maya movement? In that case, how should I relate to this? But then again, I believe one must be able to ask questions, to investigate, to consider different options. I can only declare my true curiosity and my willingness to contribute to the understanding and development of this field of knowledge. What else can I do, if not stay at home and seriously consider another career? I have no answer here.

Traditionally, anthropologists have been very involved in the work for the rights of the indigenous population of Guatemala. For example, many anthropologists worked to document and analyze the violence towards the indigenous population during the civil war, together with the communities, to be able to demand justice. As soon as it was reasonably safe to go to Guatemala, anthropologists were there to show and highlight the impact of violence on and destruction of whole communities (Warren 1998:88). Of course, this was controversial research for the military and people in power. Years after the conflict is officially over the same people hold many of the same positions of power and it could be a very dangerous pursuit. Myrna Mack was one of the anthropologists doing this kind of work in Guatemala. She was killed in 1991 by an armed forced death squad. In 1994, the Guatemalan government publicly recognized that its agents had committed the killing.

Another ethical problem presented in the field was that I never felt that I could completely explain the purpose of my study to my informants. It was not because I wanted to keep it a secret, or because I underestimated their understanding of my intention. I think that in one way I was a little ashamed of my subject of study. Even after several years of social anthropological studies I asked myself why I had the right to come and investigate these complex matters in a society that was not my own. It is actually a strange undertaking when you think about it. I also knew that asking about ethnicity and personal experiences are sensitive, personal matters: especially in Guatemala! So I may not have explained the purpose of my study to my informants in the same way as I have done here. Of course, I never lied, but I often said I was interested in seeing and understanding expressions of their culture and indigenous culture in the school. This was also true, although my research question is a little more complex. I never really figured out how to handle this in a good way.

I want also to state here that I have given all my informants pseudonyms. None of them specifically asked me to do so, but in case something could be construed as controversial and because the text can be read by the people concerned, I did it anyway. Some people asked me not to reveal that they were the source of some specific information and on this matter I have always kept my word.

2.2 Finding the focus of my study

Well, around here you won't find *anything* interesting concerning what you want to investigate! If you want to see indigenous culture and real discrimination you should travel to Quiché. There they have *real* problems and conflicts between indigenous and non-indigenous groups.

This statement by the coordinator of one of the most respected centers for investigations and social science in Guatemala, awoke the anthropologist inside

me. Though I pretended to agree with her, I felt even more certain that it was here, in the areas around Antigua, Sacatepéquez in Guatemala, that I wanted to conduct my study. Perhaps her statement was due to some misunderstanding about what my field of interest really was, or perhaps my field of interest just happened to change, right there and then. Perhaps it was both.

In some regard the coordinator was right. The western highland, where we find the region of Quiché, has historically been in the focus of anthropological investigations of Guatemala and its indigenous population. The interpretations and theories generated from these regions have then often been generalized for the whole country (Little-Siebold 2004:26). It is no secret that this part of the country maintains the strongest expressions of what is generally perceived to be indigenous culture, consequently accompanied by the most severe poverty and discrimination, and thus attracting the interest of many researchers. However, as an anthropology student, I find it just as interesting to study the processes occurring among people with perhaps more complicated perceptions of their own identity and in regions where the expressions of indigenous culture are not so clear or obvious.

I came to Guatemala carrying my Bachelor's thesis in Anthropology; a theoretical study of how the Maya movement carries out its political work. My conclusions there were that the Maya movement's focus on cultural expressions, such as language, dress, and spirituality, could be seen in the greater context of movements working for social and economic rights all around the world, who in the latest decades have changed their focus towards cultural rights. Also, it appeared to me that in the case of Guatemala, this focus reproduces the poverty and exclusion of the indigenous groups. Being able to conduct fieldwork, I now wanted to investigate local expressions of this movement and how the clear focus on cultural identity affects relations to the society surrounding the movement. I knew that people outside the movement, both indigenous and non-indigenous, had opinions about it. I heard several persons expressing irritation (though they are well aware of that it is not "politically correct" to do so) over the fact that now when it is "trendy" to support the Maya culture, all the funds from the government with the goal of combating poverty seem to be directed to areas where mostly Mayas live and to organizations working with Maya groups, although severe poverty and extended deprivation also exist among non-indigenous groups across the country. It is no secret that the areas of the country most populated by indigenous groups also are the poorest and that the indigenous population in general suffers far more from lack of access when it comes to education, health care, political influence, and so on (see for example Wessendorf 2008). However, the feeling of injustice among other groups is there nevertheless, be it right or not. Thus, the key issues I wanted to investigate involved determining: how did the expressions of the Maya movement appear in a local setting, how did they reason about it themselves and how were the reactions from the surrounding society? As mentioned briefly, after arriving in Guatemala, my priorities changed. After meeting with researchers, reading the most recently published studies and research not available in Sweden and talking to some Maya activists and anthropologists working with these questions, I noticed that so much

was already said and done when it came to local (and not the least national) expressions of the Maya movement. It seemed to me there was no big need for yet another investigation about the relationship of the Maya movement to the multiculturalist discourse and how this was expressed through their work. However, what *was* needed appeared to be investigations about the influence of this discourse, both through the movement and institutions such as the state and the international community, on local settings and everyday life of Guatemalan people, not engaged in the movement. It was from his new focus that I formulated my research questions.

The school is one of the few places where historically there has been everyday coexistence between indigenous and non-indigenous groups in Guatemala (Arriola 2002b:199). Of course there are other places, the market, for example, but for a study conducted in such a short time (less than two months) it was important to find a place that was both limited and easily defined, in terms of space, time, and people. A school is such a place. Another reason I find a school to be a relevant place for my research has to do with the position of the school as a potentially important institution in any country. In Guatemala this is more than obvious as the school has become the way through which the state has implemented their different agendas concerning the indigenous population; from exclusion to assimilation and back again. This will be dealt with further in the thesis. In my Bachelor's thesis in Pedagogy it is shown that the curriculum and life in school is an important space for the politics of identity and culture in Guatemala; not least when it comes to the focus placed (or not) on indigenous languages (Ekermo 2007a). It seems that the school is the only institution that could "save" the indigenous languages. Indigenous languages are spoken less and less often in everyday contexts but the schools could, if they wanted, prioritize the teaching of these languages. Thus, the way the school chooses to act in these matters has important implications for society as a whole.

2.3 The problem of accessibility

My first and main issue during fieldwork was the problem of accessing an appropriate study site. I was unable to locate an exact site for my fieldwork from Sweden so I needed to quickly identify a suitable place on my arrival in Guatemala. This proved to be more difficult than I had hoped. I had made contacts with the research centre CIRMA in Antigua, working with and documenting, among other things, the history of ethnic relations and racism in Guatemala. I hoped they would be able to help me with suggestions or contacts leading me to a place where I could carry out my work. I was open to all suggestions when it came to the local field of study, but always had the possibility of a school in mind. Since I wrote my bachelor thesis in Pedagogy on discourses of bilingual education in Guatemalan schools, I felt comfortable with the school environment and how it works.

2.3.1 The "open" school; closed for controversial research

In an attempt to solve my problem of access the coordinator of CIRMA gave me the address of a nearby school in Antigua. She said I could go and ask if it was possible to conduct my fieldwork there. This was a school for girls who wanted to become teachers in the future, and it was known to have a rare even-mixture of girls from indigenous communities and girls from the Ladino (the Spanish-speaking majority population). It appeared to be an interesting place, so I went there to talk to the principal. At the time, the days that followed seemed to be my biggest waste of my time during my entire fieldwork. However, in retrospect I learned a great deal during those days. I was never formally denied the opportunity to conduct my study in this school, but the principal made it practically impossible for me to enter the school as a researcher. I had to wait several days to meet with the principal, show and hand in copies of extensive documentation and references of who I was, where I came from, and what I wanted to do, write a long official application stating my purpose and methodology. After this was completed, the principal said she would not deny me access as this was a school, a public place. However, I was to provide her with an exact description of the days and hours I was going to spend in the school and to write down the exact questions I was going to pose to the students and teachers: at this point I gave up. It was obvious she did not want me there. So I choose to retreat. Without the full support of the principal I believe I would not have been successful in conducting my study. I have learnt that it is the often inexplicable and unselfish support of people around you that enables you to follow through this kind of work. No official documents in the world can help you, if people are not willing to provide assistance.

The contrast of the above situation with how I was received in the school in San Antonio, where I ended up conducting my fieldwork, could not have been greater. I believe there is a reason for this difference. The school in Antigua was a large institution with students of different ethnic backgrounds from around the country. There are few official places in Guatemala with this daily coexistence. Given that I was not able to study their environment I do not know too much about it, but my assumption is that this coexistence works just fine. The school has a good reputation in town and appeared to be well organized and functioning. Therefore, why would they welcome me, asking uncomfortable questions about controversial matters? Why stir up unnecessary trouble? The question of ethnicity is always controversial in Guatemala. Everyone has an opinion and everyone has very personal experiences and memories related to discrimination or the civil war where lines often were drawn along the ethnic boundaries. I have heard people comparing the indigenous population to animals, and I have heard horrible stories about persecution during the war. The stories of conflict, violence, and discrimination are always just below the surface and I understand if people do not want to scratch the veneer.

2.3.2 "Selecting" field site and participants

To be honest I did not exactly choose the precise location of my fieldwork. As usual, my problem of accessibility was solved through personal connections and luck. Through the coordinator of the volunteer organization where I stayed in Jocotenango, outside Antigua, I came into contact with an American woman; Harriet Morales, who I was told ran a school for indigenous girls in Antigua. Upon meeting with her this proved not to be the case. She was actually the head of an NGO, running several school projects supported by international aid and cooperation in the region of Quiché. We established that she had actually traveled to Lund, Sweden to talk about her project because an NGO, Individuell Människohjälp (IM) provides support to her projects. As it happens, I live in Lund and am a member of IM, through which I am supporting her specific project financially. Despite the happy coincidence of the connection my problems were not resolved. There were no nearby projects I could visit so she put me in contact with her friend Zulma Lopez with the idea that perhaps I could visit her village San Antonio Aguas Calientes (hereafter referred to as San Antonio) outside Antigua and the school where her children are pupils.

Just as you might not choose your exact field of study, the same is true regarding the "selection" of participants and informants. Through Harriet, I met Zulma, who I would consider my key informant; then through Zulma I had the opportunity to meet other participants. In the school I interviewed a majority of the teachers, selected primarily for practical reasons, because they could spare the time or because they spent a lot of time in the school. I interviewed both men and women.

The focus on the organization, OKMA, is a different story. I wanted to talk to representatives of the Maya movement and understand their reasoning. I chose this organization because it was most often mentioned in the context of the Maya movement and their focus on language fit well with my study site being a school. The access to OKMA was much easier; I just got in contact with their office and later was able to interview some of its members.

2.4 Being in school

As Fanny Ambjörnsson states in her doctoral thesis *I en klass för sig* (2003:39), the method of participant observation has many advantages when it comes to accessing forms of knowledge that are often unspoken, but expressed in ways of acting, ways of talking about something, or just a feeling of something in a room. Observations, Ambjörnsson continues, further give us an opportunity to see any discrepancies between official rhetoric, what is being said in less formal contexts and what is really happening. This element is vital to the questions I am posing. I knew from the outset that people were unlikely to pour out their hearts about personal and sensitive issues to a complete stranger. The key to gaining an understanding of deeper feelings, was through the participant observation method.

In order to properly do this I had to invest my time and effort in the people and places that most interested me. This investment of time and energy was magnified many times in the responses of the people. I believe this is what makes fieldwork possible – the kindness and trust of the individuals you meet.

The primary part of my participant observation was carried out in the school *Jardin Christino, Gotitas de saber* in San Antonio Aguas Calientes, where I participated in the everyday life of the school in March and April of 2008. More information about the school and the students and teachers there, will follow later.

2.4.1 Creating trust and getting the job done

Different things are required of an investigator depending on where a study is carried out. In a school, I had the same experience as Ambjörnsson (2003:40) who writes that a prerequisite for creating trust and getting her work in the school done was continuity: being there everyday, showing up when you say you will and being available during class as well as during breaks. This was not possible all the time, because I also wanted to investigate the ideas of the people of the Maya movement residing in the town of Antigua. However, it was my constant objective to try as far as possible and although far from perfect, I believe I was ultimately successful. Another reason for my presence was to show my respect for the people working and studying in the school. I wanted them to know that I respected their work and took my study of their milieu seriously. The participant observation method relies very strongly on the *participating* element when interacting with children and I had no illusions of that I could act like a fly on the wall. I was part of the situation I was observing, influencing and changing the situation from the moment I first entered the classroom.

It is a known fact that fieldwork in the form of participant observation on a daily basis, can be quite boring and testing. Although choosing an institution where I could occupy some kind of a semi-teacher/semi-student role made things a little more interesting for me, it was not easy. It was not easy to blend in, not easy to get people to talk to me in a relaxed way, not easy to make the hours pass, and not easy to stay focused and present when sometimes all I wanted to do was to go back to my room and read a novel. However, it was my persistent presence that ultimately made my research possible. The students, the teachers, and the parents became used to seeing me around the school. I became a familiar face they trusted. It might not be obvious when one is in the middle of fieldwork wondering what is really being achieved by sitting in classrooms everyday, watching football games with the teachers, or having lunch with contacts such as Zulma. It is afterwards, when one sees the bigger picture that it becomes clear; to be present and just be there really *is* getting the job done.

2.4.2 Practical field methodologies

In this investigation I wanted to observe and understand the opinions and everyday comprehension of cultural identity existing in the two environments chosen: the school in San Antonio and OKMA, one of the central organizations in the Maya movement. To this end the methods of participant observation and interviews are most appropriate. Because I spend a lot of my time with children and teenagers I also employed the technique of asking the children questions through workshops in the classroom. This was something I prepared in collaboration with my supervisor in field, Aura Cumes. I came in contact with her through one of the scholars I interviewed. She is a Guatemalan anthropologist from a Kaqchiquel community. The intellectual support she provided was of vital importance to my work. She is also the author referred to as Cumes in “Cumes and Bastos” in this thesis.

The method of participant observation, or more or less “deep hanging around”, is what really paid off. This was a prerequisite for later longer, recorded interviews with people in and around the school. I made a total of 11 recorded interviews with a digital recorder, ranging from about 30 to 60 minutes. I later paid a friend in Guatemala to help transcribe the interviews. I also carried out semi-structured interviews with similar questions to all of the people working in the school in order to compare the answers to identify similarities and differences. These interviews were conducted in school, after the school day was over, or whenever a teacher had a moment to spare. I also conducted interviews in the home of Zulma and at the organization OKMA. These were more loosely structured interviews, where I knew what I wanted to ask, but also let the informant lead the interview somewhat. It thus became more of an informal talk than an interview. I believe the interviews I made in school were necessarily more structured, partly because of the expectations of the teachers. Despite the expectation that I be serious and structured, it was the times when I showed my weaknesses, made jokes, and tried to make my informants feel more comfortable that they really started talking. It was always a balance between maintaining my “scientist-role” and creating an informal mood where more honest words could be spoken.

The third method I used was a workshop-type setting with the students of the school. This was a method that was adjusted to the fact that I was dealing with children. I could not find out from a formal interview approach what the children thought about matters of their own cultural identity or their understanding of who is meant by the term “Maya” and who is not. Nor did it feel right to ask them such things one-on-one. So, after consulting my supervisor in field, I developed a workshop to ask these questions in a way to which the children could relate. The teachers were kind enough to lend me their classes for about an hour and I tried to make it into an opportunity where children were helping me understand their world, which they gladly did, and where they were able to ask me anything about my world, in which they were almost as interested as I was in theirs. We also played games and generally had a good time. I asked a number of questions that they answered by writing and painting on separate pieces of paper. It was obvious

they enjoyed being able to assist me. The workshops were really helpful for me to understand the way the children thought about these matters. The fact that they reacted quite differently to my questions than the adults became an important part of my analysis and conclusions. Compared to their parents and teachers, the children did not identify neither as indigenous, Kakchiquel, or Maya. I am therefore very glad that I spent the time with the children and gained their trust. They really helped me by simply being themselves and reacting instinctively and instantly to my questions.

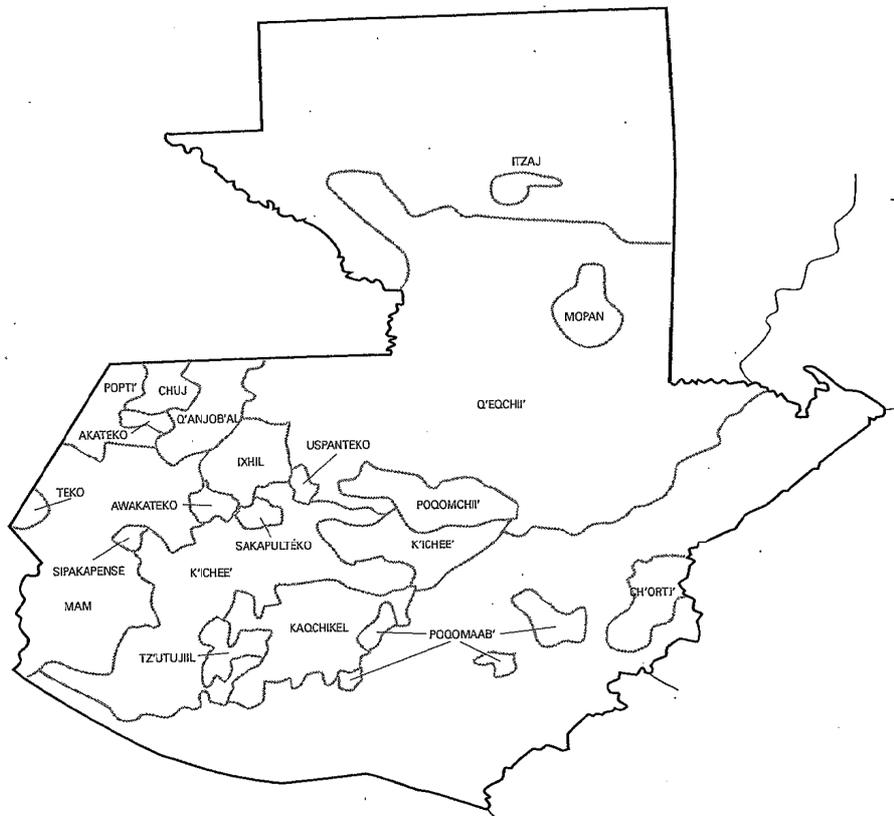
My investigation at OKMA consisted of a literary study of their organization, reading documents about the organization provided by OKMA, talking to associated parties, and interviewing one of its prominent members in a more formal manner. I also intended to participate in their workshops and investigations, but at the time of my fieldwork, the operations were somewhat slow and there was nothing happening in which I could participate. Obviously this was a little disappointing, but since my “real” fieldwork was in the school in San Antonio, I decided that it was not a major loss. OKMA is used as a point of reference in my study, but is not the main focus.

3 Contextualizing the situation of the "Mayas" in Guatemala

3.1 Where ethnicity permeates everyday life

The history of Guatemala as a part of Mesoamerica, where the classic Maya societies occupied the area for centuries, remains evident today through the 22 different linguistic groups with origins from this time (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:13). The Xinka and Garífuna groups are also classified as indigenous, but are not Maya. Based on its colonial heritage Guatemalan society is hierarchically structured between "Spanish" and "Indian" populations, summing up in its broad categories all the heterogeneous groups (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:13). This division was reinforced by the system of coffee plantation-based liberalism and adapted in the new model of capitalistic domination (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:13). Even if there are other ethnic groups in Guatemala and other relations between groups, for example that between different indigenous groups, it is the relation between the indigenous "group" and the non-indigenous "group", the latter lumped together under the term *Ladino*, that has marked and continues to mark Guatemalan society. The term *Indígena*, indigenous, carries with it associations of cultural and racial inferiority and is supposedly characterized primarily by "traditional" features of pre-Hispanic character, such as indigenous languages and the female dress, the *traje* (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:15). In contrast, the term *Ladino* is the Guatemalan way of saying "non-indigenous", and is associated with the western European and the modern, but it is defined only by this negation. There is also a third category that marks ethnic identity in Guatemala, and that is *Criollo*; the people born in Guatemala by European parents. This is the identity of the majority of the oligarchy in Guatemala, a small number of *Criollo* families setting the agenda when it comes to owning land and undertaking the big business and politics of the country. In this way recognizing and understanding ethnicity is a vital key to understanding the structure of Guatemalan society and also the actions of its individual members (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:17). It is particularly important given that almost 80 percent of the indigenous population lives in poverty, compared to 50 percent of the non-indigenous. Note that this figure hides a huge disparity of income *within* the non-indigenous group. In the *Ladino* group there are people on the extreme ends of the income scale, which is not the case among the indigenous groups (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:17). The indigenous population of Guatemala is generally poor. However, when talking about poverty in Guatemala it is not simply referencing an indigenous issue, but an issue that runs across ethnic boundaries.

In Guatemala, ethnicity serves as a way of categorizing the members of society into groups, based on cultural and biological traits that carry references to different origins. Like in the rest of Latin America the colonial regimes were structured in such a way that people would be economically and politically separated, based on the difference of origin. The categorization is hierarchical and the use of the term indigenous in Guatemala makes more of a social than a cultural reference. The result is a system where the different groups have been accorded different rights and obligations and the socioeconomic situation has developed based on those differences. As in many other places this system is an historical product that remains the basis of inequality in society today (Cumes and Bastos 2007a:24). However, ethnicity is not the only basis of exclusion and inequality in Guatemala; it often works together with other systems, such as class. As in expressions from the informants of Cumes and Bastos: “The Ladinos are rich and we the indigenous are poor” (2007a:25). There is also indignation over the fact that the poverty of the non-indigenous is not always as present in the political agenda as that of the indigenous. One informant to Cumes and Bastos said: “I am poor, but I am not Indian” (2007a:25). Below is a linguistic map of the country. The names of different indigenous language groups are displayed, in the south-east viewed as small islands in a Spanish-speaking sea where the capital Guatemala City is situated. This study was conducted in the south central of the country, where the language group Kakchiquel is displayed.



Sources: N. Cojtí (1988), England and Elliot (1990), and England (1996)

3.1.1 Consequences of “being indigenous” in Guatemala

The yearly report from IWGIA of 2008 states that the indigenous population of Guatemala continues to suffer the worst living conditions, as a consequence of “...the historic process of exclusion and marginalization that have characterized Guatemalan society, manifested primarily in racism towards and discrimination of indigenous peoples.” (Wessendorf 2008:90). Furthermore they mention statistics saying that 87 percent of the poor people are indigenous, 41.7 percent of the indigenous population is illiterate (compared to 17.7 percent of the non-indigenous), and only 5 percent of the indigenous population has access to public healthcare. The Political Constitution of the Guatemalan Republic states that the nation is both multiethnic and multicultural (Wessendorf 2008:90). The statistics illustrate some of the reality of this multicultural and multiethnic society, and the consequences of belonging to an indigenous group in this society. Knowing the reality behind the statement from the constitution, it is easy to see this statement as somewhat ironic, at best, or perhaps as deeply problematic and provocative.

A potentially influential event for the indigenous population is the general election, last held at the end of 2007 (the next one will be held in September 2011). The second round of the presidential elections was won by the so-called “social democrat” option, Álvaro Colom representing UNE, Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza, with around 53 percent of the votes. This was described as a triumph for the left by the international media (Wessendorf 2008:91). Their biggest competitors for power were the right wing PP, Partido Patriota, receiving about 47 percent of the votes in the second round. According to the European Union Election Observation Mission, overall the general elections were carried out in accordance with international standards for democratic elections. They also state that members of indigenous communities participated significantly, generating turnout rates above the national average. However, despite this and despite improvements over previous electoral processes, particularly in the municipal arena, indigenous access to elected political office remains far below their demographic portion of the nation as a whole. This situation is extremely visible in the Guatemalan Congress and among the candidates to the Presidency and Vice-Presidency of the Republic (*European Union Election Observation Mission, Guatemala 2007, Final Report on the General Elections*, page 4). Rigoberta Menchú Tum’s candidature for the presidency, both 2007 and 2011, is an exception. She is the most internationally famous Maya activist. In 1992 she received the Nobel Peace Prize for her work, but the majority of people I met in Guatemala, both indigenous and Ladino, question her credibility and her motives. People often sighed and said that she was just a puppet that the international community could use to show off and who for herself mainly wanted to achieve personal goals of power and wealth. She does not appear to be very popular in her home country.

3.2 La violencia

In the middle of the 1950s, the fight against communism was turning into a reason to punish differences in political opinion. Subsequently, with the rise of armed organizations in the 1960s the civil population turned into an “enemy within” for the state and its armed forces (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:57). From the guerillas’ perspective, this was an armed struggle to challenge the legitimacy of the state and the exploitation of Guatemalan peasants by wealthy landowners and export-oriented commercial elite. The guerillas sought to radicalize the poor peasant-population in class terms, whereas the army decided to punish them so they would not collaborate or join the armed opposition (Warren 1998:86). Thus, the indigenous population ended up caught in the middle of this violent conflict. The army received help from outside agencies in their pursuit. As part of their international war against communism, the USA and its allies (in this case, primarily Germany and Israel) fought a war against the indigenous population of Guatemala. Not only the actively subversive were killed, but also “potential” subversives, all of whom were assumed to be of the indigenous population (Fischer, Brown 1996:5). This was not the case, although political options were non-existent and the guerilla organizations (unified from 1982 in UNRG: Unión Revolucionaria Nacional de Guatemala), became the only forum for critical discussions regarding state and were often the only place where one could run to save one’s life from the military repression (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:57). More than 200 thousand people were killed during the armed conflict, and more than 1 million were forced to flee and leave their homes or the country. The majority of these victims belonged to the indigenous groups.

Between 1978 and 1985, the western highlands of Quiché, where a great part of the indigenous population resides, was the site of the most intense period of the conflict. In the countryside, this period is often referred to as *la violencia*. During these years more than four hundred villages were totally destroyed, there was constant repression and selective killings in other settlements. As an attempt to distance themselves from “political” groups, mass evangelical conversions took place in the communities (Warren 1998:86). This period left deep wounds in the communities and in the collective minds of the people. The anthropologist Kay B. Warren compares it to the conflict in Northern Ireland and the intifadas in Israel as these conflicts, “like *la violencia*, gives a shape to memories and to later experiences of repression” (1998:86). It is a living memory that is ever present in Guatemala and has had a great impact on interethnic relations. As Warren puts it, this is shown in four ways. First, both sides in the conflict manipulated and inflamed unresolved tensions in the Guatemalan racist system, dating back to the invasion of the Spanish and the resulting plantation economy. Second, *la violencia* was understood by all parties to be a conflict with strong ethnic overtones. Many indigenous felt that the conflict was simply an excuse to destroy the indigenous population. Third, the war had - and still has - a great effect on interethnic relations in many communities. It intensified ethnic distrust on both sides. Ladino hacienda owners were targets for assassination by guerilla groups, and indigenous

groups feared the connections of local Ladinos with military authorities, who massacred whole communities. Fourth, the conflict started a resurgence of cultural identity in communities and amongst university students (Warren 1998:87).

The effects of the war and the violent history of the country is also evident in other ways in society. This is a quote from Human Rights Watch World Report 2011:

Guatemala's weak and corrupt law enforcement institutions have proved incapable of containing the powerful organized crime groups and criminal gangs that contribute to one of the highest violent crime rates in the Americas. Illegal armed groups, which appear to have partly evolved from counterinsurgency forces operating during the civil war that ended in 1996, are believed to be responsible for targeted attacks on civil society actors and justice officials. Journalists, especially those covering corruption, drug trafficking, and accountability for abuses committed during the civil war, also face threats and attacks. More than a decade after the end of the conflict, impunity remains the norm for human rights violations. The ongoing violence and intimidation threaten to reverse the little progress that has been made toward promoting accountability. (Human Rights Watch World Report 2011: Guatemala)

In many ways La violencia has also shaped the organization of the Maya movement. I will discuss this further below.

3.3 The Maya movement

In their book about the Maya movement, Santiago Bastos and Aura Cumes write that the first concrete manifestations of a political movement concerned with questions of the indigenous population that rose above the local level in Guatemala was evident in the 1970's (2003:19). This was when the Guatemalan state had to recognize the movement as a political subject. At this time there were several factions of the movement, each expressing different views on culture, class, and identity (2003:20). There was the "popular" component of the movement, made up of political organizations wanting to combat socioeconomic injustice, to promote Human Rights, and the rights of the poor and agricultural population (Stern 2001:56). The "cultural" part of the movement was driven largely by Maya academics, such as linguists and anthropologists. A common understanding in this group was that the Maya *pueblo* had somehow managed to maintain its "roots" even after 500 years of contamination from outside. From this perspective, the largest threat to the *pueblo* was assimilation into the dominant society (Stern 2001:56). These cultural activists saw Maya languages as essential to cultural resistance and the revitalization of these languages as crucial for resisting domination from ladino society and the colonial state (Stern 2001:56).

According to both Cumes and Bastos (2003), Warren (1998), and Stern (2001), these factions later converged under the peace accords that were signed in 1996, in the Coordination of Organizations of the Maya People of Guatemala (COPMAGUA). COPMAGUA worked towards a consensus in key issues for the indigenous group, in order to influence the contents and conditions of the accords. As a result of pressures, compromises, and consensus-building, as well as with direct support from the United Nations and European NGOs, indigenous rights gained a forum in the negotiations. This is when indigenous groups gained institutionalized representation in Guatemalan dominant society (Warren 1998:55). The fact that indigenous rights were a separate element of the peace negotiations became the breakthrough for the movement. The government was called on to pursue the commitments and reforms contained in the accords. Below are excerpts of the rights expressed in the accords that relate to indigenous identity, they are taken more or less directly from a text by Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, one of the most influential Maya intellectuals of the movement:

- Recognition of Guatemala's indigenous people as descendants of ancient people who speak diverse, historically related languages and share a distinctive culture and cosmology...
- Recognition of the legitimacy of using indigenous language in schools, social service, official communications...
- Recognition and protection of Maya spirituality and spiritual guides and the conservation of ceremonial centres...
- Commitment to educational reform, specifically the integration of Maya materials and educational methods...
- Recognition of communal lands and the reform of the legal system so Maya interests are adequately represented in the adjudication...

According to Cumes and Bastos the accords relating to the rights of the indigenous peoples were a child of the time. Of a Guatemala in the 1990's that was leaving an epoch of crises for the domination model, but that kept its ideological base of racism and nationalism intact (2007:61). Much of the focus of the accords is on the *recognition* of indigenous languages, cosmology, spirituality, dress, customary law, and sacred places (Warren 1998:57). This is clearly evident from the short excerpts above. In the accords, the government repeatedly promises to promote constitutional reform to make Guatemala a "multiethnic, culturally plural, and multilingual" nation state. As already mentioned, the different factions of the movement converged in this peace process, and one became dominant. The "popular movement" in this process adopted much of the discourse of the "cultural movement". As Stern explains (2001:57) "(...) many organizations within the popular movement explicitly articulated their demands in terms of ethnicity. They repeated the discourse of the Mayan cultural elite, with slight alterations.". That the focus on cultural identity was a consequence of certain parts of the indigenous community setting the agenda of the movement, is a well known fact. K B. Warren, professor of anthropology at Harvard, notes this in her work (2003). I will return to this idea later in this chapter.

Two concrete reasons to why the movement articulated their demands in this way are that the national and international discourse on identity politics and indigenous rights changed in the late 1980s and early 1990's (Stern 2001, Friedman 1994), making these bases for politics more feasible and fruitful than perspectives focusing on class. Furthermore, according to my supervisor in field Aura Cumes, the civil war had created a fear of supporting political ideas associated with leftist opinions, because so many people were killed by the U.S.-supported military for their left-leaning political ideologies.

As with similar movements, the Maya also enjoyed political support and legitimacy in the international arena (Stern 2001:8). Maria Stern (2001:8) states that globally, increasing attention was given to indigenous demands in the early 1990s, which was reflected in the form of human-rights-focused NGOs, the United Nations, and the ILO convention 169. At the same time, there was a general shift away from the integrationist policies that characterized earlier decades, replaced by a move towards pluralism and autonomy (Stern 2001:8). In the chapter *Understanding multiculturalism*, on multiculturalism and the advent of this sort of ideology, I use the work of Friedman, Bastos, and Cumes to elaborate on this global change and how a movement like the Maya movement is a part of the shift.

Although it is difficult to concisely describe the goals and priorities of the large Maya movement, made up of different organizations, Warren attempts this and summarizes it in six points:

1. Language revitalization.
2. Revitalization of Maya chronicles of culture, history and resistance to the Spanish innovation – such as the *Popol Vuh* and the *Annals of the Kakchiqueles*. Fascination is great with the Maya calendrics and numerics.
3. Production of text and teacher training materials for use in intercultural school programs.
4. Revitalization of Maya leadership norms: community councils, midwives and Maya shaman-priests.
5. A radical transformation of Guatemalan politics to accommodate a *pluricultural* nation with decentralized state services.

(Warren 1998:39)

The Pan-Mayanism, as Warren calls the phenomenon, (aiming at the multinational scope of the Maya movement, wanting to include all people of the pre-colonial Maya empire stretching from Honduras, Belize, and Guatemala up through Mexico), has been criticized for making the wrong choices in stressing their cultural identity and ethnic discrimination as Guatemala's core social problem. Maya leaders do not see class conflict as their issue (Warren 1998:48). Rather they seek to build a cross-class movement based on the Maya identity. With this goal, questions of class could, of course, be a potential problem. A poor, landless farmer in a rural area may have problems relating to the well-educated academic

living a modern life in a Guatemalan town, if not for the emphasis on the mutual “Maya descendant”.

Warren (2003), England (2003), and Stern (2001) all write about the background of the people involved in the Maya movement. Most of the actors in the movement are indigenous people who have received a fair amount of formal education, an increasingly large number have a university education (England 2003:734). Most often, England states, they come from farming families in rural villages or town centers and not from the poorest of such families. Several hundred have received education or training in linguistics from organizations in the Maya movement, such as the organization OKMA that is part of my study, and through this education have become part of the movement.

3.3.1 Maya movement and effects on society

With the use of a Guatemalan version of the multiculturalist ideology, “the Maya” has become the way to speak about ethnicity; an official version, or in other words, a discourse. The conditions were created for a group to begin to self-identify as Mayas. Because this group is an influential one, an elite according to some descriptions (Stern 2001), their ideas also influence Guatemalan society. In my bachelor’s thesis in Pedagogy, I studied the influence of multiculturalism through the Maya movement in the school curriculum in Guatemala. The thesis was a discourse analysis of both the spoken and written word, and found that the new curriculum was in-line with this discourse. I have not studied other public policy, but from what I understand from the public debate and other researchers, this effect is also present outside the school.

Cumes and Bastos (2007a:55) notes that the fact that the term Maya is now a generalized term and the politically correct way to refer to the indigenous population of Guatemala, shows the magnitude of the effect of the Maya movement on social movements (both indigenous and non-indigenous), the state, NGOs and the general population. The linguist Nora C. England acknowledges the same tendency. She writes that the ideas generated by the Maya intellectuals have become quite generalized among the Maya population (2003:734). She notes the influence in the national political arena and says that they are visibly influential in all levels of society, with the exception of the very highest. This is in spite of the fact that their formal political influence and popular base is weak. The ideas to which she is referring includes revalorization of Maya culture and language, demand for an education that takes Maya languages into account, access to public services in local languages, more fair economic and social opportunities and some notions of political autonomy. According to England (2003:734), although the Maya movement has no formal political representation, current leaders of the movement have occupied (and continue to occupy) several key political positions: including Minister of Culture, Vice Minister of Culture, Vice Minister of Education, Vice Minister of Agriculture, and Director of Bilingual Education. Cumes and Bastos (2007a:19) write that today the presence of Maya activists in decision-making institutions is greater than ever. However, they note

that the effects are not necessarily as great as one might anticipate. The reason for this is conservative power structures and the fact that the sort of demands the Maya movement makes do not seem to mobilize those it most concerns: the indigenous population in their every day life (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:19).

3.4 Mayanization: Who are the Maya?

Who are the Maya? This is a critical question, and one upon which I did not reflect sufficiently in the beginning. When I proposed my study, I could not imagine that the term “Maya” was something new when used to define the indigenous population. Until the 1990s the term exclusively referred to the Guatemalan population in pre-colonial times. But during the 1990s it became part of the vocabulary of researchers and activists in reference to the present-day indigenous population (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:55). This modern use of the term is closely linked to the expansion of the pan-Maya movement which was marked by a shared identification as “Maya” by people who had previously been identified or self-identified as indigenous or even as *Indios*. The “recovery” of the ancient Maya identity became both a source of pride and a basis for claiming political rights in a racist society where Ladinos were considered valid members of the society, and *Indios* were not. In the dominant discourse of the Maya movement this recovery of tradition became a central organizing theme (Stern 2001:7). After more than a decade the term is established in the political and academic spheres and at present is the politically correct way to reference this population. Along with this new etiquette, there has developed a new understanding of the “pueblo Maya” as a culturally differentiated collective with a distinct history (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:55).

According to Cumes and Bastos (2007a) the Maya identity is a construct, a consequence of a political process in Guatemala with international connections, taking form during the process of signing the peace accords and the formation of the Maya movement as we know it today. This process of constructing a new identity, through which members could claim rights and pride, is what Cumes and Bastos call *Mayanization*. The concept of Mayanization helps us understand how the Maya movement is the most important agent in the process of introducing and diffusing the multicultural ideology in Guatemala. As such, the concept is much wider than just referring to whether people are (re)defining themselves as Maya or not. It refers to a larger and more complex process (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:21). Based on this premise, perhaps I should write “Maya” with quotation marks throughout the entire thesis, in order to show my awareness of the underlying considerations. But instead I declare my awareness here. This is also an important consideration that must be fully acknowledged when drawing conclusions based on my fieldwork. While recognizing that many people now self-identify as Mayas, it also needs to be respectfully acknowledged that many people (as will be shown in this investigation) do not.

3.5 Educate to civilize, exclude, or assimilate?

The school has been and continues to be a central agent in the politics of ethnicity in Guatemala. Among other things, this has to do with the central significance of language for the indigenous culture and the Maya movement. The school also brings about the possibilities of inclusion or exclusion in the dominant society and has always been a means through which politics has expressed its wishes for the people. Arriola (2002a:207) explains how in the past the educational system was used as an instrument of the Guatemalan state to transform and assimilate the indigenous population into “civilization” - that is, the western-Ladino perspective of civilization. The indigenous population was considered backwards and barbaric so this was something that had to be done before they could be integrated into *la nación guatemalteca*, the Guatemalan nation. Through the educative system national identity could be built on a basis of common knowledge and national values. This was to “socialize” the individual and make him or her feel part of this nation (Arriola 2002a:207).

At the time of liberation from the colonial power in 1821, the universality of citizenship was actualized and directed towards all groups. However the Guatemalan state eventually realized that an assimilation project to be enforced through education across the country, was too big to be practical. They thus delegated the responsibility of educating the rural children to the *finqueros*, the owners of the cultivated land, the *fincas*, in 1877 (Arriola 2002a:211). However, the *finqueros*, foreigners as well as Guatemalans, had little interest in educating the people working as forced labor on their lands. They did not need the people who cut the sugar cane and harvested the coffee beans to be able to read, write, or count. As a result of sabotage by the *finqueros* and also resistance from the indigenous people to the politics of assimilation, the education program was, of course, a failure. Consequently, the rural children were educated to be good agricultural workers, rather than Guatemalan citizens, which helped to reinforce the ethnic differences and the racism stating the inferiority and incivility of the indigenous people (Arriola 2002a:212). a:226).

3.5.1 The Guatemalan Spring

With the revolution of October 1944 and the beginning of the ten-year period often referred to as the “Guatemalan spring”, the old idea of assimilating the indigenous population was actualized, but it was no longer articulated in terms of “civilizing”, but rather alphabetization and thoughts about promoting bilingualism in schools, in order to promote the greater goal of *castellanización* and including the illiterate population of the rural areas in voting and the general political system (Arriola 2002b:197). The politics of segregation, - necessary to justify the forced labor of the indigenous in the production of export products such as coffee, bananas, and sugar - needed to be replaced with something that would allow

production to continue, but that was justifiable in the awakening of a new democracy where forced labor was no longer acceptable. According to Arriola (2002b:198), the October Revolution planted the idea that the integration of the indigenous peoples in the national project must involve making the indigenous become workers and consumers in the capitalistic development of the Guatemalan agriculture. At this time the state also began to recognize that the diversity of languages, costumes, and religious practices constituted an important cultural reserve that should be protected and also integrated into the national culture (Arriola 1998b:198). Alphabets for the indigenous languages began to be elaborated although the final goal remained castellanization and efforts to incorporate indigenous languages were primarily aimed at making the process more effective. The idea of bilingual education in Guatemala originates from this time, an idea that has had tremendous influence on the education system and that continues to be debated today. The difference today is that children have a legal right to be taught in their mother tongue in an educational system that is supposed to be multilingual. The success and effectiveness of the politics of integration persisting between 1944-1985 can be questioned: statistics from 1981 show that 77.4 percent of the rural indigenous population was illiterate (Arriola 1998b:198).

3.5.2 The educational system and the Maya

Arriola writes that the educational system of Guatemala may be characterized as a segregating force for several reasons: it is not equally accessible to everyone, the conditions and quality differ. The inequality in education and knowledge has been used by the dominant groups, reinforcing and perpetuating the inequalities in society, particularly with regard to class. And because, in Guatemala, class is inextricably linked with ethnicity, it has further strengthened the connections between these two (Arriola 2002b:199).

The imagined *Guatemalan*, created and to some extent maintained, by the state until the 1980s, was usually focused on the Ladino. However under pressure from the armed internal conflict and the emergence of the Maya movement supported by multiple international agencies, ideology began to move towards the idea of a pluriethnic Guatemala (Arriola 2002b:199). The educational projects within this pluriethnic agenda offered an alternative to the prolonged exclusion that the educational system had historically given the indigenous communities. It generated an alternative to the system of discrimination that wanted to assimilate but was unsuccessful. Focus shifted towards Maya languages for the indigenous people and a more segregated education system. Arriola (2002b:198) goes as far as to say that it was actually this prolonged segregation of the indigenous groups in the education system that generated, among other things, the *mayanization*. The fact that the multiethnic schools, now the norm in Guatemala, are one of the few spaces of coexistence and social interaction between different ethnic groups, does not make it less interesting. Because even though the schools are often a scene of coexistence in Guatemala, outside the segregation persists (Arriola 2002b:200).

4 Researching Maya cultural identity

I have now given a background to the cultural and political situation in Guatemala today. In order to understand what cultural identity is and how it influences the lives of people I need the help of other researchers. This is vital for answering my research question. I also want to understand what the multicultural discourse is and how it is connected to the Maya movement. This will help me understand the reactions and actions of my informants, who I suppose are affected by this discourse.

4.1 How can we understand cultural identity?

What does it really mean to “have” a cultural identity, Pnina Werbner asks us, when it is a concept that constantly resolves into its component parts, every time we look closer at it? (1997:3). Within the concept of cultural identity there are always multiple positionings, based on gender, age, class etc. Therefore, no absolute borders or definition of such an identity are possible. In the anthology *Debating Cultural Hybridity* (1997), a point of departure is that all cultures are hybrids to their nature. Even if they might be experienced as bounded, cultures develop through unreflective borrowings, exchange, and inventions (Werbner & Momood 1997:5). Therefore, to claim a bounded concept of a culture is an essentialist project, carried out by certain people under specific circumstances. It is a project related to class, education, and position in the world system. But, as Werbner points out, if cultural identity is nothing more than an intellectual construction – from where do its strong mobilizing powers arise? (1997:4). It is obvious to all that culture matters, both in the life of people and in national and international politics.

Thomas Hylland Eriksen is another anthropologist who observes that the concept of culture falls apart when we begin to analyze it. He observes how identity politics tend to turn personal identities into political identities. But when people are mobilized on “ethnic” grounds, it is most often really a question of resources, power, and equal rights (1999:38); thus, the focus becomes misdirected. In his pamphlet *Kulturterrorismen: en uppgörelse med tanken om kulturell renhet* (1999) he criticizes the tendency to make cultural communities into political communities and asks for alternatives. This is what happens when political projects gain better hearing when they look like a struggle for cultural rights. Thus, he says, “peasants” in Bolivia are now “Indians”... (1999: 25). But

Eriksen also explains that people need to relate to a myth of the past, in order to exist in the present. This applies both to individuals and to the *imagined communities* of Benedict Anderson. The myth of the past is a dynamic and changing process, not a substance or a “thing” (1996:52).

In the words of Zygmund Bauman, “identity depends on the ability to chose/reuse some parts of the culture that is available to all” (1999:xiv). According to Bauman, as social and physical mobility increases, our identities are no longer given, but must be “invented” by us. This is why our time is a time of “constructed” cultural identities (1999:xxx).

Jonathan Friedman’s explanation as to why cultural identity and its accompanying politics and cultural movements have appeared in a new way during recent decades has a slightly different focus. In *Cultural Identity and Global Process* (1994) he outlines how national and ethnic fragmentation in the “centre”, in a world-system theory context, coincides with an increased focus on cultural past and traditional identity and a shift away from class and nationality. At the same time culturally-based movements are growing in the “periphery”, or the fourth world (1994:87); this is not a coincidence. These tendencies are a sign of a general global crisis, where national identity and citizenship are weakened in favor of ethnicity, language, and other concrete cultural expressions (1994:86). The crisis is a fragmentation of the hegemony of the “centre” in the world system, today the western world. The effect of a collapsing modernity in the centre is an increased need for cultural identity both there and in the periphery. In the centre people are looking for a cultural past that has been lost, and in the periphery people want cultural autonomy (1994:90).

It is apparent that the Maya movement in Guatemala is an example of this; appearing at the moment in time when it was logical and easier for it to do so. In the case of Guatemala it has involved a continued focus on the binary opposition Maya/Ladino that so characterized the last 500 years.

4.2 A research field of strong political connotations

When I arrived in Guatemala it soon became clear that I had to position myself as a researcher in this field. I did not know that I was facing such a divided and complex field of study, where research, politics, and activism are so intimately connected. It was virtually impossible to remain neutral. Of course I had some level of pre-understanding of the issue and the related ideas and opinions; otherwise I would not have undertaken this research. The urge to know more, to understand better this complex and divided society, was always my driving force.

Many of the intellectuals that make up the body of researchers writing about the Maya movement are themselves very clearly involved in the movement and in its political and practical work. In many cases activism and academia are so

closely intertwined there is no way of separating them, or seeing them as distinct entities or practices. This is especially true for the anthropologists and linguists working with questions concerning the Maya communities or languages. These intellectuals are Guatemalans as well as foreigners, some living in Guatemala for many years and some living in the United States, working in North American universities but travelling to Guatemala on a regular basis.

One of the many North American researchers is Nora C. England, professor in the Department of Linguistics, University of Texas at Austin. Since the early 1980s she has written and published academic texts on the subject of Maya languages and the role of language in Mayan society in linguistic and anthropological journals. England (2003:742) clearly states how the linguists/activists at OKMA and other institutions and organizations working with Maya languages where she has taught and conducted research during the last 30 years, have influenced her way of “thinking about language, ideology, language politics, and the contributions that linguists can make to these matters.” (England 2003:742). And of course it has influenced her! A wide range of the research conducted by OKMA was carried out under her direction; she is the current *Asesora Académica* at OKMA and consequently has been intimately involved in the Maya movement and its practical work for a long time. In my opinion, this fact has influenced the actual research questions she poses and also the potential answers to the questions. For example, when reading her text mentioned above, published in *American Anthropologist* (2003:732-743), it is clear that the intellectual starting points of OKMA are also her own. Surely, for example, she is aware that “Maya” is not an uncontested term that may be discussed in a number of ways with regard to how it should be used and what it really means. This awareness is not evident in her text though. I do not consider it too bold a statement to say that England has developed her theoretical starting point in accordance with that of OKMA. Another example of this starting point concerns the conservation and revitalization of language and culture. In England’s text there is a constant underlying assumption that this is something unproblematic and necessary for the wellbeing of the people characterized as Mayas. The question of *why* the preservation of Mayan languages is important when they are no longer as commonly used is never even posed. The necessity is assumed, but not discussed. England has carried out a tremendously large amount of top quality research and practical work when it comes to documenting and standardizing grammatical rules for Mayan languages, training linguistic professionals in Guatemala etc., but I would expect more from a researcher than a reproduction of the local ideology. However, as stated previously, research around these issues is highly politicized in Guatemala (as elsewhere) and one’s intellectual statements tend to become one’s political statements.

To aid the analysis and understanding of this research field, I will present the two opposite sides of the field. One side is in favor of the multiculturalist ideology that has influenced the Maya movement and made it to what it is today, and the other argues against the total focus on ethnicity in analyzing the Guatemalan society. At the core of the different perspectives are opposing opinions about what cultural identity really *is*, and what it means to be Maya

today. This has to do with the degree of essentialism placed on the terms culture and identity. What is apparent in the literature is that a critique of the multiculturalists discourse is usually followed by skepticism towards the positions and opinions of the Maya movement. This reflects the fact that the Maya movement is associated with only one of these positions. On one side are the constructivist perspectives on ethnicity, culture, and identity and on the other are the more essentialist perspectives claiming that there are, for example, timeless characteristics of the Maya. I consider the close relationship of many of the researchers with the political Maya movement, to be the reason for their position when it comes to analyzing Maya politics and strategies in relation to the national society. This is not said in order to diminish or dismiss their theoretical positions, it is simply a way to understand and to place them in a context.

4.3 Different opinions on the multicultural ideology

The division between the two positions is clearly demonstrated by the American anthropologist Kay B. Warren (1998:75) as she describes a seminar she held in Guatemala in 1989 to an audience of Maya scholars and intellectuals. I believe this is also a story of the journey of a researcher coming to a place with certain ideas and opinions, but having to rethink those pre-existing ideas when confronted with local positions. In the seminar she made her case for an interactive view of identity where identity becomes practice, representation, and negotiation: a constructionist view (Warren 1998:73). Professor Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil, a Maya public scholar who is widely regarded as the principal intellectual voice of the Maya movement, held the closing remarks at the seminar (see chapter 7 for an account of his ideas and writings). He argued forcefully that the role of North American intellectuals, such as Warren, working in Guatemala with questions concerning the indigenous population, should be to help identify continuities in Maya culture, the timeless characteristics of the Maya. This urge came as a contrast to the ideas presented by Warren that there is no essential Maya, no constant core, but rather a complex self-authorship related to what is going on in society (Warren 1998:74). While the researcher from outside wanted to demonstrate constructivist perspectives on ethnicity, many Mayas themselves were articulating a cultural essentialism. It is easy to understand why this must be very provocative to the activists of the Maya movement. It becomes clear that the issue is very political, not just political in the sense of it treating societal matters that are full of conflict, but also political in the sense of arguing along quite traditional left-right political lines when it comes to wanting to stress or tone down the focus on class-issues. This does not mean that people involved in the Maya movement are not concerned with the poverty of the indigenous population, but it has been expressed that class conflict is not their primary issue - rather they try to build Maya solidarity above the lines of class, education, location, etc. (Warren 1998:49). What is obvious, however, is that both camps consider

themselves radical in relation to the present situation, and each criticizes the other for being backwards and racist.

4.4 The skeptics

Kay B Warren (1998:9,223) mentions several authors skeptical of the ethnic focus of rights movements, seeing the indigenous leadership as reflecting the opinions of a bourgeoisie rather than the interest of the majority of the indigenous, agrarian class. The research centre AVANCSO in Guatemala is one example of an intellectual environment that has long stressed the class-perspective. There are several researchers who refuse to use the terms “Maya” or “indigenous”, which, they argue, hide the true situation of the matter: being that the groups are in fact working-class, or farmers/campesinos and should be named as such (Hervik 2003:23). In this way they choose to emphasize economic organization and political relations above ethnic classifications. These critics question the validity of the politics practiced by the Maya movement because they find no clear ethnic division between the indigenous population and the mixed, Ladino mainstream (Warren 1998:223).

For a clearer understanding of the different positions in the debate, I outline the opinions of some of the people involved.

4.4.1 Morales: Culture as politics

One open sceptic of the multiculturalist discourse is Mario Roberto Morales, who works in cultural and literary studies. Analyzing the dominant discourses, texts, and statements with names such as Franz Fanon and Laclau & Mouffe close at hand, he poses a serious critique towards “the essentialism of the culturalistic identity construction known as “Maya” (Morales 1999:220). He claims that the understanding of the term “Maya” (he uses quotation marks) is very important, because if we recognize the term as valid, we also recognize that the indigenous population are “Mayas” and consequently that there is a “*pueblo maya*” and a “*cultura maya*” perfectly separated from what then becomes the opposite; the “*pueblo ladino*” and the “*cultura ladina*” (1999:220). According to Morales this essentialist vision can be found, among other places, in the Accord on Identity and the rights of Indigenous Peoples created and signed during the peace negotiations in 1996. As mentioned earlier, these accords have been vital to the Maya movement in defending their positions and claiming rights. Morales opinion is that the accords depart from an essentialist view of what is Maya and that this makes for a binary division, making it hard to reform the education system, the divided political landscape of the country, the legal system etc. He even claims that this fragments the nation, the rule of law, and raises the risk of an ethnic conflict (1999:220). In this way Morales wants to show how the essentialist

ideology of the Maya movement has consequences for the whole of Guatemalan society. He clearly states that the discussion has nothing to do with the validity of the cultural and ethnic claims made by the indigenous groups, for example claims for more regional autonomy. These he finds undeniable. He rather wants to point at the essentialist character of the arguments behind these claims. He sees that the argument presupposes a pure ethnical and cultural origin of the “Mayas” of today, and he strongly criticizes Cojtí for supposing that there is a “racially pure” Maya. (1999:236). He wants us to see that “Maya” is a political and ideological construct that could be used to give more power to the historically oppressed and discriminated indigenous peoples, but that *is* a political construct. To insist that the *pueblo maya* is a trans-historical subject with a culture and cosmovision unchanged by time, implies a confrontation with the Ladino that makes the democratic development of the Guatemalan nation very difficult (1999:226). According to Morales, the goal should be an expansion of the discussion of what is meant by the Guatemalan nation, a wider concept of the nation rather than a politically constructed binary ethnic division of it.

Admittedly I find this goal appealing. Even more so because Morales wants to promote another vision, one that do not accept that some in leadership racialize and ethnicize the problems that make us blind to their class basis (1999:233). Making a plural democracy possible in the times of neoliberal triumph demands that this racialization and essentialism come to an end. But, there are also some parts of Morales argument that I find problematic. For example it may seem a little disassociated from the real life of real people. It appears as if the discussion takes place far above the heads of the people concerned and one kind of misses a “real” field. In this way, Cumes and Bastos, though similar in their arguments, are unlike Morales: their writings are all based on anthropological fieldwork.

4.4.2 Cumes and Bastos: Words as politics

That which Morales calls *el mayismo*, meaning “...the ideology that is characterized by cultural essentialism and religious fundamentalism coming from some intellectual indigenous leaders.”(Morales 1999:235, my translation) is named *mayanismo* by others, and by Aura Cumes and Santiago Bastos is named *mayanización*, mayanization. I prefer using the term of Cumes and Bastos, because it implies that the phenomenon is a process rather than something static. Cumes and Bastos are social anthropologists, drawing conclusions based on experiences in the field and from theoretical and ideological starting points. However, in my opinion they end up with conclusions not too far from those of Morales. They, like Morales, see the use of the term “Maya” as very important and symbolic of the new public policy and the politics directed towards this ethnically-differentiated population (2007a:11). It is a symbol of the new way of talking about cultural and ethnic diversity in Guatemala, which is related to the change in the way of speaking about these issues on a global scale within the multicultural ideology (2007a:11). According to Cumes and Bastos, this new

ideology is being promoted by Mayan activists and other actors in Guatemala through the bilingual education, special Maya schools, Maya ceremonies, and arranged workshops against racism that are now taking place in many parts of the country. They state (as did the conclusion of my bachelor thesis in social anthropology) that while the Mayan groups and activists are playing an increasingly greater role in Guatemalan politics and hold more decisive posts in the society, the indigenous groups have not changed their excluded position when it comes to issues such as education, healthcare, and the generally high level of extreme poverty (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:11, Ekermo 2007b). This is a paradox.

As mentioned previously, Maya has only been a part of the vocabulary since the 1990s (Cumes & Bastos 2008:55). The introduction of the term was a reaction of the academic world to a process that had been underway for some time, where the political participation of the indigenous groups were beginning to claim a collective cultural difference, based on a shared history of their own (2008:55). Thus the term has a recent history in Guatemala and when this history is researched, it is a major source of information as to the history and the development of the Maya movement in Guatemala as well as its changing relationships to other movements, the state, international agencies, and the indigenous population of the country (2008:55).

The main critique of Cumes and Bastos with regard to this discourse is that it will not end the discrimination against and poverty of the indigenous people. Because it departs from the idea that the cultural characteristics are the cause of the inequalities, one might think that if we change the legal status of these characteristics, the exclusion will end. According to Cumes and Bastos, the strengthening of ethnic pride may serve as a step on the way to changing the ethnic-based discrimination, but it cannot guarantee there will be no more oppression (Cumes & Bastos 2007:377). Instead they suggest that people working in the Maya movement should widen their doctrinal multicultural base, to become more flexible and inclusive. To be less dependent on the nationalistic heritage, to see the “peoples” as collectives that are not necessarily internally homogenous, and to reduce focus on particular symbols that for many have mostly been symbols of exclusion. According to Cumes and Bastos, it is possible to construct new alliances that offer other solutions to an inequality that is ethnically marked (2007:378).

Morales, Bastos and Cumes are in agreement on the fact that the material and cultural claims made by the indigenous peoples are justified and must be attended to, beginning with the respect for their specific cultural expressions. Their projects do not stand in opposition with the claims for rights that the movement make. Cumes positions herself as an indigenous woman, even though she feels that this might be counterproductive to her personal wish not to add to the construct of Mayanization. However, this position might give more credit to their analysis, because some may believe that their critique means that they are opposed to the rights of indigenous people, which is not the case.

It sometimes seems that the debate about the above mentioned issues in Guatemala is merely a debate about terminology - about how to use words and what words to use - a philosophical debate. In some sense this is true, but in

another sense the difference in the effects on politics and the lives of regular people are so large that the debate is inevitable and essential. And although this should not simply be a debate about words, we should not be afraid to linger in these issues in order to understand and clarify. Someone once said that anthropology is philosophy with people in it. So be it.

4.5 Understanding multiculturalism: making my stance clear

The focus has shifted from class to ethnicity, from class to culture, from rationality to the need for religion. (Friedman 1994:79)

The quote above is taken from *Cultural Identity and Global Process* (1994), a book that is central to my understanding of the multicultural ideology. The quote refers to a general shift in society, affecting everything from research to politics and the uprising of cultural movements such as the Maya movement. Friedman wants to understand the mentioned shift in a global context, related to the hegemonic decline of the “centers” in the world system, that is the West, generated by the massive decentralization of capital accumulation that has taken place on a world scale over the past decades, and also the general loss of faith in progress of our societies and of civilization at large. He sees the explosion of new cultural movements as related to this decline and explains the phenomenon as:

Order is intimately connected to power: hegemony produces homogeneity. The hierarchical global order consists in the subordination of a multitude of local and regional projects to the dominant project of the hegemon. (...) The decline of hegemony is thus, quite logically, a liberation of the world arena to the free play of already extant but suppressed projects and potential new projects. (Friedman 1994:252)

Hegemony here refers to the status of the world system which opens up, as it declines, for other projects. A hegemon in decline is also the individual modern nation state, threatened as it is today by various sub-groups and by world economic and political process (Friedman 1994:2). According to Friedman (1994:234), state policies towards minorities and immigrants have changed from assimilation to multiculturalism implying a political resignation when it comes to inequalities and injustice between groups in society. In this light multiculturalism may be seen “... as an abandonment of the ideal of a strong social project and assimilation to that project...” (Friedman 1997:72). It is no secret that the politics of assimilation and the goal of everyone having the same opportunities were abandoned at the time of the economic crisis in the 1970s and 1980s, which was also when multiculturalism became widespread. However, as Friedman points out,

multiculturalism is part of a dual process rather than a simple enforcement from the top down. Forsaking modernism and the decline of hegemony generates a return to the roots, strengthening sub-national and ethnic identities, which in turn further reinforces the decline of hegemony and modernism (Friedman 1997:72)

Parting from the theoretical understanding of for example Friedman (1994) and Cumes and Bastos (2007), I perceive “the multicultural” as an *ideology*, as a way of *understanding* of reality that is politically practiced in many instances and as a method to deal with ethnic relations, rather than a *description* of the state of the world. Although Friedman makes a more deterministic analysis of the multicultural, seeing it as an inevitable consequence of the decline of hegemony and the modernity generated from the Western civilizations, while Cumes and Bastos sees it more as a choice and a strategy, I can see them as coming from the same place; wanting us to acknowledge the problems built into the discourse. I share this point of departure.

I believe that it is possible to understand why, for example, politicians embrace the multicultural ideology as a description and vision for society, with the society’s well being in mind. It may be a way of avoiding conflicts between groups in the short term, and a way of dealing with decreasing economic resources in a situation where society can no longer provide for everyone. I can certainly understand why cultural movements appear and make their claims through the rhetoric of multiculturalism, whether they are indigenous movements or movements formed by people in exile, or living in a situation of exclusion. The point is not the claims, or the politics in themselves; what is important in this context is that they might not have appeared had we had another economic and political system and reality. The purpose of this kind of research should be to see the actions and choices of people in a larger context related to what is going on around them.

4.5.1 Multiculturalism and postmodernism: why all the fuss?

Because multiculturalism is connected to the influence of postmodern perspectives on political thinking and academia, a common opinion is that the postmodern is to blame for almost everything wrong with the world today. In this view, postmodernism is apolitical by nature (because it poses a critique of grand narratives such as Marxism), makes collective action impossible (because definitions of groups are questioned and no one can claim to possess the final truth), and wants to destroy science and civilization as we know it (when a work of art can have as much relevance as a doctoral dissertation for understanding a phenomenon). Since I believe the assumption about the connection between multiculturalism and postmodernism to be true, but none of the others, I think that a short explanation of my position is needed. Setting aside the discussion about whether or not we live in a postmodern world, I begin with the fact that today we have both modernistic and postmodern perspectives coexisting in society as well as in science. I believe the locked positions in the debate are unnecessary, and much based on prejudices, perceived political differences, academic prestige, and

a need to belong to this or that camp. And what is science once its authority has been undermined, as it seems to be by postmodernism? In the words of Jonathan Friedman, the “so-called postmodernism” (1994:80) threatens the authority of a science as anthropology and therefore its whole existence. To Friedman traditionalism and the postmodern are seemingly opposed reactions to the same phenomena; that is the hegemonic decline. He mentions names as Foucault, Lyotard, Deleuze, and Paul Friedrich and in his words it all seems like a messy group of strange people wanting to return to traditional ways of life and deconstruct both science and civilization (1994:80). I believe this is undeserved and wrong. To me it is not at all impossible to unite a postmodern perspective such as the discourse analysis with the “traditional” way of doing anthropological research. Quite the opposite! As earlier stated in the chapter on methodology, I believe there is no Big Truth to be “revealed” behind practices of race, culture, and ethnicity in Guatemala; a typical postmodernist standpoint. This statement should not be considered provocative to any anthropologists, regardless of whether they have positive or negative feelings towards the postmodern perspectives. In this it becomes evident, I believe, that postmodern forms of empirical research coincide with much of the “traditional” forms of anthropological ways of doing and thinking about research in hermeneutical and critical traditions, such as that of Jonathan Friedman. “Experience of the world, however imbued with immediate interpretations, is neither true nor false; it simply *is*.” (Friedman 1997:88), he states and I believe this is a core statement in his reasoning, in my mind highly compatible with postmodernism. This confirms my belief that these ways of undertaking research do not have to be incompatible despite coming from seemingly opposed ontologies and epistemologies.

According to Kuznar, postmodernism is powerfully influenced by both hermeneutics and critical theory (1997:122). Hermeneutics is a method of analysis that is open ended, taking in to account that interpretations change during an encounter and are affected by prior biases and positions. No final Truth is to be found, because interpretation will always change. The concept of what is True thus is also questioned in hermeneutics, which is carried out as an interpretation trying to see things from the “native point of view”. This leads me to consider the relation between hermeneutical anthropology, which is often critical of drawing generalizations and always context-based, and postmodernism. Combined with critical perspectives (without the meta-narratives, but directed against institutions upholding unequal power structures) it seems to me that postmodernism and anthropology are not necessarily incompatible. This is also the opinion of Alvesson and Sköldbberg (1994). They believe that there is no big difference in the method level of conducting science between many more free forms of interpreting sciences and a somewhat pragmatic version of postmodern qualitative method (1994:265). In other words, researchers should not be afraid, but open up to understanding what the postmodern and also post-structural perspectives can do for a science such as anthropology. Incorporating other understandings of the world, such as those generated by discourse analysis, is not destructive to anthropology; it is fruitful and necessary. Consider the discussion on ethnographic authority - it did not put an end to anthropology – rather it was incorporated into

the science. In the article *Posmodernismo y teoría antropológica. La implosion de la modernidad*, Francisco de la Peña Martínez tries to characterize postmodernity through the scepticism, dislike, and doubtfulness against three defining features of modernism: the ideology of progress, the superiority of the scientific rationality, and individuality as the only possible and superior way to express identity (1998:184). Many, I believe, could agree with such scepticism.

In the book *Postmodernism and the Social Sciences* (1992), Graham et al. (1992) describe how postmodern thinking developed foremost in architecture and the arts, but how it then, as well as now, in the social sciences is "...seeping in to the collective consciousness bit by bit." (Graham et al. 1992:3). I generally believe that my generation of students and researchers carry this perspective with us, whether we recognize it or not. This is also why I, shamelessly, use both self-proclaimed postmodernist theorists, and such that are probably outspokenly opposed, in my theoretical framework. I see no reason why not to. The way of thinking about subjectivity, universalism, and humanity is irrevocably changing, and we just have to figure out a way of dealing with the effects of these changes. But, as Finlayson and Valentine, the editors of *Politics and Post-structuralism: An Introduction* write, this does not mean "... the terror or freedom of chaos. The sky does not fall down. It does not entail that words will cease to mean anything and communication will come to an end." (Finlayson & Valentine 2002:13). There are anthropologist actually undertaking anthropology with politically radical intentions *and* postmodern or post-structural methods (yes, it is true). One of the big names here is Arturo Escobar. I believe a compelling way of carrying out postmodern analyses of classically-anthropological fields of interest, such as "development", is in the manner of Escobar (ex.1997). He uses poststructuralist theory and methodology, primarily discourse analysis, to understand the birth and makings of the development concept. In his analysis the elements themselves are not as interesting or important as the system of relations established among them. This explains the flexibility of the discourse and how, as Escobar puts it, the "architecture of the discourse" (1997:89) remains. This is another way of saying what Fredrik Barth says in the collection of essays *Ethnic groups and boundaries* (1969), where he studies the mechanisms creating and maintaining the boundaries between ethnic groups, rather than focusing on the cultural material within the boundaries. In the new preface to his book Barth says this explicitly when talking about his participation in a research symposium, which resulted in the book in 1969: "Though we lacked the opaque language of present-day postmodernism, we certainly argued for what would now be recognized as a constructionist view." (Barth 1998 preface, in 1969:6)

However, although here I defend the postmodern approach to science, there are aspects that concern me. The possible political lock up must be taken seriously. Others who express the same concern are the editors of the book *Anthropology, Development and the Post-modern Challenge*. They write, "The relativism of post-modernist approaches is in danger of collapsing into depoliticised irresponsibility... (and)... the deconstructionalist stance... makes active involvement in processes of change difficult." (Gardner and Lewis 1996:157) This claim deserves consideration by those of us who concern ourselves

with politics. The multicultural discourse can possibly be seen as a product of postmodernity, and it *is* a problem. But possible consequences of something do not prove it to be *wrong*. Literary and cultural studies are often looked down upon by anthropologists, but in my view we need them. Not uncritically accepting anything, I need Franz Fanon and Stuart Hall to expand my understanding of identity and the multicultural, and to inspire me and stretch my thinking. To me, their perspectives represent both a problem and a hope. I like to think, like Finlayson and Valentine (2002), of the implications of post-structuralism/postmodernism on anthropology to be a move from a logic of either/or to one that recognizes both/and. It is not necessarily either capitalism or socialism (not implying we should choose a “middle way”), not either true or false, etc. Even if events have no absolute conditioning origin (that is if you are not religious or believe in a human core...), they are not un-conditioned. We can study these conditions, and politics can change them. In refusing to see agents or structures as closed or fixed, post-structuralism leaves them *undecidable*. Yet decisions are taken, and that is the moment that bears possibilities and enables change, and should be of interest to social sciences, such as anthropology. If questioning universal reason as a foundation for all human affairs, seeing all narratives - including my own - as partial, and undertaking a critical reading of all scientific, cultural, and social texts as they are products of political and historical contexts, is considered having a postmodernist starting point, I claim one.

4.6 Fredrik Barth and mechanisms of boundaries

Fredrik Barth and the co-authors of *Ethnic groups and boundaries, The social organization of cultural difference* (1969) help widen and develop perceptions of culture and ethnic grouping. One might sometimes wonder why ethnic groups and the boundaries between them persist, although the groups may live in the same nation for hundreds of years. This is the case in Guatemala. Certainly anthropologists have changed their perceptions of these matters since 1969, but I sometimes feel that others have not. Barth criticizes the traditional anthropological definition that supposes that an ethnic group is biologically self-perpetuating. He says that these definitions are similar in their content to the traditional proposition that a race equals a culture equals a language (1998:11). According to Barth, this leads us to believe, that the maintenance of boundaries between ethnic groups is unproblematic and a result of racial difference, cultural difference, social separation, and language barriers. We are led to imagine that each group develops their cultural and social structures in relative isolation, primarily in response to ecological factors. This way of seeing things has rendered us a world of separate peoples each with their own culture, legitimately isolated in an island of their self (Barth 1998:11). This view is no longer common among anthropologists, but as Barth writes in a new preface to the book from 1998, it is still often expressed and published, deriving from the commonsense of people or from the rhetoric of ethnic

activists across the world. To move away from these ideas we need to shift our focus from descriptions of manifest forms of culture, from the common history and cultural heritage to a study of the mechanisms that creates and maintain the ethnic boundaries, “not the cultural stuff that it encloses” (Barth 1998:15).

Barth (1969:16) writes that the persistence of cultural difference between ethnic groups in contact with other groups, is allowed by a structuring of interaction between them. Maintenance of boundaries depends on the punishment of actions that occur outside ethnic group borders just as with borders of gender and class. In the essays presented in the book, examples are given of stable and persistent ethnic boundaries that are crossed by a flow of people. According to Barth (1969:21), such crossings are far more common than the ethnographic literature (until 1969) would lead us to believe. However, he writes, when it comes to the changing roles of the individuals within an ethnic group, ethnic boundaries have different characteristics than the boundaries of other stratification systems. When persons within the gender or class group fail to act or chose to act outside of what is expected of a person within the group, the result is often that that person is no longer considered to be part of the group. In the case of an ethnic group though, the solution is the recognition that every person within the group no longer acts according to the roles (Barth 1969:28). That is, the definition of the ethnic group changes with its members. Peter Hervik (2003:53) makes the same claim when he says that language itself is a limited tool when speaking about these matters. The content and meaning of a category, such as an ethnic group, can change while the category itself remains. Revision of the categories only take place if the categories, or ethnic boundaries, are very inadequate. They do not change just because they are untrue, but because they are “consistently unrewarding to act upon” (Barth 1969:30). I will consider this idea in relation to my data. According to Barth (1969), the essays in *Ethnic groups and boundaries* show that ethnic boundaries are maintained by “a limited set of cultural features” (1969:38). What these cultural features are in the case of Guatemala is an intriguing question. Due to drug and gang related crime a primary factor in Guatemala today is the total lack of security for the general population. Barth writes that violence and insecurity act as a constraint on inter-ethnic contacts. “In this situation, many forms of interaction between members of different ethnic groups may fail to develop, even though a potential complementary of interest obtains.” (Barth 1969:36)

4.7 Redistribution or recognition – what is the core issue?

In the context of discussing the work of social and cultural movements, a polemic arises between the advocates of a social justice that is based on a *redistribution* of resources in society, and those who claim that the core question for justice is

recognition of e.g. cultural or ethnic rights. This division continually resurfaces when digging deeper into these issues: but are they really mutually exclusive? Does one necessarily exclude the other? The philosopher Nancy Fraser does not think so. According to Fraser (2003:9), we need both and they must thus be combined and reconciled. She notes that:

...egalitarian redistributive claims have supplied the paradigm case for most theorizing about social justice for the past 150 years. Today, however, we increasingly encounter a second type of social justice claim in the politics of recognition. Examples include claims for the recognition of the distinctive perspectives of ethnic, “racial”, and sexual minorities, as well as of gender difference. (Fraser 2003:7).

In the book *Redistribution or recognition? A political-philosophical exchange* (2003) Fraser and Honneth discuss the issue. Both are professors of philosophy who depart from critical theory in their reasoning, but draw quite different conclusions. Whereas Fraser, as mentioned above, sees that we need both redistribution and recognition to achieve social justice, Honneth believes that recognition is the only component we need to reach this goal. He even sees that it can accommodate “... a modified version of the Marxian paradigm of economic redistribution...” (Honneth 2003:3), while Fraser denies that distribution can be subsumed under recognition. As Fraser writes, when claims for egalitarian distribution are almost extinguished by the downfall of communism, the free-market ideology, rise of identity politics, etc., recognition tends to dominate. And these two kinds of justice claims tend to be dissociated. This is why we are presented with an either/or choice: redistribution or recognition, class politics or identity politics (2003:8). This tendency is visible within the Maya movement, which has consciously excluded the class-perspective. In my opinion the core issue to be addressed lies in the relationship between these two concepts, but first we must understand the life and priorities of the people concerned.

5 San Antonio: a community exposed to rapid change

San Antonio is the community where I conducted most of my fieldwork. Here I present some facts of this place, in order to understand it better.

McKenna Brown (2000:155) suggests that San Antonio Aguas Calientes might possibly be the most known indigenous community outside Guatemala. Its proud tradition of weaving techniques, which result in a very identifiable, bright multicolored pattern with flowers and birds, and its close proximity to Antigua, the tourist centre of Guatemala has, according to McKenna Brown, made the community a popular place for tourists from around the world (Garzon 2000:155). Although this may be correct, it was not my experience; I saw other foreigners only once. In any case, the traditional picture of a woman of San Antonio, dressed in her multicolour *huipil*, the woven women's shirt of the traditional costume, has become a popular tourist image of Guatemala, shown in folders and commercials for promoting tourism. The large *típica* market, filled with textiles and other goods intended to be sold to national and international tourists, is centrally located by the community square, the church, and the community council building. The sellers wait for tourists to arrive and buy their wares, but during my time in the village they waited in vain. Apart from the market there is little physical evidence that San Antonio is a tourist place. There is only one *comedor* by the square, a simple place serving food; and a couple of small *tiendas*, small shops where you can buy anything from eggs to batteries and telephone cards. The community square, where the supposed tourists would arrive initially, is beautifully maintained with colonial architecture and no litter. Possibly this is a consequence of the hopes to attract tourists. Undertaking my fieldwork in a "famous" place was not my intent, but neither did it create a problem.

5.1 Location and demographics

San Antonio Aguas Calientes is a community located in the region of Sacatepéquez, 8 kilometers from Antigua Guatemala, the old capital and now a tourist centre. To the north it borders with the community of Pastores, to the east with Ciudad Vieja, to the south is San Miguel Dueñas, and to the west lies Santa Catarina Barahona. A couple of kilometers from San Antonio Aguas Calientes we find the two small villages San Andrés Ceballos and Santiago Zamora, - *aldeas* or suburb villages, of San Antonio. San Antonio Aguas Calientes is located approximately 1,500 meters above sea-level with a subtropical climate; generally

mild and warm in the summer, with a median temperature of about 17 degrees Celsius, while rainy and cooler in the winter. The *Aguas Calientes*, meaning *hot springs*, in the name San Antonio Aguas Calientes, refers to a small, nearby lake that used to deliver warm water from the volcanic mountains to surrounding the communities, before it was deliberately drained by the authorities in 1928 to prevent the spread of mosquito transmitted diseases, such as malaria (Gall 1983:213).

According to statistics from the *Instituto Nacional de Estadística*, the National Institute of Statistics in Guatemala, in 1997, San Antonio, including its two suburban villages, had a population of almost to 10,000. I am unable to find any more recent numbers from a reliable source. However, because Guatemala in general has a fast growing population, it is likely higher today. Other statistics from the National Institute of Statistics provide the breakdown of the different ethnic groups. Bearing in mind that one ought to be skeptical of such demographic numbers provided by the Guatemalan government, because for political reasons they have tended to underestimate the number of indigenous people in the country (Fisher & Brown 1996:18) and since you must ask yourself how such a measurement is made, it is still interesting to know that out of 9,892 inhabitants in San Antonio and suburban villages in 1997, only 701 were considered to be non-indigenous. In comparison, in 1981, only 7 of 4,527 were reported to be non-indigenous (Archilia Serrano 1989:12). This tells us that San Antonio is by definition an indigenous community. In Guatemala about half of the population is considered to be indigenous: however, the national figure is contested and varies depending on the perspective of the author. In general, Maya scholars emphasize investigations that inflate the number of indigenous people to more than half of the population, about 60 percent (Fisher & Brown 1996:18). Meanwhile, official statistics produced by the government tend to estimate the size of the indigenous population at less than 50 percent of the total population. This question of whether the indigenous population is more or less than half of the total population is, of course, very relevant because of the political implications. However, because I have no way to examine the different figures I accept the number of indigenous to be approximately half of the population.

The majority of the residents of San Antonio consider themselves to be Roman Catholic. According to the research carried out in 2001 and presented on the community webpage (www.inforpressca.com, 2008-06-26), 51.3 percent of the children attending schools in the village were malnourished, and all children across the community were considered to be at-risk of malnutrition. This is true for the country in general, and is an acute problem in many other places: for example, the national newspaper, *Prensa Libre*, reported in November 2007 that in the community of Paculam in the district of Sololá 90 percent of the population was considered poor, living on less than a dollar a day, and 83.6 percent of the children under five-years-old were chronically malnourished (www.prensalibre.com 2008-06-26). According to the same article, Guatemala presents the highest levels of malnourishment on the continent, even exceeding those of Haiti and Honduras. The article indicates that the numbers signal a crisis, particularly because of the subsequent effects on physical and mental growth as

well as educational attainment and school dropout rates (www.prensalibre.com 2008-06-26).

5.2 History of the settlement

According to Lutz (1981:66, cited in Serrano 1989:8) there is little evidence of pre-colonial settlements in the Maya Kaqchikel area of Sacatepéquez, Guatemala. However, here in 1527, the Spanish founded the town Santiago de Almolonga. In the areas around the town the land was cultivated by the settlers, but because of the low number of indigenous people in the region, the Spanish were short of workers and thus forced agricultural labor was introduced and indigenous people were moved to the area to work on the plantations (Lutz 1981:84, cited in Serrano 1989:9). The settlements that developed through this process were often named after a Catholic saint and the last name of the owner or the agricultural products produced there. In 1549, new Spanish laws meant the indigenous slaves were liberated and the Spanish feared that the value of their lands would be lowered because there would be no more slaves to work the lands. Again according to Lutz (1981:102, cited in Serrano 1989:9), perhaps because of the coercion of the Catholic Church or possibly because of the insecurity of the indigenous former-slaves, many of the indigenous remained where they were located. This was the origin of the settlements in Sacatepéquez, something that substantially differentiates it from the Guatemalan high plateau, where the settlements were formed from indigenous ones that existed prior to the colony. Thus, these places are more complex in their social structure and have a larger cultural differentiation than those in Sacatepéquez (Lutz 1981:73, cited in Serrano 1989:9).

After the “liberation” of the agricultural slaves the people generally continued to work for the same land owners, but now also had to pay tributes to their landlords and annual taxes to the Spanish crown, which meant a heavier workload. In order to be able to pay, to all intents and purposes the system of forced labor continued in form of agricultural work on the lands of the Spanish, cleaning work in the streets, and household work in the homes of the Spanish (Lutz 1981:68, cited in Serrano 1989:10). However, between the years 1575 and 1638, the region did experience a decline in population most likely due to the abuse of the people by the Spanish (Lutz 1981:74, cited in Serrano 1989:10). In 1874, there was a large earthquake, that affected many towns and villages around San Antonio Aguas Calientes, including Antigua, and as a result much of the population in the affected areas migrated to San Antonio Aguas Calientes (Serrano 1989:11).

5.3 San Antonio today

The easiest and most common way of traveling to San Antonio Aguas Calientes is by public bus, or *camionetas*, that runs frequently from the surrounding towns everyday during daylight hours. Entering the community from the east, along the road from Antigua and Ciudad Vieja, you reach a crest from which there is a grand view looking down on the valley Chocojol Juyú, meaning “between hills and mountains” in the local Maya language, Kaqchiquel. The same valley is referred to as Valle de Quinizilapa on the colonial maps. The valley is surrounded by mountains of a light brown color; mostly covered by *milpas*, cultivated plots of maize. Two volcanos; Fuego - that can often be seen emitting large clouds of steam - and Acatenango, dominate the view to the west. In the valley the community of San Antonio extends with its roofs of corrugated sheeting, surrounded by the cultivated vegetation; mostly coffee and vegetables.

Entering San Antonio on the very steep road going down into the valley (that always makes me pray that the brakes of the dilapidated buses will work one more time), the first thing to greet you is one of the public *pilas*, a wash basin for clothing and often the source of water supply if necessary. There are usually women doing the family laundry at the *pila*, at all times of the day. Just a few years ago, the roads in San Antonio were dirt, but now they are mainly stone slab or asphalt. If you announce that you wish to alight the bus close to the community square, by either standing up before the “stop” or by shouting something about bus stop, you will be let off on one of the three main streets close to the square. The main square is dominated by the white Catholic Church and the mayor’s office building built in grand colonial style. However, in contrast, the square is also surrounded by the public school, which children attend from first to sixth grade, another *pila*, a small shop, a bakery, and a simple *comedor* where traditional dishes are served. Here life is lived at a moderate pace. Mothers walk their small children to the school, and the drivers of the *tuctucs* - the small taxis made of some kind of a moped with two back seats and a roof, of which there are approximately 15 in San Antonio - loiter by their vehicles talking, laughing, and in a rather disinterested fashion try to attract your attention. From the carpenter workshops you can hear the caskets - a product traditionally made in San Antonio and sold outside the community - being hammered together and loaded onto open truck platforms to be transported elsewhere. Men and women sit in their small shops waiting for customers, others walk to the bus stop for the bus to Antigua carrying items to sell on the big market there, and still others are perhaps on their way to work in the fields just outside the village. Everywhere you go people greet you and each other and always seem to have time for a short chat. This is also something that many “San Antonietos” mention as a difference between their hometown and other, bigger, more impersonal places. “Here we greet each other in the streets. In Antigua, for example, people don’t do that, one of my informants told me when asked to describe the character of the community. Of course, the nice and easy-going image that first greets you is deceptive in many ways. You do not have to talk to people for very long before you learn of the problems and

struggles of everyday life here. The mothers walking their children to one of the several private schools may be worried about how to afford this month's school fees, and how to afford bread for dinner now that the prices of basic food have risen. The *tuctuc* drivers keep only a little of the money earned over six days of working each week for the company controlling the *tuctuc* business in the village. They have to pay for their own fuel, which is now extremely expensive, and many have to work their only free day of the week in order to make the *tuctuc* driving worthwhile.

Large changes have occurred during the latest 40 years in the valley where San Antonio is located. These changes are mainly related to the development of the roads and public transportation, radio and television (twenty-years ago the village was in radio shadow), and public schooling for everyone. The growing incorporation of San Antonio into the national and international economy affects the local economy, culture, and language use (McKenna Brown 2000:159). This will be discussed and explored later through the reflections of my informants. However, although many things are changing rapidly in San Antonio, many things seem to stay much the same - at least on the surface. Traditionally, of course, the economy in the valley of Quinizilapa was based on small-scale agriculture. The growth of beans, maize, and other plants for the consumption by the family is now complemented by the growth of some additional crops for market and by handicrafts (McKenna Brown 2000:159). But agriculture is still a large part of the economy, with many of the families owning small lots of land. However, as one of the school teachers explains, the cultivated land around the village is now mostly owned by a few large landowners, who bought it from many of the villagers who previously made their living on the land.

Except for agriculture, which employs both men and women, people mainly make their living from three activities: many men and boys work as *tuctuc* drivers in the community or as truck or bus drivers for companies based in Antigua that operate on the roads to San Antonio. Another common occupation is that of carpenter. There are several workshops around the square, and I notice that coffins are the specialization of the little businesses. I often see tractor trailers over-filled with coffins of different sizes being transported out of San Antonio to Antigua and other towns. It is a little scary to see all those coffins crammed onto open trucks and a strange coincidence that this community produces so many coffins while so many of its residents work in the accident-prone transportation sector – better not to dwell on this thought too much. After the household chores are completed, many of the women dedicate themselves to weaving with the traditional techniques that are so special to San Antonio. The weavings are sold to visiting tourists or bought by dealers who sell them in larger tourist-towns or markets. The fabrics are also used to make the traditional clothes for the women of San Antonio, the *traje*, something I observe that about half the female population is wearing on the streets of the community. The manufacture of handicrafts, such as earrings or textile products, aimed at the tourist industry, is also a component of the income of many families. Thus, outside of agriculture, transportation, carpentry, and handicrafts are the primary income-generating activities in San Antonio.

6 Linguistic activists – defining indigenous culture

To be able to answer my research questions, I also needed to understand the motives and demands of the Maya movement. This will be further explored below.

6.1 The importance of language

It is striking, Warren (1998:xi) writes, how many of the activists in the Maya movement have a background in the field of linguistics. In the late 1970s, this important part of the Maya movement gained momentum; partly under the “disguise” of seemingly apolitical work with indigenous languages. During the military dictatorship working with indigenous issues was regarded as potentially subversive, but the people in power considered the field of native-language research to be a marginal activity with no political significance (Warren 1998:x). Rejecting the social hierarchies usually built into development assistance, some foreign linguists and activists began to build up these organizations by training local people in skills that were previously not available in Guatemala. They also encouraged the participants to make their own decisions about how community projects should be formed, rather than relying on foreign aid-workers to make decisions. The students reached master’s-levels in their training and created a very politically- and culturally-aware environment: “The result was an extraordinarily wide construction of linguistics as a scholarly and activist field of knowledge.” (Warren 1998:x) Partly as a result, language issues have always been at the center of the Maya movement and its political vision. Training these students in the 1970s were foreign experts like the linguist Nora England, who is mentioned in chapter 4 as one of the central foreign-figures in the movement. According to her, and many others, language is the first and most important focus for Maya cultural activists. This is largely an effect of the importance that language plays in the indigenous communities (2003:735). However, as I will show in my investigation, this importance is questionable in the case of the community of San Antonio.

According to England, language is the principal means through which Maya worldview and cultural practices are passed on; the focal point of Maya cultural revitalization. England claims (2003:735) that the languages are spoken by a majority of the indigenous population, and that they are viewed as something authentic and unchanged since pre-colonial times. This kind of authenticity is something with which the Maya movement appears to be very concerned. The

realization that many of the Maya languages are spoken less and less commonly has led to an active concern and work with promoting and maintaining the languages. Language standardization, for the purposes of literacy and education in Maya languages, is part of this process and the organization OKMA, that I visited, plays a central role. Maya languages have never been taken into account in the construction of the Guatemalan state. According to England, the idea of nation and the idea of language are widely held as equal by many Mayas. She writes that it is taken for granted by Maya revitalizationists that Maya language is the only possible transmitter of Maya philosophy and worldview.

Only very occasionally does any Maya claim that Spanish is inevitably the future language of the Maya population and that it does not, in fact, matter what people speak, and then such sentiments are immediately rejected or, worse, dismissed contemptuously as “Ladino thought”. (England 1996:179)

Of course, language is a code system that is linked to specific cultural content that is not always possible to replace in another language. England refers to the paper *A Defence of the Proposition, “When a Language Dies a Culture Dies”*, by Anthony Woodbury (1993), a study of the demonstrative system in the indigenous language, Yup’ik (Alaska/Siberia). Woodbury claims that this system is substantially different from that of the English language, for example, and that if it is lost, the cultural codes and special meanings that can only be expressed through Yup’ik will be lost forever. If one agrees with this perspective, then the indigenous people of Guatemala are right to be concerned about the loss of language, because it also implies a loss of culture communication that cannot be replaced (England 1996:180). However, the argument is always that this should be left to the people concerned, and in this case, the people concerned are the people on the street, in the fields, and the shops in the corners of Guatemala.

6.2 Demands for revindication

One of the most renowned activists of the Maya movement is the academic Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil. He has written widely on the demands of the Maya movement and the importance of language. His text, *The Politics of Maya Revivication* (1996), is a good summary of these demands and the views of Cojtí and the movement that he represents. He begins the text with a summary of the “Hidden thoughts of Ladino colonialists”; a horrifying enumeration. According to Cojtí, the Ladino thinks of the “Indian” as an animal or a subhuman, and wishes the conquistadors would have exterminated them when they had the chance. To oppress “Indians” is simply to oppress a degenerate race, incapable of self-government, and thus oppression is necessary. Ladinos know what is best for the “Indians” and it is dangerous to give them liberty (1996:19). The indigenous peoples of Guatemala suffered from more than 500 years of oppression, discrimination, and terrible acts of war. However, it may be a bold statement to

ascribe these thoughts to the mixed non-Mayan population of today. Cojtí also states that “all Ladinos” believe that the Maya culture has to die together with all non-Ladino nations and that Spanish can be the only language to exist in Guatemala (1996:22). Factually speaking, I know this to be untrue.

Cojtí is upset by the fact that the Guatemalan constitution recognizes “the groups of Maya descent” as ethnic minorities, and not as a group of nations that are defined by kinship, historical origins, and world view. International law through the United Nations (U.N.) does not recognize the Maya as a distinct people either, although he believes (1996:27) the International Human Rights Covenants should apply to the Maya and give them the right to self determination. The problem is that these institutions do not recognize the “nature of the Maya people” (1996:26). Cojtí refers to the situation in Guatemala as “internal colonialism” and proposes autonomy, pluralism, and a complete decentralization as a solution to the problem. He also sets up a list of demands from the Maya people to the Guatemalan state, which is summarized as follows:

- *Territorial demands*: political-administrative divisions and territorial autonomy should be based on ethnicity.
- *Political demands*: the Maya right to political-ethnic autonomy must be recognized. Maya representation in the Congress should reflect their number in the country and appointment of functionaries should be based on ethnicity.
- *Jurisdictional demands*: the right to use and promote Maya law must be recognized.
- *Linguistic Revindication*: Mayan languages should be used in education, public offices, courts of justice, mass media
- *Educational demands*: education should be executed based on ethnic groups. In the Mayan schools, education should be Mayanized and focus on Maya culture, history and language.
- *Cultural demands*: national culture in Guatemala is dominated by the Ladino, while Mayan languages and culture are treated as folklore.

Cojtí also states some, civil and military demands, economic demands and social demands. (Cojtí 1996:47)

Much has happened in Guatemala since 1996 when Cojtí outlined his demands, and some have been recognized. Parts of the demand for bilingual education have become a reality in the use of Maya languages in public institutions and the recognition of Maya traditional law in some parts of the country. It is not my goal to review the ideas and demands that Cojtí presents. Personally-speaking, I believe that many of them are completely justified and should be recognized. It is the focus on ethnicity, language, and the essentialist view of the Maya people that Cojtí manifests, that is of interest here.

One of the more radical ideas of Cojtí is to completely separate children of different ethnic groups in to different schools. Achieving this in reality, in one of the few spaces of everyday interaction between ethnic groups, would likely be very difficult. Who is to decide which person belongs to which group in a country

where ethnic belonging is frequently-changing, fluid, and difficult to define? What also surprises me is the fact that in all the texts that I have read that are written by persons involved in the Maya movement, none mentions *why* language revitalization is so important for the indigenous population. As with Cojtí above, they usually refer to the problems of exclusion and discrimination that the indigenous population of Guatemala faces and then presents solutions to this problem that involve a stronger focus on ethnic boundaries and revitalization of cultural expression; but it is not clear how exactly the focus and revitalization provide a solution.

According to Morales, the majority of the indigenous intellectuals in Guatemala draw their discourse and understanding from the western world's multicultural ideology (1999:256). This sort of claim is viewed by England (1996:194) as coming from the left and aimed at undermining the demands of the Maya movement, saying that they are consequences of, or influenced by the colonization and the western world; and are thus less "authentic." She states that these arguments have been proven wrong. Here the discussion touches upon the "invention of tradition" debate, that Friedman discusses in the article *Will the real Hawaiian please stand; Anthropologists and natives in the global struggle for identity* (1993). Authenticity is an important aspect to the Maya movement and the focus on language is a "safe card" because the indigenous languages of Guatemala are of clear pre-Colombian origin (England 1996:194). In the invention of tradition-school of thought "... all tradition can only be understood as false construal whose object is political in nature" (Friedman 1993:745). Does it really matter? As Friedman points out, the critique of claims for authenticity that, for example, the Maya movement makes, are just as much a part of an agenda regarding what we should do with culture and identity in a fragmented world system. To me, the origin of the traditions that the Maya movement defends is unimportant, what interests me is the importance of the traditions to the people concerned, and my question in this thesis is how important the fight for some of these traditions is to the people themselves.

6.2.1 The concept of borders

According to Fishman (1988) the concept of *borders* is an important consideration in language continuity. National languages have national borders to protect them, whereas indigenous languages do not. Fishman writes:

...where minority cultures are strong enough to protect their cultural boundaries, they produce the same defense for their ethnocultural mother tongues. They separate populations into insiders and outsiders and they define the cultural desiderata – including language – which are often required for membership. (Fishman 1988:148, cited in McKenna Brown 1996:173).

These borders are often difficult to define in a movement that is increasingly focused on the Pan-Maya, rather than the local expressions of indigenous culture. According to R. McKenna Brown, the importance of the local cultural markers decreases in the movement, to the advantage of common expressions (R McKenna Brown 1996:174). In revitalization activities the functional value of Spanish increases at the same time as the symbolic value of the Maya languages grows. Often the borders between municipalities, different indigenous languages, and nations become secondary to the distinction between Maya and non-Maya. Maya history becomes important in reconstructing "... the bounds that unite all Maya through time and space." (R. McKenna Brown 1996:174). In this I noticed a difference between my informants in San Antonio, and the ones at OKMA. The people of OKMA were very concerned with these borders, while other people were not.

6.3 OKMA - Asociación Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib

Borrowing from Fishman (1988), The Maya language loyalty-movement in Guatemala, is characterized by:

- Lead and organized by a largely urban, educated minority of Maya
- Apolitical, at least in the sense of the left-right dichotomy of Guatemalan politics
- Seeking to mobilize the language-ethnicity link
- Seeking to increase prestige of Mayan languages for speakers and nonspeakers through education and the publication of linguistic works. (Fishman, cited in McKenna Brown 1996:169)

These characteristics also apply to OKMA Asociación Oxlajuuj Keej Maya' Ajtz'iib' (Guatemalan Mayan language organization), the organization included in my study. OKMA is a Guatemalan non-governmental organization (NGO) for linguistic research on Maya languages and is, as previously mentioned, a prominent organization in the Maya movement. OKMA began its activity in 1990 and has since then prepared young Maya people from different Maya linguistic communities to collect and analyze linguistic data. To date, the linguists of OKMA, together with foreign academics involved in the organization, have proposed standard grammar for 14 Maya languages. Thus, OKMA is a very important actor in standardizations of Maya languages. OKMA has created technical materials, dictionaries and works for the diffusion of language ideologies that foster language retention (England 2003:736). Clearly, this is extremely valuable work, particularly considering that it involves languages that essentially lack a tradition of literacy. The ancient Maya did have a writing system of hieroglyphs that was still in use at the time of the Spanish invasion, the only proper writing system that was developed freely in the Americas, but it soon fell

victim to the forced cultural change (England 1996:180). Maya languages of today have thus lacked all tools of literacy: no standardized alphabet (different forms of the Latin character alphabet have been used), no dictionaries, and no grammar. So according to Nora C England, who has been inextricably involved in the work of OKMA, they had to start completely from the beginning and examine in detail what literacy means (England 1996:181).

OKMA does not receive any funding from the Guatemalan state, but Norad (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation) has been a large supporter of OKMA since 1997 and also ordered an evaluation of their work in 2008. The evaluation team hired by Norad are completely and totally positive to all the work of OKMA. The report is full of praise, for example: “Without doubt, there is no other research team in Latin America as firm as this one and with the academic capability of producing such high quality studies in just three years.” (Zavala & Smith-Stark 2008:12). OKMA *has* a right to be proud. They are considered the most important linguistic organization in Guatemala, they are regarded as the most qualified organization to execute linguistic investigations, and they have produced more than 100 publications that are among the most complete works that exist on the subject, which are widely used in universities and other institutions (Zavala & Smith-Stark 2008, England 2003). However, it is perhaps a little strange that the external investigators did not find *anything* that could be improved or discussed in the work of OKMA. Personally-speaking, I question the fact that there have been no studies or investigations concerning the reception, functionality, or impact of the work of OKMA in the communities towards which their work is directed. This is a blind spot. No one at OKMA knows how the work they are doing is influencing the everyday life of the people. I want my investigation to contribute to filling this knowledge gap.

Today, many of the former associates of OKMA and similar organizations are working in other development or community action groups (England 1996:186) and are thus part of politics and change. Therefore, although working with language preservation may appear quite apolitical, it really is not so in the case of Guatemala.

6.4 Talking to OKMA

My recorded and more formalized interview at OKMA was conducted with one of its prominent members and employees, David Sanchez, who has worked in language standardization and preservation projects for many years. I met him in the office of OKMA, which is situated on a dusty street in the outskirts of Antigua. I wanted to know more about OKMA's views on language and development and the situation in the indigenous communities in the country that their work is directed towards.

6.4.1 Annoying anthropologists

I was always politely received at OKMA; the staff provided me with material and took the time to meet and talk with me. However, despite the polite reception, I felt like sort of an enemy when talking to Mr. Sanchez. Without saying a word, it appeared to me that he reacted in a negative way when he heard that I am a student of social anthropology. I noticed his skepticism towards my research questions, which partially inhibited me from asking some of the questions that might be perceived as critical. I have read about other anthropologists who studied and worked with organizations of the Maya movement, and who did not accept to be an instrument for the political work of the movement. This has been perceived as very negative and anthropology has thus been associated with the dominant society and Ladino-worldview. “Either you are with us or against us”, seems to be the predominant perspective. And because this way of thinking is mostly incompatible with anthropological science, the relationship between the two seems to be a complicated one.

During the course of the interview Mr. Sanchez mentions that anthropology has created problematic situations for his work. First, in the context of the work OKMA is undertaking in the communities. Mr. Sanchez says that people in the communities have come to expect OKMA to provide more than just books of grammar and so on, because of the work of the anthropologists. The people now expect that OKMA should be part of the social and economic development of the communities, but, Sanchez says, that is not their role

- Recently we have heard that our work does not help with developing the indigenous communities because our work does not help to improve the question of poverty. It does not help the people to stop being poor.

“This idea they must have got from the anthropologists”, he sighs. I am not sure what he purports the anthropologists were doing, but it is a troubling situation for language preservation that:

... literacy in Mayan communities is inversely related to language retention. Those townships with the highest literacy have suffered the greatest language loss, while those with the lowest literacy have suffered the least language loss. (Richards 2003:128.129, cited in England 2003:733)

This is, of course, a problem for an organization that works solely with language preservation. Perhaps OKMA received some criticism for not taking the problem seriously, and this is what elicited his comment. I cannot know for certain. However, his irritation with anthropologists did not end there. He believes that anthropologists have influenced the minds of the people when it comes to creating ethnic definitions:

- It is like when people in the communities say that they are indigenous or Indians, and they do not say that they are Mayas. The anthropologists ask

the question “who is really Maya?”, but it is only because of a lack of information, not because people do not want to identify as Maya. They just have not had the proper information. I learned only because I read that I descended from the Maya people. The same thing applies to language. People know that it is important but there are other forces who fight against this, and who apparently win at times with the idea that speaking the language is bad and only for stupid people.

It appears to me that in his mind, anthropology was helping the people in the communities develop ideas that he did not want them to have. I did not observe any anthropologists running around trying to influence people’s viewpoints, but the perspectives of anthropology may happen to coincide with the thoughts and questions of many people. Furthermore, and more importantly, I did not meet anyone who thought it was a bad to speak Kakchiquel or that only stupid people did so. On the contrary, people were generally very concerned about the language, which did not seem to have a natural place in their everyday lives as I will discuss further.

6.4.2 People have their ideas

Nikte Juliana Sis Iboy, the coordinator at OKMA and its frontal figure, states in a paper from 2000 that the ideology of devaluating Maya languages, which comes from Ladino society, has been converted into an internal ideology in Maya communities. She suggests that the Maya languages are associated with negative values of “tradition”, such as ignorance, isolation, and poverty, whereas Spanish is associated with positive “modern” values, such as education, the opportunity to migrate, economic advancement and so on. (Sis Iboy 2000, cited in England 2003:738). This, she says, is the first stage in Maya language loss in favor of Spanish. It is the ideology that is to blame and it comes from the dominant society that never has taken Maya languages into account. Thus, this ideology is the main enemy of OKMA because it turns their “own people” against them.

This is the same perspective expressed by Mr. Sanchez. I asked him if he could speak about the differences in opinion concerning language between the educated people involved with OKMA and the people in the communities who often lack higher - and sometimes even basic - education. He answered that there is a lack of awareness and vision in the communities when it comes to language, compared to that of OKMA or the academically trained Mayas. The academics believe that the languages have to be recovered, because it is a *right*. In the communities there are also people who are influenced by racist ideas, Mr. Sanchez explained. These ideas say that the language does no good, that it leaves the communities behind and makes the people seem stupid, and thus communities do not teach the languages to their children. Therefore, there are people who do not want their children to learn the language in school and who will not let their children participate in such classes. “And we try to influence the people so that they stop with these ideas that they have”, he says.

I asked about the multicultural ideology and the Guatemalan state and if he believed that the state expressed such an ideology. He answered, “Yes, at least that was what they said before they were elected.”. They said that they were going to take the Maya culture into account and that the government was to have a Mayan face. Therefore, he had hoped that more ministers would be Maya, but there are still only a few. He says that they also supposed that bilingual education would be given a greater priority and more resources, but the opposite occurred. I had heard before that the people are disappointed with the new government, but the focus and the interpretation of what politics that support the indigenous population really is seem to vary. If it is seen as supporting Maya culture and language when you speak to the representative of OKMA, it may be something completely different to the person in the street. In the incident on the bus that is described in the very beginning of this thesis, when I spoke to a young indigenous teacher about politics, she told me that the most important questions for the indigenous were the price on bread.

7 Things I learned in San Antonio

Important things I learned in San Antonio were above all about the priorities and everyday struggles of its inhabitants. By coming closer to a San Antonio-family, I also got a new understanding of my research questions.

7.1 The naming of the “Mayas”

I began my work all wrong. The prime mistake I made involved my use of the terms “Maya” and “Kaqchiquel”, the name of the local Maya group. By using these words in interviews and conversations, I was unaware I was setting the agenda with my informants. I did not realize the implications until it was too late. It was not until I had carried out some research and read more about the history of the Maya movement and its influence on society, that I realized that the use of the terms had strong ideological connotations. The important background to this phenomenon is explained earlier in the thesis. I thought that using the term Maya was a way of showing respect to the people with whom I spoke, but afterwards I realized I never heard this term ever being used in everyday conversation or in interviews, without my having said them first (except at OKMA, of course). However, no-one I talked to ever contested the terms except for the children, who often reacted in quite a different way; more about this later. Consequently, it is possible that my informants made a quick analysis of what they thought I wanted to hear as a result of my using these terms, and adjusted their answers accordingly. To me this was an important realization.

The transcripts of my interviews clearly show no record of anyone ever mentioning the term Maya until after I used it, except for the activists in OKMA. Even then, most people never use the term at all, instead using Kakchiquel or indigenous. A typical example of this is my recorded interview with my main informant, Zulma. She defines herself and her village as indigenous rather than Maya. She also uses the main occupations of the people in the village to define the village as indigenous. She tells me that 95 percent of the village population is indigenous, because their work is indigenous. That is: they dedicate themselves to the cultivation of the land and to traditional occupations such as weaving. In Zulma’s eyes the indigenous occupations define the village. I believe it is important to note this focus on occupation as the defining feature recognized by an indigenous woman, rather than other ethnic traits.

In contrast, the term Maya was used in more formal situations, for example when talking to researchers, activists, and other people representing a formal institution. As explained in the chapter *Mayanization*, Cumes and Bastos

(2007a:55) write that this is now the politically-correct term when referring to this population in Guatemala. As also mentioned previously, the term Maya as a description for the now-living indigenous population, was first used in the 1990s, by academics such as archeologists, linguists, and anthropologists. It has since entered the vocabulary of politicians, activists, and the studies of social movements. The introduction of this term was an answer to the process of strengthening the political participation of the indigenous peoples, who now as “pueblo Maya” are restoring a differentiated cultural collective with their own history (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:55). As a result of my fieldwork experiences, I can add to their analysis that the use of the word Maya has not trickled-down to “local” people. Among my informants the Pan-Maya identity and project is not a part of the worldview or of everyday life. Nor is the work done by the organizations claiming to represent these people anything of which they are aware. Most people I talked to had no concept of Pan-Maya identity. The best way to begin to understand the reasons why is to get closer to the people concerned. I begin with a more detailed description of the everyday life of my main informant, Zulma.

7.2 Getting to know Zulma

Zulma Gonzales, the woman I got to know through the American Harriet Morales, quickly became my main informant. She confided in me from the very beginning and I soon felt her friendship. As a friend of Harriet, she trusts me and helps me in any way she is able. It is her help that made my work possible. Subsequently she asks me to return her help, something I can only achieve to a small degree - more about this later. Zulma is around 35-years old and a mother of three. I believe that by getting to know her, her family, and their everyday life, troubles, and priorities, I got closer to answering my research questions. I do not believe I could have answered such questions without getting close to the people concerned and understanding their situation and perspectives. This is why we need anthropological fieldwork!

The first day I visited San Antonio was the day after I first met Zulma at Harriet’s house. She invited me to come to San Antonio and visit the school where her daughters are students, because there was to be a celebration at the school: *el día del maíz*, the corn day. She instructed me to take a public bus from the chaotic bus station in Antigua to San Antonio. The ride was supposed take about 20 minutes. However, on this day it took 40 minutes, so of course, I was late. It then took me a while to find the home of Zulma and her family, although it was close to the central square with a certain number written on it as she had described. I wandered around the unfamiliar streets, only finding it when I began to ask for directions to the house of Zulma. When I finally arrived I was sure that they would have left for the school without me, but they were waiting for me and not quite ready to leave. The school schedule was more flexible that day because of the celebration. Zulma’s house is white, made of concrete and clay with a

corrugated iron roof. There are two parts to the house and in the center is a covered patio with dirt floor. A lot of activities happen on in this patio: clothes are washed and hung to dry, food is eaten, birds live in a small cage, firewood is stored, and the tools for weaving are set up ready to be used whenever there is a spare moment. Zulma wears the traditional clothing of indigenous women in Guatemala: a skirt made of a large piece of fabric woven in different patterns, depending on a person's region of origin, draped around the hips and held up by a belt; a blouse, in the style that most younger women in traditional clothes tend to wear, made of cotton and adorned with discrete flowers, it is probably factory-made. Zulma, her two daughters, Sheyla and Merci, seven and ten years old respectively, and myself left together for the school. Zulma's husband Jorje and their two-year old son, Danilo remained at home. Zulma's father and her unmarried aunt live in another part of the house and were at this time of to work out in the field.

As we walked to the school, Zulma carried a large container of *frijoles molidos*, milled black beans, for the festivities. All parents are invited to participate and contribute in any way they are able. As we walked she began to tell me about her problems. She and her family have money problems because her husband Jorje has injured his foot and is unable to undertake his regular work as a bus driver. They have had to borrow 2,000 *Quetzales* (about 200 USD) from a friend and she has no idea how she is going to pay it back. With the temporary loss of her husband's income she was also unable to pay the monthly school fees for her daughters. The private school, Gotitas de Saber, has a monthly fee for all students, which pays for teachers, buildings and maintenance. There is a free public school in the village, but Zulma does not want her children to attend this school because the classes are large and she believes the education is not as good as in the private schools. Thus, her children attend one of the private schools in San Antonio, even though it is quite expensive; 200 *Quetzales* (about 20 USD) per child a month. I assume this sum is a large portion of the family budget, so the education of the children is a big investment for the family. Without asking me out-right, the story is her way of asking me for help. I listened to her story but did not immediately respond to the underlying question regarding money. However, a few days later I felt I wanted to do something for the girls, so I offered to pay their school fee for the next two months. My offer was accepted and it felt like a good way to give something back to the family who allowed me into their house and their lives.

After the day of festivities in the school, to which I will return in the chapter about cultural expression in school, I rode back to Antigua with Zulma and her family. They were going to visit Harriet again that week to deliver some new *trajes* for her collection, which Zulma had made. Jorje was driving their scrapheap of a car. Strange, I thought to myself, that he was unable to drive a bus due to his accident, but he could drive a car. Perhaps driving a car is different or perhaps it was something else. There had been a lot of talk recently of extortions and shootings being directed at bus drivers. The *maras*, criminal gangs, were demanding money from the owners of the bus companies, and if they refused to pay, the *maras* would threaten to shoot or hurt the bus drivers. Almost every day

the there were reports of bus drivers being shot or killed. There have also been reports of passengers being hurt and even killed in shootings. Bus companies have been a target for the maras for some time, perhaps later they will move on to another sector. To stay home, and call in sick, as Zulma's husband did, was possibly an indirect strike. This is logical in a society where unions are almost unheard of and where fathers, the primary breadwinners for the family, risk their lives every day to go to work. Perhaps it is more rational to lose income for a short time, than risk your life to drive a bus.

7.2.1 Weaving and violence - always present

I visited the house of Zulma and her family several times, for example when they invited me to eat with them. I sat in the patio, with the dirt floor below and the corrugated roof above and watched what to me seemed to be a normal day (but was probably not, since they had a *gringa* sitting on the patio). The family income is from different sources. Usually Zulma's husband drives the buses to Antigua. Zulma's father and his unmarried sister are responsible for cultivating the family's land. They leave in the morning with their tools and walk the short distance to the fields. Also on the patio is the equipment for weaving, always set up ready for Zulma or her aunt to work. In the handloom a beautiful textile is beginning to take shape. The textile is extremely colorful with complex patterns of flowers and birds, to an amateur like me it seems one would have to be extremely skilled to produce such fabric. I ask Zulma about the weaving and she enthusiastically tells me about it. She explains that the technique of the two-sided textile is unique to San Antonio. When it comes to art work, San Antonio occupies first place because of this textile. It is made with a special and time-consuming technique and is therefore very expensive compared to the one-sided textiles. The *huipils*, the blouse in the traditional female dress of San Antonio, is made from this fabric. Zulma tells me that it takes months of work for one woman to finish a huipil and consequently the cost is high - at least a couple of average Guatemalan monthly salaries. I ask who taught her the technique. She responds that it's like a chain: her grandmother learnt through her mother, and she taught her daughters, Zulma's mother taught her and now it is Zulma's responsibility to teach her daughters, Sheyla and Merci. I ask whether they want to learn. She replies "yes" with a touch of pride in her voice. Sheyla, who now is ten years old, has already shown an interest in learning the technique and as soon as there is time Zulma will begin teaching her.

There are different ways of selling your textile work in San Antonio. Zulma sells to some buyers from the village, who, she says, pay very well because they know the textiles are of high quality. In turn, they probably sell the fabric to other dealers. Many people also sell their textiles and other handicrafts in the local tourist market, depending on tourists to visit San Antonio. Lately though, Zulma says, the tourists are coming less often. Luckily her income is not dependent on tourism, but she has heard that few tourists visited even during Easter week, which is a time of great tourist activity in Guatemala. She heard that the reason is

the insecurity and violence in the country, which scares away foreigners. I believe this is a correct analysis, because much of what one hears about this region of the world, and particularly of Guatemala, from abroad is how the violence and crime are out of control. Meaning it now also affects tourists and foreigners. Guatemalans, I notice, are in general very security-conscious. They live in a country where violence has set the agenda for a long time. People try to live their lives as normally as possible, but they know exactly what streets and people to avoid, when it is time to quickly send the children home from school, or when it is better to call in “sick” than risk one’s life at work, despite the loss of income.

7.2.2 The children, the language, and the future

The school has a day of open-air activities, with a football tournament involving teams from a school in Santiago Zamora, the small village nearby. I attended the games, with Zulma, her aunt, and little Danilo. We took the family car out along small trails in the bush until we reached the football ground where the games are held. The tournaments had already started and the children played with great enthusiasm. The whole school turned out, and also the ladies selling *chuchitos* (the Guatemalan tamal – cornmeal dumplings stuffed with rice), candies, sodas, and small ice-creams that children buy for lunch in school, were present, cooking and selling. Zulma often participates in her children’s school activities. She is highly invested in their education and it is clear that ensuring they receive the best possible education is a big priority. We watched the games, made small talk with the teachers and the principal, and later I walked back to San Antonio with “profe José” as he is called by the students. He explained about the land around the village and how it used to be owned by many of the villagers of San Antonio, but how nowadays it primarily is owned by a few large landlords. José is a few years younger than me, around 25, but he talked and acted like a wise old man. Although he seems a little uncomfortable with my presence and my questions, he always provided informed answers to my questions, and demonstrated a kind but firm manner with the children.

Later that day I visited Zulma again. I wanted to buy some of the fabrics made by her and her aunt and I also wanted to make a recorded interview. This was to enable me to ask questions that would not usually be raised in everyday conversation, and also to record her exact formulations on tape to be able to go back and check details. This proved to be very important. I wanted to ask her about her perception and understanding of her identity as indigenous, her relationship to cultural expressions such as the local language, the traditional dress, and most of all, how she felt about these things in relation to her children and their future. Perhaps what most surprised me was how unproblematic these things seemed to her.

Zulma has had many experiences in life other than that of being a mother and housewife. She studied to be a teacher in the capital, Guatemala City, before she had children. She tells me that she would like to teach after her children are grown, but for now it is not possible. She also has some important connections,

for example her friend Harriet, who is a North American woman. Zulma's thoughts and ideas are always expressed with conviction, but sometimes the message is mixed. I most often receive a mixed and sometimes contradictory message when talking to people about the use of the Kakchiquel language (referred to in Spanish as just "the language"), and this is also true with Zulma. I had never heard Kakchiquel being spoken among the family members, so I asked her:

- *Do the majority in San Antonio speak the language (Kakchiquel) in everyday life?*
- *Yes, the majority speak the language.*
- *But you, in your family, you do not speak it?*
- *We practice it. We do not directly speak it, but yes we use it sometimes. Mostly we speak Castellano (Spanish).*
- *Do your parents speak it?*
- *Yes my parents speak Kakchiquel and Castellano, as the elderly do. We as their children speak it a little, not much, and our children learn Kakchiquel from us.*

In this conversation, as in many other conversations on the subject with informants, I notice an ambiguous approach. Automatically the answers to questions about the Maya language Kakchiquel seem to be that *yes, it is spoken*. But when I ask more specifically I very often am told it is *not directly spoken by us, or our children. The elderly speak it, but to us they speak Spanish*. I believe this ambiguity is an expression of the discrepancy between the official discourse of a bilingual multicultural society and the practical reality of people living in the society. Few would question the discrimination against the indigenous groups in Guatemalan society, or their right to their cultural heritage. However, it appears today that the children of the Maya groups and the children of the ladino groups speak the same language.

To Zulma it is important that the children learn Kakchiquel. She says:

- *It is a tradition to speak Kakchiquel. You teach us to speak English and that can be of use for us in some ways, but the Kakchiquel we inherit.*

Zulma then tells me about the problem obtaining a teacher to teach the children to speak Kakchiquel at the girls' school. She says that the school, Gotitas, where the girls are students, is the only school in San Antonio that teaches Kakchiquel. Zulma knows that the children have the legal right to learning in Kakchiquel, but she tells me that the salaries of the teachers are very low in the countryside so most educated teachers choose to work in the towns where the wages are higher. This is a problem I have heard about previously. There seems to be few educated teachers who can speak the Maya languages at such a level that they are able to teach it. Thus the implementation of the right to learning in your mother tongue, signed in to the peace accords of 1996, seems to have failed completely. Or has it? What is really a mother tongue, and could you claim that Kakchiquel is the mother tongue of Zulma's children? I do not have an answer, but I know that the children I met, from the indigenous groups to whom the policy is directed, do not speak Kakchiquel in school nor, in most cases, with their parents.

7.2.3 “Todos somos iguales”

Zulma made an extremely conscious decision when choosing a school for her children. There are a total of six schools in the village, but only one of them is a national school, free of foreign aid and free to attend. The other schools are privately run institutions. Zulma tells me that in the national school, teachers have to teach classes with up to 40 children. She sees this large class size as an impossible situation and does not believe that the children are able to learn and develop in such a large group. In San Antonio, as in Guatemala at large, the education system goes hand-in-hand with religion. As mentioned in the chapter on education in Guatemala, a hundred years ago the Catholic Church was a big agent in building schools and educating the indigenous children of the countryside (Arriola 2002a:226). Today, the connection between the education system for the indigenous population and the religious institutions pervades, but in other forms. Today the big actor is the North American evangelical church. In the small village of San Antonio there are two schools built and sustained by North American churches. This is symptomatic in a society where the Catholic Church now has a big competitor in the North American evangelical church, which has become established across Guatemala in different forms, with support from North American religious organizations. A few years ago it was unheard of, but now you can hear the singing and crying into microphones so characteristic of the North American church, all across the country. The churches attract many people, particularly people with big problems such as unemployment and alcoholism. Their audible gatherings are often a source of irritation to the people who do not attend.

So, I asked, why did Zulma and her husband choose the school, Gotitas, and not one of the other for-fee *colegios* for their children. She explained that one of the schools had low teacher-student ratios, another lacks green space for the children to play and relax during recess, and one of the *colegios* was still fairly new and the standard of education unknown. Gotitas is an evangelical *colegio*, although it does not receive aid from abroad: Zulma, like most indigenous people in Guatemala, is Catholic, so I ask if religion had anything to do with their choice:

- *No, here religion means absolutely nothing. For example my daughters study in an evangelical school, and I know that religion has nothing to do with that whatsoever, because we worship the same God, only in different forms. No-one speaks about religion here. It is not a problem for me that my children go to evangelical schools, because they don't influence the religion of the children. They speak about it, but it is not a problem at all, since here religion is not a problem.*

Her conviction regarding the unimportance of religion initially strikes me as strange, but I soon noticed that this was a common point of view. The people with whom I spoke tended to emphasize that religion is neither problematic nor a source of conflict. Through this insistence, further discussions on the matter were avoided and I felt some discomfort from my informants on the subject.

The same occurred when discussing the cultural identity of people. Frequently, the phrase *todos somos iguales*, we are all equal, was mentioned and the opinion expressed is that it is not a problem and above all not something that I need to worry about. The same goes for Zulma. I asked her about her daughters and their cultural identity. How would Zulma define it? They dress in western clothes and sometimes traditional, they speak Spanish, a little Kaqchiquel, and some English, they practice Catholicism with their family, go to an Evangelical school, and are raised in a village dominated by Kaqchiquel people. The question seems relevant. She answered:

- *We are indigenous-Catholic and I do not have a problem with other religions. My definition is that “todos somos iguales”, we are all brothers and sisters and I do not discriminate anyone. We are all equal, that is a good conclusion, and not a problem for me.*

This was not what I asked, but I received a pledge as to the equal value of every culture and religion. *Todos somos iguales* is easy to say and nice to talk about. However, it is clearly evident (see the chapter *Consequences of being indigenous in Guatemala*) that it is not true: people are not equal in Guatemala. What marks inequality is often still the traditional expressions of indigenous culture. The people living in areas with high densities of indigenous populations, dressing traditionally, and practicing traditional trades, are statistically the most likely to be poor and generally excluded from the benefits of modern society. Zulma knows this, and she has told me of personal experiences of discrimination because of her traditional dress when she studied in the capital. At that time she chose to change her clothes to better fit in.

Todos somos iguales is what Zulma says, and this appears to be the official discourse in Guatemala. However, the reality of discrimination and exclusion that is so obvious to a visitor prevails, but no-one wants to talk about it.

8 Maya identity in school

The school was a good fieldwork site for this study. I learned what the adult world wanted to promote and teach to the younger generation, what they failed to do, and how the multiculturalist discourse was part of the curriculum of this ambitious school. I was also able to spend time with the children and, after they got to know me better, talk to them on their terms about the issues that interested me. The result was striking. Their views differed a lot from the adults. They had no preconceptions of what I might want to hear and reacted spontaneously to my questions. So follow me in to a local school and discover how the discourse of Maya identity affects (or does not affect) the daily life here.

8.1 The school: ‘Gotitas de Saber’

San Antonio has a proud history when it comes to education, something that is very apparent to me as a visitor in the school and community. According to McKenna Brown (2000:159) San Antonio has distinguished itself for more than a century, as a place with a high rate of literacy and general education, compared to other rural areas in Guatemala. In 1874 San Antonio had two schools, at a time when most of the communities of equal size had none (McKenna Brown 2000:159). Also one of the first missionary schools established by organizations from the United States in Guatemala was placed in San Antonio.

The people that I spoke to, both within the school and among the parents etc., expressed the opinion that the public schools in the village are of poorer quality than the private schools, like ‘Gotitas de Saber’- ‘Drops of Knowledge’. This is not really surprising. Many who have worked in the public schools or whose children have attended tell of messy classrooms, large student-teacher ratios, insufficient resources, and a general low standard of education. Even if the teachers are well educated and good at their job, it is difficult to effectively teach 40 children. Clearly, parents with ambition for their children will apply for places in private school and teachers may prefer to work in private schools such as Gotitas. But even if the fees might be considered low ranging from about 10-15 U.S. dollars per month for the younger children, up to 30 U.S. dollars for the older, not everyone can afford them. The young female principal, Graciela, tells me this is a low price for the education and environment provided to the children. It is also possible for families with very low incomes to pay a lower rate. Graciela founded the school with her family when she was unable to find a good school for her oldest son when he turned 12. Graciela is an educated psychologist, but felt

that this was an important personal mission. The school started with 17 students and grew very rapidly to the 180 attending today.

The school has an evangelical religious foundation, but all are welcome to attend. Based on my reading of the guiding principles for the school I see an establishment that is very progressive and socially aware run by people who see education as the most effective way out of poverty. This is also the impression I received during my time in the school. Extract from these principles:

Aware of our mission as Christians, we are called to serve our fellowmen. We believe that we have to respond to the conditions we have in our society today; to form the children for a better society through an education that is based in the philosophical principles of: Love, Integrity and Science. (Extract from *Guiding principles for the school Gotitas de Saber, San Antonio Aguas Calientes*)

The guiding principles of the school have a strong focus on poverty reduction through education, “in the spirit of Jesus”. It is a different form of struggle for the rights of the indigenous than that of the Maya movement. In the school social justice and equality are goals, whereas the way you speak or dress on the way to achieving those goals is secondary. Graciela tells me that they have chosen to give the children uniforms, because there are quite a few parents who may not be able to provide their children with clean, serviceable clothing. However, students may also choose to wear their traditional dress. This is actually encouraged by the school, but it is difficult because, according to Graciela, many of the girls prefer not to wear the traditional skirt, *corte*, even if their parents would wish them to.

The parents also play an important role in the school. They are expected to take an active role in the schooling of their children and to participate in events and meetings at the school. According to the principal, this is the only demand the school has of the families of the children enrolled in the school.

8.1 An ordinary day at school

Once I came to know Zulma, I spent a lot of time in the school Gotitas de Saber in San Antonio, where her children were students. As I explain in the methods chapter, it took a lot of time, patience, and even stubbornness for me to become someone the children and teachers trusted, who was an accepted part of the school day. I sat through classes in English, domestic science, religion, mathematics, computer science and natural sciences, as well as parent-teacher meetings and so on. It was often boring, but many times also amusing and fun. Sometimes I became an extra-teacher, helping the teachers to keep the children in their benches and making them behave as they should. However, I usually remained at the back of the class room, observing and listening.

On an ordinary day I spent the mornings with the junior- or intermediate-level groups and the afternoons with the senior level-groups. The junior levels and the intermediate levels have classes until around 12 p.m. after which the senior-level classes begin. Many times when I arrived at the school there was a class outside the classroom doing something physical. For example on one of the first days I visited the school the fourth-grade students were playing with their teacher, Byron, outdoors. This day they practiced left and right and the name of flowers through different games. They were ecstatic in their games and full of laughter as children often are. Suddenly someone fell over and began to cry. Then the games were over and they returned to the classroom. On this typical day the children were happy to see me and as usual they wanted to talk, ask questions and look at my possessions. As I sat at the back of the classroom I often studied my surroundings; it was an idyllic scene. The classrooms have only three walls, and are open to the green schoolyard where the birds sing and children play on their breaks. The atmosphere is gentle and familiar between the children, teachers, and principal; with lots of hugs and friendly chatter. To an outsider like me, any hierarchies were invisible - if there were any, I could not see them. There was no cleaner in the school but everyone, teachers and children, helped out whenever there was a moment to spare. They picked up litter, watered the plants, and swept the classroom floors and the yard. It felt like a place where people enjoyed being.

After outdoor games it was time for mathematics this day. The teacher explained that he tries to have the children do something physical during the day to help them focus on the work in the classroom. This is probably a good idea. Most of the children seem to handle the work with addition well. A typical lesson procedure would be for the teacher to write something on the board that the children then copy into their books. Then they might count together and afterwards work independently. It is a scene familiar from my own years in school. One girl called out: *Profe, I do not understand!* And the teacher responded: *I need you to be totally quiet, please.* He explained again on the black board and when he gave homework assignment they protested loudly in one voice: *No, we already have homework in three other subjects!*

Mathematics was followed by English lessons with another teacher, Heidi. The children stand when she entered the room: "Good morning, miss!", they say in English. They practiced the days of the week, but pronounce the words as they would a Spanish word, so it sounds funny to me. Heidi reminds them that although they write Monday, they must pronounce it *Mondei*. I observe that the teachers of the school are generally very patient with the students. They are kind, very young, well-prepared for classes, and work patiently. I see a lot of love and respect coming from the teachers to the children, who love their teachers in return. The mood in the class room is usually calm, but a little messy. In the classes with older students they often walk about, asking questions to each other or the teacher. The system of raising your hand and waiting your turn is almost nonexistent.

The children take their lunch break in the school yard. Most of them bring some small coins to buy something from the ladies selling ice cream, chuchitos, and small candies. The breaks provided a good opportunity for me to talk to the students and teachers in a relaxed, informal way. The students, especially the

girls, are curious about me and want to hang out during their breaks. Many are very sweet to me, bringing me candy and stickers. However, it is obvious that as in all schools there are different groupings among the students. It is, of course, a simplification, but nonetheless a very visible phenomenon. There are the “cool girls” who see me as one of the teachers; that is, I am not cool. This group does not attempt to connect with me, and answers my questions with raised eyebrows and a bored look. There are the “funny girls” who are very clever and ask the teachers questions that make everyone laugh. They make me laugh as well, but can also make me look stupid when they are in the mood to do so. There are the “shy girls”, who only hang out with their best friend and would prefer not to talk to anyone else - they are hard for me to reach. Then there are the “good girls”, who do what they are told by the teachers and who demonstrate a polite interest in what I have to say. These girls wear their hair long and in traditional styles, often with the skirt from the traditional female costume, whereas the “cool girls” tend to wear modern accessories and their hair shorter. Similar groupings exist among the boys. It is amusing to arrive to a classroom on the other side of the world and see repeated the same social patterns of your own school experience almost 20 years earlier.

In the afternoon of this typical day, I visited a senior-level class during their Spanish class, or *escritura* – writing, as they call it. The teacher was an older gentleman who spoke from behind the desk as he taught the class about different writers from the Spanish speaking literature. He talked and the students wrote in their books... *He was born in Havana...* etc, or at least most of them wrote in their books. Some students lay on their benches, not caring much about listening or writing down what the teacher was saying. The atmosphere was slow and sleepy. But the older teacher continued talking, patiently, kindly, like he really has something important to tell them. He did not let the tired mood affect him, but did his best to convey the message of the great literature.

Later in the afternoon the senior-level classes were divided into groups of boys and girls. Teacher Louis, who also teaches computer-science and is the youngest and most energetic, took the group of boys in *ciencias industriales* – industrial sciences. Louis described how in this class the boys are taught about different materials and different work methods – *everything that has to do with men’s work*, he explained. On this day, however, no official “male education“ is taking place, it is more subtle. The students played with Louis instead, because they had recently finished a period of tests. Together they constructed a ropeway in the yard between two of the buildings. With a handle on the rope the idea was to fly over the yard holding the handle. It looked very dangerous to my eyes. While the boys were out playing, the girls were in a classroom sewing dolls in domestic science class with their teacher, Raquel. I was a little taken aback by the very traditional gender division and asked the girls whether they would want to ride the ropeway. They look at me a little surprised and answered that of course they would ride the ropeway - just as soon as it is finished. *What kind of stupid question is that?* Raquel brought ice cream to the classroom and the girls were eating and working on the dolls. I too was given an ice cream and a dolls leg to stuff with cotton. Thus we spent the afternoon of this ordinary day working

quietly and making small talk, while the boys worked with the ropeway outside in the yard.

8.2 Expressions of Maya identity in school

There were several visual clues that the leaders of the school wanted the school to be explicitly *Mayan*; but also there was a very complex relationship to the Maya identity and a questioning of its use and implications. In talking with the children I realized they had a completely different perspective.

8.2.1 What happened to Kakchiquel?

When the peace agreement was signed after the civil war in 1996, it became a legal right for children to be educated in their mother tongue. This required the state to educate thousands of teachers from the indigenous communities and see to it that schools all over the country had access to the teachers. In reality, this has not been implemented at all. In San Antonio, a village that is considered well developed in terms of education and schools, only one school of five, Gotitas de Saber, offers its students any education in Kakchiquel. Here Kakchiquel is a specialized subject, and not used in every class. As mentioned earlier, when talking to Zulma I learned that the Kakchiquel teacher had been away for some time and the school had no chance to replace him. There simply is no one available to replace him with; no educated teachers who speak Kakchiquel. According to teachers in the school, this particular Kakchiquel teacher is elderly and they wonder how they will replace him once he is retired for good. Therefore, none of the children in San Antonio were learning or hearing any Kakchiquel in school. I tried to find out why the teacher was absent and when he might return, but I still do not know for certain: I received many different answers:

- *The teacher is out travelling. In two weeks he will be here again.* (Luis)
- *Unfortunately the teacher is a bit sick at the moment, because of his age.* (Graciela)
- *The teacher had his own ideas about things, and for this reason there are no classes in Kakchiquel this year.* (Mario)
- *There is a professor, but I do not know when he will come back.* (Carmen)
- *Last year they gave classes in Kakchiquel here, but this year I do not know why there is no teacher of Kakchiquel here.* (Magdi)

Perhaps this was a sign of a conflict in the school related to the presence of the teacher, perhaps they could not get him to work there, or perhaps it was not that important to have him there. I never did find out.

Graciela, the principal, has a dualistic view of the situation regarding the Kakchiquel language. On one hand she believes it is sad that they are losing the language, but she also believes that the idea from the government, that the schools should be bilingual, is unrealistic and not based on the reality in the schools. She says:

- *I have always been against this bilingual education that the government wants to implement. I do not know why they call it bilingual, because the teachers give their classes in Spanish and not in Kakchiquel. I imagine that the government receives some kind of international aid for this project and so it has to be called this. When you go into a school or a classroom you will hear Spanish, not Kakchiquel, and the teachers do not know Kakchiquel, except for perhaps a few words. The children would not understand anything if the teaching was in Kakchiquel.*
- *Is it not an obligation from the state to give all classes in Kakchiquel to the children with Kakchiquel as their mother tongue? I thought that you had to do this? (Anna)*
- *Yes, you should do it, but it is not carried out. If it is not a bilingual school you do not have to do it and the bilingual schools are very few in Guatemala. For example here in San Antonio there are none. I think that there are some classes in San Andres (a small village close to San Antonio), but they don't give any classes in Kakchiquel there either, only in Spanish. (Graciela)*
- *But you could still say that this is an indigenous village, even if the language has changed? (Anna)*
- *Yes this is an indigenous village; we just do not speak the mother tongue anymore. But this is an indigenous village and it is one hundred percent Kakchiquel. (Graciela)*

That the principal of this school does not consider it to be a bilingual school is interesting. No-one would ever question that San Antonio is an indigenous village, and the language spoken by the older generation is considered the mother tongue of the village. So why, I ask myself, is the school not considered bilingual? It is because the language is not used by the people! Usage of the Kakchiquel language is decreasing due to discrimination and for pragmatic reasons. The children do not speak the language with their parents or with each other, so why would they speak it with their teachers (who do not speak it either)? It does not make sense. But, as noted, the feelings and opinions about the language are two-sided. I asked the teachers how they feel about the loss of the language. They expressed similar views:

- *This is an indigenous Kakchiquel village, but the language is not spoken much? (Anna)*
- *Yes, sadly we are losing the language. (Mario)*
- *So could you say that the mother tongue is Spanish and not Kakchiquel here? (Anna)*

- *No, the mother tongue is Kakchiquel and the second language is Spanish. (Mario)*
- *Do you speak Kakchiquel? (Anna)*
- *No, I know some words, but I cannot speak it. (Mario)*
- *Could you say that a language is a mother tongue if you cannot speak it? (Anna)*
- *They say it is a mother tongue because it has its roots from our parents and grandparents. But until a certain point, yes it is the mother tongue for the older persons, but for those who come second or third after those who speak the language, the mother tongue might be Spanish. (Mario)*

In another interview:

- *How do you feel about that the Kakchiquel language is not spoken so much anymore? (Anna)*
- *It is a shame, because it is something that came before, something valuable that our ancestors had. The Spanish came and tried to take away all that was Guatemalan, this is very sad. I would like to change it, but for the time being it is hard because the people are more preoccupied with learning English than Kakchiquel, because the people think ahead. (Luis)*

Talking to teacher Mario:

- *How do you feel about Kakchiquel being lost? (Anna)*
- *It is a shame, because not only the language is lost, but also our customs and our traditional clothes. This is because of influence from Ladino culture and discrimination. (Mario)*

Talking to teacher Magdi:

- *Do you think that it is a shame that the language is lost? (Anna)*
- *Yes I think so. But it has both negative and positive sides. Because many people from here with education have been busy with learning English, because Guatemala is such a tourist-orientated country. The language has not been taken care of, because people have favored learning the languages of other countries. (Magdi)*

They also all pretty much agree on *why* this change has happened:

- *I have seen a lot of discrimination here in Guatemala. We indigenous people do not have the same opportunities as the Ladino. Many times we are discriminated against for being indigenous. (Magdi)*
- *Do you experience discrimination even if you do not wear the traditional clothes or speak Kakchiquel? (Anna)*

- *No, people are a bit stupid and only when they see a person wearing traditional clothes they think that that person is indigenous. But not when they see a person that looks Ladino. (Magdi)*
- *Could it be that people want to change language because of this? (Anna)*
- *Yes, to have more opportunities. (Magdi)*

Graciela has her views on the matter of why language is lost:

- *The television is one thing. The children love to watch television, but there are no programs in Kakchiquel. Another factor is that we are close to the capital and close to Antigua; to go there you have to speak Spanish well. Imagine walking in to an office there if you do not speak good Spanish. You would be totally discriminated against. Therefore people prefer going in pants and the way that you speak will determine if you are indigenous or not. Because of discrimination the indigenous people have decided to speak only Spanish and this has been the primary factor of why the language is not being used or taught. (Graciela)*

They all speak about the discrimination and the demands of life today. They blame the Ladino culture and that the people more focus on learning other languages in order to have more opportunities in life. “The way that you speak will determine if you are indigenous or not,” said Graciela. This is an important sentence and is in contradiction to what she said earlier about San Antonio: if people in the village no longer speak the language and this means that they are not indigenous, how can this then be an indigenous village? My point here is not to indicate that the principal is inconsistent, but to underscore the idea that people have a complicated relationship with their cultural identity and the part it should play in society.

8.2.2 'El día del maíz'

I was lucky - I got to experience 'El día del maíz', or “Corn day”, at the school. I was interested in investigating this kind of cultural expression in the school, as well as the less obvious ones, so I was very happy to have the opportunity to participate in this day. Corn is the staple crop of Guatemalan food culture and is also a strong symbol of the Guatemalan indigenous people who traditionally are occupied with cultivating the land, where corn is the most important product. I ask the teacher Carmen why they celebrate it here in the school.

- *To make the indigenous children here aware of the corn. They are people of corn. (Carmen)*

In the novel *Hombres de Maíz* (Men of corn, 1949) by the Guatemalan Nobel Prize winning author Miguel Angel Asturias, the traditional myths of the Quiché people in the work *Popol Vuh* is repeated. Man is created from corn! The same

goes for the creation of man in the myths of the Kakchiquel people, in the *Anales de los Cakchiqueles*. Corn is the symbol of the holy, of food, life, and man. And in *Hombres de maíz* the central conflict is between the people who see corn as a holy crop (the indigenous people) and those who see it as a product to be sold like any other commercial product. It exposes the conflict between the traditional life of people in Guatemala and the effects of capitalism and commercialization of their crops. So, to celebrate El día del maíz should be viewed as a celebration of traditional indigenous culture and values.

It was the first day that I arrived in San Antonio that the school, Gotitas, celebrated Corn day through a variety of activities. Many of the children brought a parent to the school to show them all they had prepared for the day and to be the audience to a procession and contest. The parents brought dishes for the big corn buffet that was laid out on a large table in the school yard. I attended with Zulma and her daughters, who brought a large bowl of ground beans as a side dish to the corn dishes. The buffet consisted of more Guatemalan dishes made of corn than I had ever seen. There were popusas (corn dough cakes filled with cheese and fried in a lot of oil), chuchitos (cornmeal dumplings stuffed with meat), different tamales (more advanced form of chuchitos), tostadas (crispy fried tortilla topped with, for example, guacamole), sweet corn gruel, and much more. It was a feast for the eyes and mouth and I was invited to participate in everything. An informational exhibit made by the children recounting the history of corn was displayed in the courtyard. I saw the four different kinds of corn: yellow, red, white, and black.

After looking at the exhibits the procession and contest got underway. Each of the grades in the school had prepared a costume made of corn, these costumes were worn by a representative in a type of fashion show. To the sound of loud pop music and the screams and laughter of their fellow students, the children walked out onto a runway built in the school yard. The costumes were amazingly ambitious; enormous hats made solely from corn leaves, skirts covered with popcorn, corn-leaf dresses, and so on. Two of the younger teachers played the role of masters-of-ceremonies, presenting the children and explaining the costumes with a good deal of humor. This was a good way of playing down the situation, because most of the children entering the runway looked so nervous, and as an audience member I was afraid they might fall. The masters-of-ceremonies were also responsible for explaining the importance of the day. Several times they referred to how corn had been, and still is, a foundation of Guatemalan culture, and that it is important to celebrate one's culture and remember your past. The children took the costume contest seriously and two older, very serious-looking teachers were the judges, sitting behind a table writing down notes about the costumes and discussing them in low voices. The corn day was intended to be fun, but it was obvious that it was not just a game.

Most people I spoke to in the school told me that this celebration of El día del maíz is something new, something they did not celebrate growing up. Teachers Carmen, Louis, and Mario tell me that they like this new event and say - a little contradictory, I think -, that it is good to maintain your traditions, saying:

- *When I was a child we celebrated 'el día de Tecún Uman', who was the Guatemalan national hero, but not 'el día del maíz'. Until now we did not celebrate a lot of these things. (Mario)*
- *We did not celebrate 'el día del maíz' when I was a child, it is something new that was invented in the school. (Carmen)*
- *No I never celebrated 'el día del maíz' when I was a child, but the principal of this school has an interest in maintaining our traditions. I believe that the corn is very important and you cannot live without corn; what would we do without corn? So to emphasize this is something important that they might not be doing in other countries. This is what we do, raising the mood of the people and knowing that the corn is very important to us. I believe that our school is the only one celebrating 'el día del maíz' here. (Luis)*

The principal Graciela told another story though; that 'el día del maíz' is an old tradition that has been taking place in schools for as long as she can remember. At first these contradictions puzzled me. What should I make of them? Is it an old tradition or a new one, do they only celebrate the day in school, or in everyday life too? The actual statistics do not really interest me, but the fact that there are different versions of the story does. My interpretation of the situation is the same as that of Luis (above); that the principal *has an interest in maintaining our traditions*, which is in-line with the multiculturalist agenda of the time. When establishing this new, or old, tradition in school she is acting in accordance with the ideas of the Maya movement and organizations like OKMA. She is doing exactly what she is supposed to do. Also, I realize, the principal bears the most resemblance to the well-educated and socially-mobile people of the Maya movement. She is a very well-educated woman who holds several degrees including one in psychology from the university in Guatemala City, and she is now back in her home village to lead the school. Compared to other people I talked to in the village she has more education and is much more ideologically aware; her way of talking about these matters much resembles that of the activists of the Maya movement. Like many of these well-educated people she is also well informed and has a clear cultural agenda for the school. In one of my interviews she said:

- *It is important to develop values in the children. For example they have been told that we are purely Kakchiquel and that we have to feel proud that we have one origin and one culture that we have to continue to respect. Perhaps we need to practice our customs in an appropriate way so that they do not disappear. The Ladinos have disregarded the indigenous peoples for 500 years but now the indigenous feel stronger and could start disregard the Ladinos. This is not good. Our job is to foster the culture, tell the children that we come from Mayas and to feel proud. But we should not cultivate hatred. (Graciela)*

I believe that some of the circumstances and happenings in this school, such as, education in Kakchiquel, 'El día del maíz' etc, can be viewed in this light. I see the events as expressions of the multiculturalist ideology, in Guatemala communicated by the Maya movement in the school curriculum. The fact that most people tell me that 'El día del maíz' is something new and that Gotitas is the only school that had any teaching in Kakchiquel is an indicator of this perspective. The opinions of the principal strengthen the argument. This is how people are supposed to view themselves and their identity today: as *Mayas*.

8.2.3 Maya mathematics

One of the things that surprised me was that the students learned the numeric system of the ancient Maya empire in the school. To an outsider it seems like a complex, complicated system, comprised of dots and lines instead of numbers. I tried to understand the basics of this system but was not able even grasp the basics in one class. I asked the teacher if this is something that is used in society that the children will need for their future. She said it was not of any practical use, but a part of their cultural heritage that they wanted the children have a relationship with. In my opinion this is reasonable. Furthermore, I have read later that some pedagogs recommend the Maya numeric system as a tool for understanding our own numeric systems; especially for illiterates. Because it is a visual system and (apparently) logically structured, it can help with an understanding of mathematics without having to deal with written numbers. In the context of this numeric system, the teacher and the children were talking about it as something *Mayan*; referring then to the ancient pre-colonial empire and the people and culture occupying the land in that time. Even though they emphasized the relation between this Maya culture and themselves today, they did not put an equal sign between them. Representatives of the Maya movement, like OKMA, used the term Maya to refer to the people living today. But these people that I met did not refer to themselves with the term, but to the people and the culture that existed before colonization. This is a central finding.

8.2.4 Are you Maya?

Although I sometimes felt quite awkward and uncomfortable asking people about their cultural identity - it is after all a very personal question - I tried to ask the people I interviewed this question. I wanted to record their answers on tape and be able to go back and see exactly what they were saying. I asked them to describe their cultural identity and in the school I heard answers such as:

- *My cultural identity is indigenous.*
- *Well, it is a mixture I believe, because I am not Ladino, neither one hundred percent indigenous because I do not speak Kakchiquel, I only understand a few words. The same is true when it comes to clothes. Five*

years or so ago I remember that you still could see young people dressed in traditional clothes here, but now this is lost too, because it is very expensive. A huipil costs around 2.500 Quetzales (around USD 400) and they take a lot of time to produce. My mother and I can make these fabrics.

- *On a national level I would say I am Guatemalan, but I am always foremost from my village and I am Sanantoniero (from San Antonio) with pride!*
- *I am indigenous-catholic.*
- *I am from the village and if people ask me where I am from, the capital or Kakchiquel, I say Kakchiquel because I am part of this. I do not speak the language, but still many people define themselves like that: "I come from San Antonio and I am Kakchiquel." This is independent of if they speak the language or not, but because they live in a Kakchiquel area. So I and my mother can say this, because I live here and I am of this origin. People who are from other places can say that they are Mam or Pocomam etc.*

As evidenced above, people often identify with their place of origin, such as San Antonio, and the indigenous culture that is traditionally associated with life in that place. A physical place, rather than connections to a pre-colonial culture, is the basis for identification for most people I met. I did not see an indication that people associate their cultural identity with a pan-Maya identity, like OKMA seem to think that they "ought". Neither do they dissociate themselves from the Mayan, because of influences from racist discourses as OKMA implied that they might.

When I asked the people how an indigenous person is defined, the responses often suggested that dress and the language were determining factors: as in the example with the principal given earlier. Another definition was that of having old beliefs. I asked one of the teachers:

- *Do you believe that it is the language and dress that defines whether a person is indigenous? (Anna)*
- *Yes, I think so. And the beliefs. Older people, like my grandmother have beliefs and myths. For example she says that on Easter Friday you cannot wash yourself, because if you do you will turn in to a fish or a siren. Or if someone is pregnant they say that if you walk across a rope, the umbilical cord will become entangled. But these are only beliefs and they are influenced by the Mayan cosmo-vision. (Teacher Magdi)*
- *And do you have these thoughts in your mind as well, or are they not part of your life at all? (Anna)*
- *No, I do not believe in this, because when I was in first grade I went to play basket, my mother said that I should not play because then the chuchitos would not be cooked. I did not listen to her, and the chuchitos cooked. (Magdi)*

8.3 Listening to the children

As mentioned in the chapter on methodologies, I conducted a series of workshops with some of the classes in the school. The idea to undertake this form of data collection came from my supervisor in field, Aura Cumes. We agreed it was a good way to approach the children and gather their ideas and views on this subject. Since I did not want to do regular interviews with children or just talk to them about these matters in a disorganized way, and because they are used to the classroom situation, we believed that a workshop in the classroom would be a good alternative. I gave the children some papers and asked them to write down their answers to the questions I posed. I did not ask them to write their names, as this was not important and I did not want them to feel embarrassed about anything they wrote. In all, I had 32 children at the age 10 to 12 draw pictures and write down answers to 12 prepared questions. I tried to make it to an enjoyable experience and after I finished asking my questions there was time for them to ask me questions about what ever they wanted. It became a fun activity were I asked them questions and they asked questions in return.

8.3.1 About the village, family and future

I asked the children to describe the village of San Antonio to someone who did not know it. I also asked them to tell me what the difference was, if any, between the people who lived in San Antonio and the people who lived in Antigua or the capital. I then requested that they describe their families, their parents' occupations, and to draw a picture of someone in their family.

All the children described San Antonio with an affection that moved me. There is no question of the presence of local patriotism. They described San Antonio as a beautiful and peaceful village, where the people are friendly and nice to one another. They say that it has many inhabitants and children. According to a majority of the children the big difference to the larger cities in Guatemala is, that people in the cities wear "normal clothes", as compared to the traditional ones worn in San Antonio. Many also said that the people are not as nice and might be stressed out because of the life in the city. The idea that people in San Antonio are more hard-working and have less education was also mentioned by some.

Around half of the children wrote that their mother worked in the weaving of traditional fabrics or other handicrafts, some defined them as housewives. Most of the fathers worked as drivers, in a variety of shops, in the fields or as carpenter/craftsman.

When it came to their futures, the children had quite defined plans. The most common professions of choice were teacher or doctor; but also others including professional singer, police, veterinary, pilot, architect. One girl wrote about her future:

- *I want to be a doctor, like a friend that I admire. I will speak Spanish and English and I will stay unmarried, have many friends, and live with my parents.*

And one boy wrote:

- *I want to work hard, take care of my family, and live free in the USA.*

8.3.2 Defining themselves

It was important to me to ask the children about their cultural identity; especially as they had already been defined by people around them, such as the principal who said that the village was one-hundred percent Kakchiquel and wanted to promote Mayan cultural traits in the school. Obviously, the questions could not be posed in the same way as to the adults. I believe the workshop format was a good opportunity; everybody wrote their answers anonymously, nobody told them what to write or think. And the result was, as mentioned before, quite striking.

To the question of whether they speak Kakchiquel, a couple of the children said that they did speak it a little, but the majority responded that they did not, or that only their grandparents or some older relative did.

- *I only speak it a little, but I have to learn more because it is important.*

I asked them what an indigenous person is and how you could define such a person. The most common answers were that they are poor, wear traditional clothes, and that they speak Kakchiquel. Many elaborated further:

- *They are simple and calm people and it is good to be so. They are not self-important and also very happy.*
- *They are people with small recourses, and because of this they work in the field.*
- *Many people say that indigenous people are the Guatemalans, but I do not know if this is so.*

I asked the children if they are indigenous. Only seven of them said yes.

- *Yes of course, because I was born here.*
- *Yes, I think so.*
- *Yes, all of us Guatemalans are Guatemalans.*

Three of them said that they did not know, but the rest said no.

- *I am not, but my mother was before.*

I then asked them what a Maya person is and how you could define such a person. It was obvious that the absolute majority of the children understood this concept as something referring to the people living in the ancient Maya empire.

- *They were our ancestors, someone who existed before.*
- *They made statues and symbols.*

Mostly I received answers that explained that these people wear neither clothes, nor shoes, thus referring to the pre-colonial times:

- *They go without trousers, without shirt and shoes, and they are covered in leaves.*
- *They are not like us, they are strong and they do not wear clothes, only underwear.*

But they also had other things to say about this people:

- *They are very smart and know a lot of things that we do not know.*
- *They pray to many gods.*
- *A Maya person cannot write.*

Then I asked them if they are Maya. Just like when I asked about if they are indigenous, only seven of them said yes.

- *Yes we are all , because we came from the same origin*
- *Yes, a little.*

In the same way, three said that they did not know, and the rest said no. Some of them referred to the fact that they could use the Maya numeric system.

The last question referred to the Kakchiquel. I asked them what a Kakchiquel person was and how you could define such a person. Almost everybody wrote that the term referred to a person that could speak Kakchiquel.

- *It is a person who speaks this language.*

Some also elaborated with descriptions of their looks and temperament.

- *They wear corte and huipil (the traditional dress for women)*
- *They are simple and nice people.*
- *They cultivate the land.*
- *They are poor and short.*

To the question whether they themselves are Kakchiquel, the answers were similar to before; seven said yes and the rest said no.

- *Maybe a little, because we speak the language.*

- *I am not Kakchiquel, but I respect my culture.*

8.3.3 Reflections

It is clear that the children I met in the school in San Antonio did not generally consider themselves to be either indigenous, Maya, or Kakchiquel. Only a minority felt spontaneously associated with these terms. Most of the children seemed to consider the term Maya as referring to the people of the ancient Maya empire, although some of them noted that they must be somehow related to the ancient people because they are their ancestors. When you have children describing Mayan people as persons only wearing underwear or being covered in leaves, you can be quite sure that they do not consider themselves as belonging to such a group. But I did not see any sign of contempt towards this group or embarrassment from being associated with it. They just did not consider the term Maya to have much to do with them.

The answers that the children gave are considerably different from the ones given by adults in the village and in the school. The adults I spoke with all considered themselves to be either indigenous, or Kakchiquel, or both. I believe there are several reasons for this difference. First, the children are further away from the indigenous culture and the Kakchiquel language that only a few decades ago completely dominated everyday life in San Antonio, as in most other Guatemalan villages. If you are not explicitly told that you are Kakchiquel, it may not be obvious to the children that they actually “are”, or should consider themselves to be. Second, and I believe more importantly, the children reacted spontaneously to my questions as children usually do, and did not have any notion that I might have a specific answer in mind. They still they have not been socialized in to giving this or that answer. They did not know to be politically correct. At the time, the politically correct answer would be that, of course, they are Maya Kakchiquel people; this according to the official multiculturalist discourse promoted by organizations of the Maya movement, like OKMA. None of the adults said that they were Maya either, but mentioned terms like indigenous and Kakchiquel and did not explicitly say no when associated with the term as the children did. I believe that the adults had an idea of what I was possibly looking for when asking about their cultural identity. And, of course, they wanted to oblige by giving me answers that related to the things that tourist are interested in: traditional culture (language and dress) and the Maya empire. They are polite people and unlike the children, they know what foreigners usually want to hear.

8.4 Thoughts on Maya organizations among the teachers

The organizations of the Maya movement who supposedly speak for the local indigenous people, are not well known among the people themselves. None of the people I spoke with understood what I was referring to when I asked them their opinions on the organizations who work for the rights of the Maya people or the recovery of Maya culture in society today. Most people thought I was talking about organizations that work with tourism, the education of children, or archaeology. One teacher said that yes, he believes that these organizations work very well in taking care of tourists, the conservation of archaeological sites, and traditional dances. Another teacher said that he knows about the tourist guides and some schools that teach the Kakchiquel language. He says that these schools are hard to find today because people do not prioritize the learning of Kakchiquel. They would rather learn English in order to move ahead and increase their opportunity to make money. He explained that if I started a Kakchiquel school, it would not work because no-one would attend.

Only two of the people I interviewed in San Antonio seemed to have any concept of what the Maya movement is and what they do - the principal and one of the teachers. The teacher explained that she knows about the organization of Rigoberta Menchú, and that this is the only organization she has heard of that works for the rights of the indigenous people. Generally she believes there are no organizations who take problems of discrimination seriously. When I asked the principal about it, she answered that:

- *Well, I do not know what to say. Because to give classes in Kakchiquel, for example, we have to speak this language. But the problem is that we do not and if they come and start a Kakchiquel school it would be a disaster, because first of all we would have to teach the children the language in order to be able to teach. But I think that would be a waste of time. It can be okay to save the language in places where it is spoken, but not here.*

8.5 What does it mean to be Maya?

Who should define who is Maya and who is not? I believe most would agree that it is up to the individuals to define themselves, but this is not the case in Guatemala. In defining oneself there is much to consider: where you come from and where you want to go, your own social status, etc. Cultural identity in Guatemala is a complicated concept, as becomes apparent in speaking to the people, especially the children. When considering their answers to my questions in the workshop, I started to ask myself what it really means to “be” Maya. San

Antonio is defined as an indigenous community, and therefore also a Maya community under the classification of the mayanists. But people in San Antonio do not identify as Maya so then what is the meaning of the definition?

Peter Hervik (2003), who carried out fieldwork among the indigenous “Maya” population of Yucatan, Mexico, says that the indigenous population in Mexico calls themselves *mestizos* – a term referring to a mixed European/native American decent. In his experience only anthropologists, tourist guides, and so on call the population “Maya” (2003:xix). This is similar to what I experienced in Guatemala, but here I almost exclusively heard the term Maya being used by representatives of the Maya movement in reference to the population of today. Hervik also writes that his informants consider the term Maya to refer to the people that inhabited the empire in ancient times. When it is used today it can also refer to language (2003:26). This is also what I experienced, particularly with the children who clearly referred to the ancient Maya empire when I asked them about a Maya person. However, this may be changing. The Maya movement wants people to “stop being influenced by racist discourses” and to start self-identifying as Maya; and a few of the people that I spoke with actually do so. An example is the principal of the school in San Antonio. She is an educated woman with a degree from the university in the capital and knows what she is talking about. Her self-identification is very conscious and she also tries to apply some ideas in the school that would be to the liking to the Maya movement (for example, *el día del maíz*, teaching in Kakchiquel, teaching Maya mathematics). The last to pick up on what is politically correct are probably the children, who react more spontaneously and who generally do not identify with “being Maya”.

The children do not speak the language. They wear a mixed dress and the majority wears a uniform in school. Their names do not usually hint about them belonging to a Maya community; they are Cindy, Andrea, Jonathan, Heidi, Kevin, Wilson, Iris, Lisbet, Sandra, Jimi, Edith, Sergio, Elsa, Karen, Jessica, Brandon, with last names such as Lopez Santos, García Pérez, Xicay, and Guarán. None of this would matter of course, if the children self-identified as Maya. But now they do not. So, in this case: what does it mean to be Maya?

9 Arrogance versus pragmatism

“We try to influence the people so that they stop with these ideas that they have,” said Mr. Sanchez of OKMA during the interview (see chapter 6). His comment was aimed at parents who show no interest in teaching their children the indigenous languages, but the statement has a wider scope. According to Mr. Sanchez, anthropologists have influenced people into believing that poverty reduction is just as important, or even more important, than language revitalization. He is also annoyed by the fact that people generally seem more interested in learning other languages, to travel, and to educate themselves and their children, than to revitalize languages, organize around a Pan-Maya identity, or identify as Maya at all. According to Mr Sanchez this is due to a lack of information, and because of the influence of racist discourses. When I conducted my fieldwork in San Antonio and came to understand everyday life of the school, of its children and teachers, of Graciela, Mario, Louis, Carmen, and parents like Zulma, I realized that the perspectives expressed at OKMA concerning these people are profoundly arrogant and completely incorrect. The people I met, though not formally educated, are perfectly able to draw their own conclusions and are the people best able to make the decisions regarding their children’s future. Perhaps their decisions are more pragmatic than ideological, but so be it.

In light of this conclusion I explore related issues below.

9.1 Multicultural hegemony – the contested influence of a discourse

I asked the representatives of OKMA if they considered there to be any multicultural discourse in society that supports their views on culture and identity. They said there was not and that they receive no support from official quarters. Thus, to claim that their views and work could be seen as part of a dominant discourse was almost absurd to them. In their opinion they are working against a strong headwind. My supervisor in field, the anthropologist Aura Cumes, holds the opposite view, saying that the multiculturalist discourse is now setting the agenda in Guatemala, supporting the views of the Maya movement. According to Cumes, people like herself who dare to discuss or even criticize this discourse become excluded and silenced. On a general level, this view is shared by Friedman (1994).

It is important to again point out that in this thesis “the multicultural” refers to and is perceived as an *ideology*, as a way of looking at society and as a method

to deal with ethnic relations, not as a *description* of the state of the world. Thus, if we live in a multicultural society, it is because of political decisions rather than because of a certain composition of ethnicity or culture in that society. In the words of Bastos and Cumes, Guatemala is now in a state of “multicultural normalization” (2007a:11), with the paradoxical situation that the poverty and exclusion of the poor indigenous population seem to increase with the influence of neo liberalism and globalization, at the same time as the presence of Mayan activists in positions of power also increases (2007a:11). The multicultural ideology is a way for the nation states, such as Guatemala, to understand and manage the ethnic and cultural diversity. The Mayan activists and other actors are attempting to consolidate this ideology among the people (Cumes & Bastos 2007a:11).

According to England (2003), the Maya movement has influence in the national political arena and in all levels of civil society. But, as I observed in my fieldwork, it still has a weak popular base. Only one of my informants knew about the organizations of the Maya movement. Still though, the ideology has managed to influence the mind of the general population with the ideas on cultural identity and Pan-mayanism. However, as I discovered, that probably does not include the next generation, that is, the children. According to Warren (1998:10), the Maya movement disapproves of indigenous people who increase their opportunity for physical and ethnic social mobility and find jobs or pursue education outside their home community by “passing” as Ladino. However, many of the people I met, both children and adults, see this as a way out of poverty, exclusion, and hard physical labor. In this they will not let the new way of thinking about cultural identity affect them.

9.2 Folklore and local identity

According to the Maya activist and scholar Cuxil (1996:42), the national culture of Guatemala is dominated by the Ladino, whereas Maya languages and culture are treated as folklore: with this, I agree. And my investigation shows that this is also true for the culture of the people defined as Maya. The cultural change in communities like San Antonio can not be defined only as a forced top-down process. Maya culture in the school in San Antonio, and in the life of many of the children attending the school, is expressed and treated as folklore, rather than everyday practice. The explanation for this is not influences of racist discourses or embarrassment of a cultural heritage, as the representative of OKMA would have it, but have pragmatic reasons.

Those in power in Guatemala cynically exploit the Maya cultures to make money through the tourist industry, Cuxil also claims (1996:42). This is most certainly true. But it is also true that many ordinary people make their living from tourist spending. In San Antonio the community has created a centre where makers of local products and handicrafts can meet with visitors and tourists

interested in buying their products. A high proportion of the income of many families in the community depends on selling and providing services to tourists, mostly in Antigua. One perspective of this is that it is an enforced situation and that communities are forced to change because of visitors arriving and changing old structures, traditions, language etc. However, I have not heard of anyone living in the village having this view of the situation. What I observed is that changes in language and culture in San Antonio are primarily a result of “Sanantonieros” going away to Antigua or the capital and coming back with new ideas and needs, than of an invasion of foreign tourists making the town change in ways that would be against the will of its people. People choose to move, to make contacts with foreign people, learn foreign languages, and make money from tourist-related industry. Many of the people I met see opportunities of a better life for themselves and their children as a result of tourism.

“ Soy Sanantoniero y con orgullo”, I am from San Antonio, and I am proud to be, said both Mario and Louis in my interviews. I heard the same from many others in more informal situations. The people I met have a local identity first, a national Guatemalan second and a Kakchiquel third. Few in the village say that they are or identify as Maya, and none feel connected to a Pan-Maya identity or similar. This must of course be a disappointment to the representatives of the Maya movement, whose goal is to build a sense of a Pan-Maya identity among the indigenous people of Guatemala-Mexico-Honduras.

9.3 In dialog with Friedman

In an article in the anthology *Debating Cultural Hybridity: multi-cultural identity and the politics of anti-racism* (1997), Friedman criticizes those of the intellectual elite, referred to as cosmopolitans, who question or are negative towards the ethnification of people and states in the now decentralized global system; the kind of ethnification occurring in Guatemala, for example. These cosmopolitans choose hybridization as their politically correct solution for self-identification and definition of the world, he says (1997:75). A world where there is no ethnic absolutism and the ethnic and cultural identity projects of local people thus are “wrong”. This cosmopolitan elite is rather postmodern than modern, is anti-racist, anti-ethnic, and convinced that everything is mixed and hybrid. Friedman sees this as happening above the heads of the real people, who face a quite different reality. According to Friedman (1997:74), at the forefront of these cosmopolitans are sociologists of the Cultural Studies School, who prefer to study literature, music, film and the like, rather than “real” life. In my opinion this is acceptable because not everyone can be an anthropologist and of course different conclusions arise, depending on the study method of choice. However, it is obvious that their position annoys Friedman - as if the mere existence of those other than anthropologists studying cultural phenomenon threatens the anthropological discipline. I am not so concerned.

I wonder if, in Friedman's view, am I a cosmopolitan, secretly despising my informants in the Maya movement for using their indigenous identity in political work? I hope it is clear that this is not the case. I have never seen it as a "terrible intellectual error" (Friedman 1997:79) to devote oneself to one's ethnic identity. When studying these issues my comprehension of the situation and of the experiences of people is the same as that of Friedman's, as mentioned before, that "Experience of the world (...) is neither true nor false; it simply *is*." (1997:88). I have simply asked myself (and my research data) how interested local people outside the movement are in revitalizing a Maya cultural identity: not much, it seems.

Friedman also mentions the question of hybridity versus essentialism when it comes to Guatemala and the Maya identity. Here, Friedman (1997:82) says, the elite want to promote a hybrid comprehension of ethnic identity, saying that all in Guatemala are part Indian, in order to lessen the importance of the claims of the indigenous groups. I assure you, I have thought about this many times, but when studying these issues my loyalty is still with the perspectives and lives of my informants (my data), and not with any political or ethnic positions. And I also, at least to some extent, beg to differ in Friedman's statement. Certainly, elites the world-over use whatever tricks they can to maintain their position and oppress others. But I have also seen that the situation in Guatemala is more complex.

In Guatemala the multicultural takes the form of the Maya movement, because that is the cultural form it was able to take. As stated previously, this is the dominant way of perceiving society today and those who question it are both criticized and excluded from the official debate. This is what happened to my supervisor in field, Aura Cumes, who is a Kakchiquel woman who speaks the language and wears traditional clothes and also holds a doctorate in social anthropology, when she officially argues that she does not want the laws and policies of her country to be based on ethnicity. In Guatemala this is a controversial statement. I observed that also few, if any, of the local people I met would embrace the position of giving more importance to ethnicity. From my observations, nor do the locals experience a strengthened ethnic identity amongst themselves. A strengthened ethnic identity is a privilege, and maybe a need, of the educated people of the Maya movement. Maybe it could be seen as a way of consolidating their own position and ambitions? This would need to be further explored.

It is in relation to the findings above I would like to make an addition, or maybe a development, of the theories of Friedman on the subject of hybridity and essentialism. According to Friedman, it is cosmopolitans versus locals, international elites versus people in general of the developing world, that take opposing positions in terms of cultural identity; either you experience a hybrid identity or a need to get "back-to-the-roots". In my study I observed a more complex reality than Friedman's polar perspective. In Guatemala it is the organized, educated, and urbanized people with opportunities and power over their life that experience and work for a revitalized and strengthened cultural identity; whereas local people, my informants, do not experience this in their own lives. These people are aware that they "should" know more, feel more, and

express more of their cultural identity, the general discourse has not passed them by, but they do not make it a priority, they make pragmatic choices. Thus I see stratifications within the indigenous population, affecting the relationship to cultural identity, and when translating Friedman's theories in to a national context, they are turned upside down. The multicultural discourse has been expressed by an "elite" of the indigenous "Maya" population, while a more hybrid identity has been held by local people. This is an expression of pragmatism in their every day lives.

10 Conclusions and final discussion

How do local people adopt or resist the rethinking of indigenous identity that has taken place?

What is the answer to my main research question? I observed that adult people defined as Maya by the representatives of the Maya movement are partly adopting the discourse of multiculturalism and Maya cultural identity in official interviews and situations, perhaps because they know this is expected. However they do not instinctively use the term Maya to define themselves and they are more focused on improving the lives of their children than regaining a cultural past. The main exception is people with a formal higher education obtained in the capital city. That the people generally have this attitude annoys the organizations of the Maya movement, who believe that local people must be influenced by racist discourses or simply ignorant in their thinking because they do not fully accept that they are actually Maya people. However, according to my findings, this is not the case. The people I met are not ignorant nor are they influenced by racist discourses, but are proud of their cultural heritage as indigenous people and wish they could find ways to make the language and customs of their older relatives live on. However, they are also pragmatic and want, as do people everywhere, to make the lives of their children better than their own lives. To them, this entails learning good Spanish and English, getting a good education, creating opportunities outside the corn field, opportunities to travel and to make choices in life. Thus it appears that the local people have adopted the rethinking of indigenous identity, in that they are aware of the changes and seem to feel that they have to act accordingly in order to be politically correct. However, they also resist this rethinking when their choices and priorities are in opposition.

10.1 Language is limited

As mentioned before, language can be a limited tool when it comes to defining an ethnic group. I have also referred to Barth (1969) who observes that the definition of the ethnic group changes with its members. Peter Hervik makes the same claim when he says that the content and meaning of a category, such as an ethnic group, can change while the category itself remains (Hervik 2003:53). But as Barth says, the revision of these categories only takes place if the categories are very inadequate or unrewarding to act upon (1969:30). What it means to be indigenous in Guatemala has changed since the civil war. Today, it is absolutely possible to

identify as an indigenous person and still move outside the boundaries traditionally associated with the definition. To be Kakchiquel no longer has to include speaking the language or wearing traditional clothes. To the people I met it is more a way of associating with the community and the place of home. If one does not accept the flexibility and the changing nature of the ethnic categories, they become simplifications of a more complex reality. This is what I experienced that representatives of the Maya movement do not accept. That people within the concept of indigenous have changed, and thus the meaning of the category has changed, is not acceptable to the movement. But even if the content of the categories change, the categories themselves seem to remain. As Barth says, ethnic systems are stronger than other stratification systems (1969:28). He concludes that categories of ethnic identification have had the purpose of maintaining social boundaries just as “racially” based divisions did in the past. This is important to remember. The next research project to take on in this context might be to deeper examine what it really means to be Maya today; the social and political implications of this identification.

When speaking about language, how about what is happening to the indigenous languages of Guatemala? It is no exaggeration that they are rapidly disappearing. The representative of OKMA, Mr Sanchez, blamed the people who according to him are influenced by racist discourses and do not want to pass the languages on to their children. England (179:1996) believes the reason is a lack of information about how language learning takes place, she writes “Parents believe that their children will “naturally” acquire the language of the community” (179:1996), and thus they do not care about teaching them. However, this is not what I experienced. The parents and teachers I met were well aware of the fact that their children would not learn Kakchiquel if they did not speak it in school or at home. This was something that many people would like to change, but did not see how in the present circumstances. It is a given that people should be able to speak and use the language they choose. So if the indigenous language no longer is the language of choice, as in the case of the people working and attending the school in San Antonio, surely the policies should center on this change? Culture and society is rapidly changing in Guatemala, and if change in language use is a consequence, the ordinary people who try to better their lives and the lives of future generations should not be blamed.

10.2 Cultural recognition or social justice

Could the work of the Maya movement be described as a form of strategic essentialism, as a means to another end; that of the liberation of the indigenous population of Guatemala? I would say no. The reason is that the goal of the movement is the revitalization of the cultural symbols and expressions *as such*, not some other distant political goal. However, I can also see the multicultural ideology as a political strategy, as a means of avoiding ethnic conflicts. As such it

is understandable and perhaps rational. The demands of the Maya movement for cultural recognition are much cheaper and easier to satisfy than the demands for justice and equal social and economic rights that dominated previously. That project is way too expensive for a modern nation state and was abandoned years ago. A controversial discussion in Guatemala today concerns the conservative backlash effect that the Maya movement has had on society. It is said that “Los abuelos”, aiming at the grandparent-generation of today, fought for equal rights in their youth. They wanted their children to learn Spanish, to be able to integrate, and have better opportunities. This is no longer the story today. And the indigenous rights movement in Guatemala provides challenges to our understanding of politics and provides food for thought. As Warren asks us:

With its particular blend of conservatism and radicalism, how does the Maya movement destabilize the Right/ Left polarities of Guatemalan politics and perhaps lead us American readers to reimagine very different political situations closer to home? (Warren 1998:11)

Can there be an answer to the question of whether recognition or justice is the right way to go? Probably not: I can see that economic and social inequality and exclusion seems to be a greater problem for my informants than lack of cultural recognition. But the solution cannot be to replace the use of a cultural identity with the use of a class identity. The exclusion that many people from the indigenous communities live with everyday is more complex than that. Warren again:

...class is not a separate domain but rather in practice a multidimensional form of stratification, often gendered, racialized, and saturated with cultural difference.

And:

Thus, the political recognition of a particular “class-based” identity – by mobilizing groups around certain foundational representations of social reality – is also a process of construction. (Warren 1998:48)

Maya activists hold important positions in Guatemala - in the public debate and in political offices. However, they appear more concerned with questions that are less important to the man-on-the street (or the corn field), and this perhaps is one of the answers as to why inequalities and discrimination persist.

However, as Warren (1998:38) points out, it is important to remember that revitalization is a process of political articulation and not a nostalgic flight to a cultural past. I agree with this completely; this is a pragmatic process where the articulation takes different forms depending on one’s position in society. To consider one’s cultural identity means different things to the local people in San Antonio than to the educated people of OKMA. Again, I must point out that although I problematize the construction of the pan-Mayanism in political work, I

am not against indigenous rights. It might seem like an irony that western anthropology began to explore constructivist perspectives on ethnicity at the same moment as the Maya movement began to articulate a nationalist essentialism.

10.3 To live with double standards

There is a contradiction in wanting to maintain and strengthen your cultural identity, language etc., and at the same time wanting to integrate further into the dominant society. Double standards are also communicated to the people: Continue speaking your indigenous language! Go and work and earn money abroad! People in San Antonio act on and also express a bad conscience for not being able to uphold these conflicting demands in their life. I believe that the manifestations of indigenous identity expressed in the school *Gotitas de Saber*, which are shown in this study, is an example of this.

For many of my informants there are seemingly contradictory statements in their opinions and in their lives. Everyone knows of and experiences the inequalities in society, but still the official version of reality is that “*Todos somos iguales*” – We are all equal. This denial of the extremely divided society is expressed also by the people living the injustice.

Zulma could probably be considered a “typical indigenous woman” in many ways; she occupies herself with weaving, lives in an indigenous community, wears traditional clothes, and hopes her children will acquire the indigenous language, even though she does not really master it. At the same time she is incredibly focused on their education, that they should attend the best schools, be able to meet people from other countries, learn English, travel, and have the opportunity to study and become whatever they want in life. It is not at all an introverted, boarder-guarding approach to ethnicity, but a forward-looking, inclusive, pragmatic and non-sentimental one. She is constantly opening windows to the world and to the life of other people. To her it is never either or.

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