Reciprocation in Democratization

A field study on Mayan political participation in Guatemala

Daniel Stendahl

Abstract

"Reciprocation in Democratization –
A field study on Mayan Political Participation in Guatemala"

Over the centuries the Mayan indigenous population has been excluded from power politics in Guatemala. During the last decades much attention by scholars has been placed on the Mayan movement, as a new and unconventional political actor. In this study I examine why and how this actor has emerged, with specific consideration on the shift from class to culture. By drawing on theories of civil society, I evaluate the movement's fundamental role in Guatemalan political life. Looking at a more general socio-political continuum, one finds that the movement's development coincides with a period of democratization and normalization of politics for the country as a whole. Fundamental attention is placed on linkages between Mayan activists as members of civil society and the traditional institutions such as political parties and government bodies.

It is clear that over the last decade many activists have taken a more pragmatic view of the state and traditional politics. Old internal conflicts, within the movement have been reduced, and many agents today call for a political struggle of involvement to reach results.

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List of Abbreviations and organizations

- CIRMA- Centro de investigaciónes Regionales de Mesoamérica

- CNPRE – Comisión Nacional Permanente de Reforma Educativa

- CODISRA - Presidential Commission on Discrimination and Racism against Indigenous Peoples

- COMG - Consejo de Organizaciones Mayas de Guatemala

- COPMAGUA – Coordinación de Organizaciónes del Pueblo Maya de Guatemala

- CONAVIGUA – Coordinadora de Viudas de Guatemala

- CUC - Comité de Unidad Campesina

- Defensoría Indígena Waj'xaqib noj

- Defensoria Maya

- EGP – Ejercito Guerillero de los Pobres

- FIN – Frente de Integración Nacional

- FLACSO – Facultad Latinoamericano de Ciencias Sociales

- FRG – Frente Republicano Guatemalteco

- GANA – Gran allianza Nacional

- ILO – International Labor Organization

- Naleb´

- OAS – Organisation of American States

- PAN – Partido de Avanzada Nacional

- PRODESSA – Proyecto de Desarrollo de Santiago

- Sociedad el Adelanto

- URNG - Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca

1   Introduction

"My activism comes from suffering myself the discrimination, and to suffer it at a personal level. Discrimination attacks a person because you are part of a group; you are part of a community. This is the point of departure."

Demetrio Cojti Cuxil

Indigenous mobilization throughout Latin America has been a much debated issue in the last few years. The Mayan movement in Guatemala represents a specific case. The socio-ethnic reality of Guatemala and the problems of the Mayan population are not hard to see in statistical figures or even with your own eyes visiting the country.[1]

The purpose of this field study has been to examine levels of political participation by the indigenous population of Guatemala. A special attention has been given to the Mayan movement, and its specific character and role in mobilizing political participation. This project of investigation was carried out as a Minor Field Study in Guatemala from January to March 2004.

1.1   Problem & Questions to answer

1.1.1   Primary focus

When investigating the political aspirations of the Mayas, it was natural to place a direct and fundamental focus on the Mayan movement. Not only because this has been the center of attention for a substantial amount of academic studies and writings in the last couple of years, but also because, for the Mayas, it is this extra-parliamentarian way that has presented the fundamental way of doing politics within the Guatemalan political system.

1.1.2   Hypotheses and Main Questions

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[1] For statistical data describing the socio-economic inequalities in Guatemala, especially along ethnic differences, I recommend the reader to visit web-pages of international organizations, such as UNDP or to read informs relating to the issue (by Sida or OHCHR). The format of this thesis does not allow me for a wider description, as I take these inequalities as given for my analysis. This elaboration will mainly provide figures and descriptions of exclusion concerning political representation.

One fundamental hypothesis at the start of this study has been that the Mayas have organized themselves in extra-parliamentarian ways because of the very nature of the Guatemalan political configuration, with rigid, exclusive and discriminatory structures. Furthermore I have assumed that the organization and struggles of the movement have been influenced, or even been facilitated, by the democratization process, that has taken place during the last two decades. This raises the following questions:

- In what ways has Mayan activists and politicians changed their way of doing politics within the changing reality of the Guatemalan society?

- To what extent can these changes be attributed to the political transformations that have taken place in Guatemala in general during the last two decades as part of a democratization process?

By placing the Mayan movement and activists in a historic-political continuum, I wish to evaluate the presence of dynamic and changing aspects of the Mayan-(Guatemalan)State relationship. More specifically this study wishes to examine to what extent and why Mayan activists have gained access to traditional political channels and subsequently power. I focus a good part of the study on these relations between the civil society (taking the example of the Mayan movement) and traditional political structures (i.e. political parties and government bodies). To enter into this structure, however, is not entirely easy and justifiable, and I wish to point to some of the problems and dilemmas facing activists and organizations that do.

- Has the Mayan movement's view of traditional political channels and the state changed over time?

In order to facilitate this area of my analysis I have chosen to draw on prior literature on civil society. The prime concern, as stated above, is of its role and function as political entities in society.

1.2   Delimitations of the study

This study is essentially about political participation by the indigenous population of Guatemala. I chose to put my focus on the Mayan population, instead of the indigenous groups in general. The reason for this is that the Mayan population constitutes an overwhelming part of the population as a whole, and thereby the issues and conflicts involved in their relationship with the ladino population and state is essentially different from those of other indigenous groups.[2] It is also true that the Mayas is the group that profoundly

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[2] It is debated how large part the Mayans constitute of the total population of Guatemala. In official national figures it is about 40%. But these are very restrictive and present high

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has challenged the structures of the Guatemalan state, making claims for political reforms according to Mayan and indigenous interests.

It is important to note however that the Mayan aspirations and achievements have effects on other indigenous groups. They have gained attention for their cause through the movement's ability to place a focus on indigenous issues and the sensitivization of society in this direction.[3]

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requisites for being identified as indigenous (for example as to the requirements of traditional dressing). Many domestic and international organizations in fact claim that the number is as high as 60%. Officially there are two other indigenous groups; the black Caribbean-based garífunas and the xincas in the south-eastern part of the country. For a wider discussion see: Report by the special envoyee to Guatemala of OHCHR, listed in the references.

[3] Interview with Mario Ellington

2   Methodological aspects

2.1   Characterization of the study

2.1.1   The Field study

> "One of the key strengths of field research is the comprehensiveness of perspective it gives the researcher. By going directly to the social phenomenon under study and observing it as completely as possible, you can develop a deeper and fuller understanding of it."[4]

The field study in Guatemala had two main objectives. The first was to gather information from secondary sources on the topic that are available in research institutes, libraries, book-shops and documentation centers in the country. I found this to be a particularly intriguing, and also overwhelming experience since Mayan activism represents a very current topic for many Guatemalan scholars, and Indigenous Rights make up a much debated issue in contemporary politics. Since this literature was in Spanish and hard to access in Scandinavia, this proved to be a necessary step, giving me a fundamental entry into where the topic stands today. This gathering of information was also accompanied by collection of statistical information on political participation and demographical reports from different governmental and non-governmental agencies in Guatemala.

The other, and most important, part of the field research was to perform interviews with persons related to the issue of Mayan activism in Guatemala, as a way of collecting primary data. I interviewed people with thorough knowledge of the Mayan movement, such as scholars and activists (it often seems as if these people are one and the same), posing questions of their view of the movement, the Guatemalan political context in general and other forms of indigenous political participation. The objective was also to get in contact with various organizations, that can be said to be Mayan or not explicitly "Mayan", but with an objective to promote Indigenous' Rights. I hoped to get a more profound knowledge and perception of these organizations, and their "Mayan" content, through interviews with their representatives and other activists. The design for my study has been explicitly open.

2.2.   Validity and Reliability

When, through a field study, evaluating a social phenomenon, such as the Mayan Movement, within the Guatemalan political environment, one is faced

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[4] Babbie, Earl, *The Practice of Social Research*, 1992, p. 285.

with a socio-political reality that is substantially different from the one you are used to. That is why all findings and conceptions have to be critically evaluated in the context of its otherness; i.e. as a researcher one has to be prudent.

There is a necessity to address two key concepts in any methodological discussion. The questioning of the **validity** and the **reliability** of the material collected in this study produces an excellent point for viewing its strengths and weaknesses and thereby helping in how strongly one can draw conclusions from it.

Validity refers to the extent to which a specific measurement provides data that relate to commonly accepted meanings of a particular concept. Reliability refers to the likelihood that a given measurement procedure will yield the same description of a given phenomenon if that measurement is repeated.[5] In general it can be said that field research provides strength in terms of validity, because of the direct contact with the object of study. This same argument, however, presents a problem concerning reliability.[6]

2.3   The Problem of Objectivity

Even though I have the ambition of providing and conducting a generally descriptive investigation of Mayan political participation, I feel (and fear) that many of the assumptions at the beginning and the conclusions drawn imply some very normative standpoints. This is clearly a highly politicized and debated issue in the Guatemalan society. It is difficult to assess the data objectively, given the activism and involvement of interviewees and writers of the literature.

My subjectivity also constitutes an explicit position to question a researcher's possibility of staying objective while conducting research in general, and especially in areas of political science. This argument has many foundations, beginning with your own particular pre-understanding of an issue, giving you certain pre-decided orientation of the study you are about to carry out.

In my study I argue, that it is my pre-understanding of the Guatemalan society that has influenced me to approach my topic in a particular way, and the conclusions drawn from it should be understood and interpreted in this light. The literature and other written material concerning the issue of Mayan political participation used in my work relates to my approach. There is of course so much additional material that I have not been able collect and read, due to lack of sufficient knowledge, creative thinking and (sadly) time.

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[5] Babbie, Earl, *The Practice of Social Research*, 1992, p. 135.
[6] Ibid. p. 306.

Moreover it is my view that this material has been overseen especially because of the initial (and later) turns I have taken in approaching the topic.

2.4   The quest for relevant literature and subjects of interviews

2.4.1   Literature collected

Most of what has been written on the Mayan movement, domestically and foreign, is not by scholars of political science. In fact most written material has a more anthropological, historical, linguistic or sociological oriented background.[7] It can be argued that this presents a problem for the rigidity of my study. However this is another argument for this study, since the perspective of the political scientist has not been thoroughly introduced to the problem.

Nevertheless, the validity of the literature collected could be assessed from its sheer vastness. There has been so much written and documented on the topic of indigenous' rights and mobilization in Guatemala, particularly on the Mayan Movement. There had to be some criteria for selection. These include the parameters of political participation, indigenous-state relations and social mobilization, and avoiding works with deeper reference to anthropology and linguistics.

2.4.3   The Interviews

The reasons for choosing interviews as a method for data collection should be carefully reflected upon. Furthermore, there are two aspects of the interviews to be considered. The degree of structure in the questions, and the way interviews are obtained and arranged.[8]

In Guatemala I initially approached the Mayan movement widely, by contacting organizations and conducting interviews in their offices. With initial reference, and subsequent help from the University of San Carlos and Sida personnel, Mayans with specific experience of participating in political parties or state institutions were approached. The interviews had a semi-structural form. The strength of this type of interview lies in its possibility to depart from a specific survey, which allows for comparisons between different

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[7] This should also be seen in the light that area studies, such as Latin American studies, often draws on multidisciplinary research. It is the specific geographic and cultural requisites that define the discipline. A broader scope is needed for understanding the situation, because of the fundamental differences in the socio-political environment.

[8] Bechhofer, Frank – Paterson, Lindsay, *Principles of Research Design in the Social Sciences*, 2000, p. 64.

interviews, and at the same time permits for follow-up questions depending on the answers given.

Specific surveys for each interview were prepared. A number of questions where generally covered. These include:

- What are the reasons for the creation and progress of the Mayan movement?
- What has been the impact of the so-called democratization since the mid 1980s and how can the Guatemalan state be perceived today?
- What are the prospects for a Mayan political party?
- What are the roots of your own activism?

Of course the surveys were also specified for each individual, given their particular background. This was necessary considering that I searched for the personal motives of activists for choosing one form of participation or the other?

The interviews can be divided into two broad categories:
- Scholars and activists with knowledge of ethnic relations in Guatemala in general, and of the Mayan movement in particular.
- Mayan activists – with a specific focus on individuals that have entered political parties and public office.

Nevertheless many interviews have been conducted with representatives of Mayan organizations in general. These were the natural contact points, and many interviews can thus be seen as basically informative and reference discussions. In all 22 interviews were conducted.

My selection of persons to interview can be discussed. One important element to continuously bear in mind was their current position and self-interest in the matter, representing an organization or a position.

2.5 The subject of definitions

2.5.1 What is Maya? – a discussion

A crucial perspective to discuss in this study is what the word "Maya" really represents. A background and definition of the concept can be helpful to the reader. Essentially by its critics, the concept in itself is by no means uncontroversial and evident.

The main feature of "the Maya"- discourse concerns the recovery of a cultural and spiritual heritage, lost with the impact of foreign and domestic

colonization.[9] Seeking to reestablish a linkage with the Mayan empire or culture, that was at its height 1200 years ago, it contains an element of cultural revindication for the recognition of its past.[10]

It, therefore, carries a universal objective of unity between the different indigenous groups that belong to the Mayan linguistic family.[11] This constructivist element is a major argument of the critics, which points to the essential cultural and linguistic distinctions between different groups.[12] This is met by the "Mayan" advocates who claim that the de-emphazisation of the links between groups was an important part of the colonization processes.[13] Without getting deeper in this essentialist-constructivist discussion, I accept and apply the word "Mayan", with the entire contextual connotation it embodies, for my following analysis.

The word "Mayan" is thus not really a synonym to the words "indigenous" or "indian", where especially the latter carries a negative connotation with it. Over time as the word has been accepted, it is synonymous to "indigenous" in the Guatemalan context.

As discussed above, the word "Mayan" is in itself a tool for recognition and politics by the movement and activists that choose to endorse it. The general recognition and use of the word, in Guatemala as well as internationally, could in fact be seen as one of the greatest achievements by the movement. This is however not unproblematic. As Bastos points out; "the proliferation of the use of the word "maya" has also contributed to a possible decharging of its symbolic meaning."[14] Thus the concept could be seen as the victim of a certain degeneralization.

2.5.2 Other forms of political participation by the indigenous population?

It is sometimes hard to make a difference between activists that have entered political parties or traditional entities as a natural step for political participation, and those who have a clear Mayan background and mind-set a priori, stemming from extra parliamentarian strives within the movement. This complexity is emphasized by Santiago Bastos. He chooses to make a

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[9] See Cojtí Cuxil, Demetrio, *El Movimiento Maya (En Guatemala)*, 1997
[10] The Mayans consists of 30 differently identified linguistic groups extending over various country borders in Central America, and where 21 are represented within the territory of Guatemala.
[11] Cojtí Cuxil, Demetrio, *The Politics of Maya Revindication,* 1999, p. 20.
[12] Fischer,Edward F. – McKenna Brown, R. *Maya Cultural Activism in Guatemala* (1999) p.13.
[13] Interview with Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil
[14] Interview with Santiago Bastos.

clear distinction between different kinds of indigenous political participation; in a simplified way he depicts three forms:

- a **pre-modern** in rural communities, with traces back to the colonial (or pre-colonial) period,
- a **modern** for the conventional institutions within the republican state, and
- a **postmodern**, which the Mayan movement would represent, in its purest and most radical discourse.[15]

This division can be useful, especially for analytical purposes. In my study I try not to over-emphasize the necessity of Mayan self-identity and awareness for the individual activist. As stated above the objective of this study is to understand indigenous participation, and the Mayan activists represent a tool for its comprehension. Since the Mayan conscience today permeates the political conscience at all levels in indigenous political participation, a clear distinction between Mayan and non-mayan political participation seems fruitless. It is also true that the individual activist do not necessarily reflect in these terms, when seeking political influence.

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[15] Interview with Bastos.

3   Theoretical tools

There has been numerous works written on social movements and civil society. Especially the latter gained considerable attention among political scientists during the 1990s.

3.1   *Theoretical tools*

In order to deepen my analysis of the Mayan movement and its role within the Guatemalan (political) society, I will place it in a more general theoretical setting. As a representative of civil society it has come to play a key role during the process of democratization in Guatemala. This introduction brings us to two major focal points/areas of (today's) scholars in political science.

Democratization has been the subject of many scholars attention, especially since the start of the so-called Third Wave of Democratization, as stated by Samuel Huntington in the early 1980s. Research on this topic has been both causal and prescriptive in character, trying to explain for the extensive empiric record of countries that have been embarking on paths of democracy during the last two decades. One major explanatory factor, according to many, has been the role of **civil society** in the formation and development of democratic societies. The idea relates to an entity of association outside the state and the private sphere, where individuals organize themselves, thus contributing to a pluralist breeding ground where democratic practices are fostered. As many theorists point out, this concept has been the object of considerable "stretching". This implies that civil society has come to explain everything and nothing at the same time.[16]

In this study I will not put a major emphasis on the evaluation of the democratization process of Guatemala, assessing its causal factors. The ongoing democratization in the country will be taken as given, and is analytically exogenous for my own study. Therefore the parts describing Guatemala's course of democratization will be mainly descriptive. As stated in the second chapter, however, I wish to relate the Mayan movement to the current debate on civil society and its role within society in general. For that reason it is necessary to present an introductory discussion on theories of civil society.

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[16] Boussard, Caroline, *Civilsamhälle och demokratisering,* 1998, p. 149

3.2　　　　"Voices" on Civil Society

Defining civil society is not a straightforward task. One of the fundamental problems is caused by the wide-spread use of the term in many different situations describing many different things. As Seligman points out there are three distinct uses of the idea of civil society. First he refers to a **direct and political use** of the concept as a slogan criticizing certain government policies. The second use of the term is by social scientists applying it as an **analytical concept**, when trying to define certain forms of social organization. Thirdly he also likes to depict it at a philosophical level, as an **ethical ideal**, that serves as a vision, both descriptively and prescriptively.[17] These different forms of seeing the phenomenon can be helpful in our approach, where the perception of the state by civil society is in focus.

One of Seligman's primary critiques of the use of civil society, however, is that the concept is perceived differently in different parts of the world. He likes to point to the discrepancy between a Western individualistic oriented notion and an Eastern and Central European of communal provenance. This discussion is related to our understanding of the origin of the ideas behind the modern meaning of civil society. Boussard differentiates two traditions of thought with what she calls **civil society** and **civic society**:

> "Civil society is a sphere, in which individuals interact and cooperate. All interests in society can be represented and the progress of pluralism implies that civil society can operate as a counterweight to the state. Civic society is made up of norms and values of how citizens are suppose to behave towards political institutions and other citizens."[18]

As Boussard states, the basic difference between these traditions lies in how the moral order is perceived. Civic society, connected with thoughts of virtue, defines it in terms of a general ethical conduct, which evolves through the participation by individuals in public affairs. The tradition of civil society, on the other hand, identifies the moral order on the basis of the individuals own, private, ethics. The consequence of these different approaches, lies in the view of pluralism and the differentiation of society. Differentiation is something positive, according to the tradition of civil society, whereas civic society traditionalists see it in a negative way, since it does not create a common basis for ethics.[19]

This discussion can be very helpful for our case, when viewing the Mayan movement and Guatemala. The comparison between the two traditions presents us with a basis for analyzing how Mayan groups and activists see their relationship with the rest of society and particularly the Guatemalan

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[17] Seligman, Adam B., *The Idea of Civil Society,* 1995, p. 201.
[18] Boussard, Caroline, *Civilsamhälle och demokratisering,* 1998, p. 150.
[19] Ibid.

state. It is important to understand the reach and limits of "common ground" and recognition between different groups and institutions in the Guatemalan society. For this, there is still a necessity to illustrate a definition of what civil society constitutes and what political role it may play in society.

3.3   *Defining civil society*

In an attempt to present a definition of civil society we again turn to what has been written previously. Traditionally "civil society" has referred to the entirety of social life outside state institutions. This included activities of private enterprises, since economic life and market transactions constituted a central aspect of this traditional notion. The idea of civil society however has evolved in the last century and a half, in response to the changing realities of society. Even though some may argue otherwise, today a clear limit between civil society and private economic profitable activities is also imperative. Therefore we distinguish a "voluntary associational life apart from economy as well as state".[20]

3.3.1   A negative definition

Furthermore we need to ask for the essence or objectives of these associational activities. There is a certain and fundamental element of providing institutions in society that can counter-balance or "monitor" the state. In this classical and limited view, many argue that there are a number of areas where the state cannot fill the needs and wishes of its inhabitants and this is where civil society plays a role.

Hall even wants to describe this incomplete definition ("…societal self-organization in opposition to the state…") as negative in character, as opposed to a positive one, more thorough and circumstantial.[21] This view is helpful. By broadening our concept of civil society, we get a basis for understanding its deeper reach and merits, but also possibilities for criticism and limits in range.

3.3.2   Working in a broad and narrow way

In this study I like to apply a broad, and at the same time narrow notion of what can be perceived and understood by "civil society". It will be broad in the sense that I wish to enhance the scope of its merits. Civil society and its impact are best understood by analyzing its relations with institutions of the

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[20] Young, Iris Marion, *Inclusion and Democracy,* 2000, p. 158.
[21] Hall, John A., *Civil Society*, 1995, p. 2.

rest of society. In our empirical case a particular focus will be put on the Mayan activists' perception of themselves and other political institutions. In essence this constitutes a problematization of the image of the Guatemalan state itself. A logic of reciprocity between civil society and the state is the basis for understanding the current political development.

Above, I have stated the problem of what "stretching " of definition might cause in terms of explanatory power and rigidness. I feel, however, that it is essential to comprehend that in the design of this study we are dealing with individuals, who to different extent have been active in civil society entities, as well as political parties and institutions linked to the state. I have not asked these activists for a pledge of allegiance in any direction. Therefore the broad aspect of definition is applied in order to demonstrate the civil society- public institutions angle.

The narrow sense of my argument is best understood by approaching the civil society debate with a certain amount of criticism and questioning. As stated in the introduction to this chapter civil society has been attributed considerably for processes of democratization around the world. On this issue I wish to point out that there is a danger of running into over-attribution. This limited perception is stated by Young

> "Despite the vital role of civil society in promoting inclusion, expression and critique for deep democracy, I argue against those who suggest that civil society serves as a preferred alternative to the state today for promoting democracy and social justice."[22]

Young makes the point clear as to the danger of over-optimistic attribution to civil society in its societal capabilities. She especially states the necessity for a strong state involvement in processes of democratization and undermining of injustice. One of Young's central points is to emphasize the gains that can be achieved from a vital and present relation if one can multiply the links between civil society and the state.[23]

This point is also stressed by many other authors and will prove useful to us. The narrow and broad sense both end up in the same argument. This point is relevant in our understanding of a basic line of reasoning among the interviewed activists in this study. They have been chosen, of course, on the basis of their participation in public affairs (i.e. involvement in political parties and public institutions), thus being inclined to a particular opinion *a priori*. However I am not looking for a quantitative analysis of indigenous political participation, but have looked for the arguments of these activists as to why one chooses to enter political institutions in question.

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[22] Young, Iris Marion, *Inclusion and Democracy,* 2000, p. 156.
[23] Ibid.

3.4 The Mayan movement and the Guatemalan reality

The Mayan movement and the Guatemalan reality will be further discussed and defined in the next chapter. One can question my choice of theoretical tools. The discussions on civil society above are often written in very general terms. One could argue whether it is relevant to apply this framework to a specific case as the Mayan movement and the Guatemalan state.

Moreover the Mayan movement exhibits certain claims for the restructuring of the state, that sets it apart from many other civil society groups and which doubts the compatibility with the structures of the Guatemalan state in the long run. This line of argument may question the movement theoretically as a part of the civil society on the criterion of the "civic tradition". A more thorough argument on this question will be presented in chapter six.

However this strong image of confrontation can be softened by seeing the movement as heterogeneous, including more pragmatic currents, which it does in reality. Furthermore one of the main points of my findings is that recently many activists have moved towards a new and more compatible image of the state. Even so, in reality, it would be ridiculous not to state that the Mayan movement constitutes an integral and important part of the Guatemalan civil society.[24] The discussion above just presents me with a platform for analyzing the movement with a different set of theoretical tools.

3.5 Our applied definition

At the end of our discussion we are thus left with a useful definition. Hall arrived at the following:

> "Civil society is thus a complex balance of consensus and conflict, the valuation of as much difference as is compatible with the bare minimum of consensus necessary for settled existence."[25]

This one is relevant for us as well. It demonstrates the essential problem linked with the civic tradition, where pluralism is problematized.

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[24] See Bastos, Santiago – Manuela, Camus, *Entre el Mecapal y el cielo – Desarrollo del movimiento maya en Guatemala,* 2003 p. 290.
[25] Hall, John A., *Civil Society*, 1995, p. 6.

4 Mayan - State relations in Guatemala

A brief historical background

A brief account of major points of Guatemalan history during the 20th century is required. 1944 mark a revolutionary year, when the dictator Ubico was overthrown. During the next ten years a period of social and economic reforms followed under the governments of Arevalo and Arbenz. With the land reform in 1952 and prospect of increased communist influence, a stronger resistance grew among conservative Guatemalans and the United Fruit Company. In 1954, a US supported coup, overthrew the government and brought the military to power.[26]

Over the next decades Guatemala saw a number of military (and some civilian) presidents and coup d'états. The political violence increased into a civil war during the 1960s. As politics of repression escalated, violence and human rights abuses reached a height during the regimes of Lucas García (1978-82) and Rios Montt (1982-83). It was also during the early 1980s that four different guerilla movements joined under the umbrella of the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG).

Civilian rule, and, to a certain extent, democracy was restored in 1985, with a new constitution. However the civil war with the guerillas and a heavily militarized society was still a reality. It was not until the 1990s, in the context of other, joint, peace processes in Central America that true negotiations between the URNG and the Guatemalan Government began. This led to the signing of the Peace Agreements in December 1996. These were extensive in their address of fundamental roots of the conflicts, including socio-economic inequalities, a land reform, and a specific agreement on the rights of the indigenous population.[27]

4.1 The historical context - A Latin American model

Guatemala has the historic-political traditions and structures as most other Latin-American states. After independence in the 1820s the new republican state was characterized by unitary state-building. In Latin America in general, there has traditionally been a dominant perception of the indigenous people as

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[26] This was the first CIA intervention in Latin America, where more followed during the 20th century. A comprehensive account on the background and involvement of the United Fruit Company can be read in the book "Bitter Fruit" (1982), by Stephen Schlesinger & Stephen Kinzer.
[27] The Guatemalan Peace Agreements, p. 59.

anachronistic and as an impediment to development. When analyzing the view of the indigenous people, Stavenhagen explains it by portraying its role within the Latin American society and the development of the modern state on the continent over the course of history. He makes a thorough analysis of the development of the modern Latin American state with its legacy from the hierarchial system of the colonial period into the state-building of the newly independent states in the 19th century.[28] He states that it became necessary to invent and create nations and to construct national identities. One of the unresolved issues of the nationalist debate in the region is the relationship between the model of the unitary state which was adopted, and the ethnic and cultural diversity of the societies of Latin America.[29]

Over time the mestizo identity became the basis for the construction of a national identity, while the indigenous peoples were excluded from the "national projects". Even so, into the first half of the twentieth century, as the states got a wider reach over their territories, many indigenous communities came in more permanent contact with its policies and institutions. Apart from greater urban migration by indigenous people, the rural indigenous populace also became a target for government policy known as indigenismo.

> "The supposed inferiority of the indigenous peoples was now no longer phrased in biological terms but rather in the fashionable language of the times – culture and level of socioeconomic development".[30]

The "Indian problem" now became an issue of policy aimed at development through assimilation. The indigenous communities, as targeted by development programs, were seen as part of the rural peasant class. This class perspective was further emphasized by Marxist theories, which viewed them as the most exploited and backward element of the working class, lacking in class consciousness precisely because of their community-centered, traditional world outlook. It is interesting then to look at Stavenhagens' conclusions that "the neoliberal and the orthodox Marxist approaches have held one view in common: that indigenous peoples constituted an obstacle to development and progress."[31]

This also explains why the ethnic identity failed to become a subject for mobilization. Indigenous people were organized not primarily according to their ethnic background, but rather as workers in trade unions, in peasant federations in rural areas or took up arms with leftist guerilla movements.

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[28] Stavenhagen, Rodolfo, *Challengeing the Nation States in Latin America*, 1992, p. 421-441.
[29] Ibid
[30] Ibid
[31] Ibid

4.2   The Guatemalan context - political system

The nation- and state-building of Guatemala is hence in this matter characterized by a permanent exclusion of the indigenous population. Even though at times the state has become conscious of socio-economic needs for the indigenous (as in the progressive years of 1944-54), these policies have been implemented with measures, typically assimilationist and little or no consideration for the indigenous cultural identity.[32]

In Guatemala, the mestizo population has come to be termed "ladinos". With the liberalist nation-building, especially from the 1870's onwards, this group became the principal subject of identity.[33] Guatemala, then, has a legacy, where exclusionary structures of the state are even more severe along ethnic lines. It will be explored how ethnic relations in Guatemala have changed over the last century, with the processes of fundamental transformations in society.

4.2.1   Guatemala in a process of democratization

The most recent democratization process in Guatemala started in the mid 1980s, as part of the so-called third wave of democratization. Under external (especially US) and internal pressure, president Mejía Victores instated a constitutional assembly in 1984, which led way to the approval of a new constitution and general elections in 1985.

The return of civilian rule and democracy was not entirely the case, however. Even though the URNG had been severely neutralized during the violent campaigns of previous years, Guatemala was still in a state of civil war and society heavily militarized. The country became what can be called a pseudodemocracy, because of the extensive political prerogatives exercised by its military.[34] The military's influence has declined over the years, but can still be felt in the Guatemalan society.

4.2.2   Characteristics of the Guatemalan political parties

A general judgment of **political parties in Guatemala** is the **lack of institutionalization** and continuance over time. This was expressed in many of the interviews. The parties are mainly electoral machines mobilized at times of election, and then more or less disappear. In many ways they cease to

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[32] Bastos, Santiago – Manuela, Camus, *Entre el Mecapal y el cielo – Desarrollo del movimiento maya en Guatemala,* 2003 p. 27.
[33] Interview with Alvaro Pop
[34] McCleary, Rachel, *Guatemala's Postwar Prospects*, 1997, p. 129.

exist.[35] This point that Olascoaga refers to as fragility of the party organizations, is manifested by the fact that since 1985 no party that has won a national election has returned to doing so.[36]

This lack of institutionalization is typical of the political configuration elsewhere in Latin America as well. But even in regional comparisons Guatemalan political parties are considered to have the least degree of institutionalization in Central America.[37]

The implication of this is fundamental for how you can participate in political parties and elections. Politics is business in a certain sense. When you approach a political party, you are asked to mount the funds for your campaign yourself. So the economic factor becomes an impediment for many Mayans in two ways; the extreme incidence of poverty in itself among the Mayans, requires them to put all of their time into subsistence agriculture, and few, if any, have the funds necessary to mount own campaigns. To this can be added educational cleavages and the still prevalent fundamental structures of discrimination. All these factors point to the democratic weaknesses, and are part of the reasons why many Mayans perceive traditional political parties as illegitimate.[38]

4.2.3 Mapping out indigenous representation & participation

So what is the actual extent of indigenous political representation in Guatemala? The answer to this question is not entirely straightforward. Due to the reason of elected officials and others not always committing to self-identification as a Mayan or indigenous, existing figures have to be seen as approximates. For many Guatemalans the ethnic line between indigenous and Ladino is naturally blur.

Nevertheless figures from the last general elections in 2003 can provide some insight. In the elections for national congress 15 out of 158 congressmen are of Mayan background. This actually represents a decline in the percentage of Mayan representation, due to the absolute increase of places in congress.[39]

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[35] Interview with Ligia Gonzalez

[36] Olascoaga, Daniel R., *Democrácia en Guatemala: Un modelo para armar,* 2003, p. 29.

[37] Achard, Diego – González, Luis E., *Un desafío a la democracia – los partidos politicos en Centroamerica, Panamá y República Dominicana,* 2004 , p. 16

[38] Olascoaga, Daniel R., *Democrácia en Guatemala: Un modelo para armar,* 2003, p. 186 – 193.

[39] "Baqtun" (2004), p. 11.

The real indigenous political participation can be found at the **local level**. This development has already been fought, and often won, over the last decades.[40] Given the clear majority of indigenous in many parts of the country, particularly the "Altiplano" (highlands), many mayors are of indigenous background. According to an estimate in January 2004, 36% of the municipalities were of Mayan origin.[41]

Nine of these were in the hands of so called **"civil committees"**. These represent an alternative to political parties. They have a temporary nature and by law, they are only mobilized in times of elections. Civil committees are subject to different legislation than political parties, which can explain for their popularity among Mayan political configurations. This is also explained by the inherent suspicion of normal political parties.[42] The most famous example of civil committees in Guatemala is Xel-jú in Quetzaltenango, the second largest city in the country. The case of Xel-jú will be further presented in chapter six.

The question of a Mayan political party was brought up in the interviews. Why has this not materialized in a similar way as in many other Latin-American countries? It is important to state that there was an ambitious attempt in the 1970s to establish an indigenous political party. This took the name FIN (Front for National Integration). In the 1978 elections they supported the electoral platform that brought Lucas García to power. This episode can be seen as very unfortunate, in the sense that it meant "getting burned in the political game". The regime of Lucas García became a period vast repression and human rights' violations against the indigenous population.

4.3   Indigenous – State confrontations: - "a 500 years old phenomenon"

Indigenous opposition and confrontation with the central government in Guatemala is nothing new. Tarrazena points to the special settings of permanent negotiations that evolved from the colonial period:

> "The indigenous in Guatemala learned to negotiate with the central government, first with the colonial authority and later with the republican government, from a collective position. This was disrupted with liberal impositions, of subjects being attributed to individuals. The other aspect is

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[40] Bastos, Santiago – Manuela, Camus, *Entre el Mecapal y el cielo – Desarrollo del movimiento maya en Guatemala,* 2003 p. 270.

[41] "Baqtun" (2004), p. 10.

[42] Bastos, Santiago – Manuela, Camus, *Entre el Mecapal y el cielo – Desarrollo del movimiento maya en Guatemala,* 2003 p. 271.

that the communities, through negotiations, sought support from the central government in relation to local and regional authorities."[43]

One of the major points from Tarrazena is that these structures have been more or less recurrent over history, but they have survived up until today. The Mayan movement represents a platform that has been able to create a setting of direct negotiation with the national government, on collective rights. Another new element is its national scope and program. It is about Pan-Mayanism, compared to previous settings from regional perspectives.[44]

4.4 The (Pan-)Mayan Movement

4.4.1 Its origins and evolution – in a socio-political context

Popular movements in Guatemala have a long, but hazardous testimony. The settings have shifted and records show an extreme environment of confrontation between civil society and the state. During the Civil War (appr. 1960-96) engagement in social and independent organizations meant a subsequent risk of being accused of guerilla-affiliation. It is important to state that the Guatemalan guerillas adopted an indigenous-oriented discourse.[45]

The role of the indigenous rural population during the civil war is perceived in different ways and fiercely debated. In the late 1970's and especially in the early 80's the civil war shifted locations and moved into the rural highlands, where most of the Mayan population lives. The period in the early 80's, when high numbers of massacres and human rights abuses took place in Mayan villages, is known as "La Violencia". Many authors want to portray more or less the whole indigenous population as victims of the violence, whether they were part of the guerilla, the officially supported paramilitary counter-insurgency units, or civilians. Others claim many Mayans instead were the agents of their own destiny in the civil war.[46] What is clear though is that a large number of indigenous chose to enter the URNG, which gave the guerilla a prominent and essential position within and in relation to the emerging Mayan movement.

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[43] Interview with Tarrazena

[44] Ibid. Note: This is why sometimes it is referred to as the "Pan-Mayan Movement", thereby emphasizing the element of national project between different Mayan groups.

[45] See Bastos – Camus (2003), for a vast description of relations between the indigenous in the communities and the guerrilla EGP, which became one of the integrants of the URNG.

[46] See Löfving, Staffan, *An Unpredictable Past – Guerillas, Mayas, and the location of oblivion in war torn Guatemala,* 2002.

"The violence and repression has, more than stopped the progress of the ethnic conscience, intensified its development and redefined its platforms of struggle"[47]

This claim is crucial in understanding the development of the Mayan conscience and identity. As Cabarrús points out, the dynamics of Mayan revindication is directly related to the actions taken by the government. Assimilationist measures created a breeding ground for resistance, and more importantly, when the violence was brought into the Mayan communities it worked just as much as a catalyst for opposition as human devastation. Cabarrús further shows how this identity dynamics worked in favor of a national conscience of the Mayas, where negotiation was generated as the basis for the struggle.[48]

At the time of the civil war, resistance in the communities, and the incipient Mayan conscience was caught up in the violent insurgency and general polarization of society in left and right.[49] The fight for indigenous rights and socio-economic rights became intertwined, through strong organizations of resistance working in rural areas.[50] Other Mayan activists took a more emphatic position against the class-based perspective. This created a dualism within the movement of "Mayas Populares" and "Mayas Culturales". Working with similar agendas, but depending on the priority criterion of class and culture, this became an internal divide that would cast its legacy on the coming decades.[51]

4.4.2   Explanatory factors

We can here establish a number of causalities that have contributed to the evolution of Mayan activism, with the materialization of the movement. One of my main recurrent questions to the interviewees was to state the reason for the emergence of the Mayan movement. Answers given, in combination with prior literature on the topic, present a number of explanatory factors. The explanatory element is two-fold – telling why and where the movement started, and what has contributed to its growth in impact and center of attention in the last two decades.

International factors
Over the last decades there has been **an international shift from class to culture/ethnicity**. The basic reason for this is the end of the cold war, and

[47] Cabarrús Pellecer, Carlos Rafael, *Lo Maya: Una identidad con futurom?,* 1998, p. 50

[48] Cabarrús Pellecer, Carlos Rafael, *Lo Maya: Una identidad con futurom?,* 1998, p. 54.

[49] Warren, Kay B., *Pan-Maya Activism in Guatemala,* 2003, p. 176.

[50] An example is CUC

[51] See Bastos, Santiago – Manuela, Camus, *Entre el Mecapal y el cielo – Desarrollo del movimiento maya en Guatemala,* 2003.

many studies have shown how the lines of political mobilization have changed towards a logic according to ethnic instead of ideological lines. This is also true when it comes to armed conflicts.[52]

The International discourse and legislation as leverage has been used for advocating indigenous rights as a part of fundamental human rights. On the list of explicit achievements one has to mention the ILO Convention 169, which dates back to 1989. The most important point for self-determination "indigenous people are to be guaranteed full participation in the formulation of all policies that affect them." Other international instruments are the United Nations' draft Declaration on Indigenous Rights, drawn up in a consultative process during the 1990s, and the Organization of American States (OAS) Draft Declaration, completed in 1998.[53]

Domestic factors

> "To understand the change underway in this new social actor – new in the sense of its new collective activity but old when considered as a social group – **several social transformations** must be considered. Since the 1940s and 1950s, numerous events take place in Guatemala that either produce or accelerate significant changes in the dynamic of the indigenous communities."[54]

The revolution in 1944 had an impact. Mayans still perceive that the communities were targets of assimilationist policies at the time, even though it meant a period of social progresses.[55] Economic development permitted some indigenous to improve their incomes, while high population growth left the vast majority in the communities in poverty. This **social differentiation** was a reality and was going to play an important role for mobilization against the state during the coming decades.[56]

It is also necessary to mention the effects of religious conversion and the role of the Catholic Church in the development of leaders. General educational programs of primary schools in the communities, along with university scholarships for many individuals were the action of catholic institutions. These changes and educational effects caused the **emergence of a new indigenous elite**.[57]

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[52] Yashar, Deborah J., *Democracy, Indigenous Movements and the Postliberal Challenge in Latin America*, 1999, p 77.
[53] Van Cott, Donna Lee, *The Friendly Liquidation of the Past – the Politics of Diversity in Latin America,* 2000, p. 263.
[54] Gálvez Borrell, Victor - Esquit Choy, Alberto, *The Mayan Movement today – Issues of Indigenous culture and Development in Guatemala,* 1997, p. 27.
[55] Cojtí Cuxil, Demetrio, *El Movimiento Maya (En Guatemala)*, 1997, p. 20.
[56] For a thorough account on the dynamics of social differentiation in Mayan communities see Falla (1980)
[57] Bastos, Santiago – Manuela, Camus, *Entre el Mecapal y el cielo – Desarrollo del movimiento maya en Guatemala,* 2003 p. 30-34.

"Trained Mayan youths who returned to their communities were stonewalled by ethnic discrimination; in spite of their education and of all the invested effort, they lacked the same work opportunities that the ladinos had. Some then rejected their culture, taking on that of ladinos. Others took on the task of strengthening their cultural ties, valuing them and making them permanent."[58]

1992 was an important year for the movement's growing incidence, mainly for two reasons. Firstly, this was the year Rigoberta Menchú was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, which opened the eyes of the international community to the cause and struggle of the Guatemalan Mayas. Secondly, as many of my interviewees have pointed out, the year 1992 carried a big symbolic meaning. As a reaction to the 500-year celebration of Columbus' discovery of America, indigenous and social movements organized counter manifestations. This mobilization created a momentum for the work and focus on indigenous rights.[59]

Alvaro Pop relates the start of his own activism to this time:

"I had just finished my university studies, and in the ongoing peace negotiations there was a demand for educated Mayans from the participating organizations. I became a technical adviser within COMG, which were one of the main Mayan parts in the negotiations."[60]

Pop's story is interesting in two ways. He is a clear-cut example of what education and university degrees, has meant in the creation of a critical mass of Mayan intellectuals. Furthermore it gives a picture of how the political context, of the movement's negotiations with the state, had a direct impact on the form his activism took.

4.4.3 The 1990s – Negotiating with the state

Many of the larger Mayan organizations today were established in the late 1980s or early 1990s. With the peace negotiations taking shape between the government and the URNG, the movement had to submit to the overlying structures of these relations. In this process the URNG came to exercise a high degree of influence over large parts of the Mayan movement, through the umbrella organization COPMAGUA.[61] Nevertheless, being part of the

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[58] Gálvez Borrell, Victor - Esquit Choy, Alberto, *The Mayan Movement today – Issues of Indigenous culture and Development in Guatemala,* 1997, p. 29

[59] Warren, Kay B., *Indigenous movements and their critics – Pan-maya activism in Guatemala* , 1998, p. 18.

[60] Interview with Alvaro Pop

[61] Bastos, Santiago – Manuela, Camus, *Entre el Mecapal y el cielo – Desarrollo del movimiento maya en Guatemala,* 2003 p. 16

negotiations represented a great opportunity for bringing the Mayan agenda to the government.

This culminated with the specific part of the Peace Agreements that were signed in 1996, that refers to Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This was extensive in character, addressing many fields: cosmology, discrimination, cultural rights, and constitutional reforms.[62] After the signing several special commissions on specific areas were created between the government and representatives from the Mayan movement (COPMAGUA). These were instated as permanent settings of negotiations for the construction of specific and general constitutional reforms. The experience of these settings of permanent negotiations with the government became important.

In 1999 a referendum on major constitutional changes in favor of indigenous' rights in the constitution were held. Unexpectedly the vote was against the constitutional changes. This represented the end of the momentum of progress during the "glorious 1990s" for the movement.[63] Many people claim that this even suggested that a period of crisis for the movement started, with break-up of COPMAGUA. However, the first five years of the new millennium have meant a restructure and reorientation of the movement. One of the key features has been that of entering the state.[64]

4.5   Summing Up: The Mayan Movement - A new phenomenon?

"Within this continuity in indigenous resistance, a new social actor emerges. Claiming the name "Maya", and developing a number of organizations that put forth demands that were little known in the past, in areas such as education, linguistics, religion, etc."[65]

One of the mayor academic questions concerning the Mayan-movement is whether it constitutes a new phenomenon, distinctly different from other movements of indigenous opposition in Guatemalan history. The initial discussion in chapter 2, on the essence of Mayan revindication, and the citation above, gives us a clue.

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[62] Warren, Kay B., *Indigenous movements and their critics – Pan-maya activism in Guatemala* , 1998, p. 211.
[63] Bastos, Santiago – Manuela, Camus, *Entre el Mecapal y el cielo – Desarrollo del movimiento maya en Guatemala,* 2003 p. 205.
[64] Bastos, Santiago – Camus, Manuela, *El movimiento maya: una Mirada en persepectiva*, 2004, p.6.
[65] Gálvez Borrell, Victor - Esquit Choy, Alberto, *The Mayan Movement today – Issues of Indigenous culture and Development in Guatemala,* 1997, p. 27.

The essence of this question is whether the Mayan movement put forth any new claims that have not been expressed by previous indigenous movements. It is evident that this is the case. The focus on cultural identity, with specific claims in the spheres of bilingual education, the practice of Mayan religion, cosmology, and judicial rights are all part of the same articulation.

In line with discussions above it can also be argued that Guatemala has experienced a **domestic shift from class to culture/ethnicity**. This is described in different ways. The other base of the argument relates to the form of the Mayan movement. The quotes by Tarrazena above suggest the national, collective platform as new in negotiations with the state. Some express the shift as a move towards "identity politics".[66]

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[66] Löfving, Staffan – Widmark, Charlotta, *Banners of Belonging – The Politics of Indigenous Identity in Bolivia and Guatemala,* 2002, p. 1.

5 Changing Perceptions of the State

5.1 Roles and Change – evidence

There are claims that perceptions within the Mayan movement of traditional political institutions have changed over the last few years.

> "It is evident, that interviews with different indigenous organizations show that there is a greater tendency to approach party institutions. The radicalism of some organizations that condemned the Ladino state, are giving way to a new generation of leaders that see the participation in formal political institutions as the only way of influencing the important political decisions."[67]

> "But things are changing. The political parties are beginning to see themselves strengthened, due to changes in the country, by including indigenous in their structures and electoral lists. The process is just starting. Even though the presence of indigenous on the lists has increased, they tend to be placed in the last places. But within the Mayan movement the electoral system as a way of doing politics is becoming accepted."[68]

5.2 "Going from the Mayan Movement to Traditional politics –Government and Parties."

In order to get a first-hand picture of the Mayan-state relations in Guatemala (in general), political and social activists in the Mayan movement were a primary target for interviews. A selection was made in order to find activists that had a certain experience of struggle, and entering new, traditional channels of politics. That is the part of the study where, civil society – state relations for the Mayas becomes the focal point. I wish to point out some interesting answers from interviewees on this matter:

- **Norma Quixtan**, is the long time director of a women's social group in Quetzaltenango and was, as the choice from local civil society, appointed governor of the that same department in February 2004:

> "Through my work within communities, with education and human rights, I learned that the only way of reaching results is through politics. We can have ideals, propositions, but without representation we cannot overcome the barriers."[69]

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[67] Olascoaga, Daniel R., *Democrácia en Guatemala: Un modelo para armar,* 2003, p.186.
[68] Bastos, Santiago – Manuela, Camus, *Entre el Mecapal y el cielo – Desarrollo del movimiento maya en Guatemala,* 2003 p. 269.
[69] Interview with Norma Quixtan

As this example clearly shows, the social work within communities, can constitute a platform for political involvement. Quixtan also express her fears that too many Mayan academics, activists and leaders stay out of politics;

> "Too many Mayan professionals chose to work through other channels than the public sector, because there is a perception that when you enter it you are burned. There is a basic problem that they do not want to face the enormous responsibility and challenges that public office represents"[70]

These points from Quixtan are important, suggesting that, many Mayans, who have entered the public sphere, have felt their reach and influence too limited. This has also meant disappointments from the Mayan population. Hence it can be stated that the structural impediments for influence of the state are not overcome simply by representation. Some final remarks by Quixtan are interesting however, when explaining the extra-parliamentarian form of the Mayan Movement:

> "It is much more comfortable and easy to articulate your demands, and working through NGOs. It is substantially different, in terms of compromise, to actually govern"

- **Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil**, long-time Mayan intellectual and activist, who joined the FRG government in 1999 as a Vice-minister for Education:

> "I was asked to join the government, after participating in negotiations over several years on the education reform. [This was one of the areas opened after the signing of the Peace Agreements, with major changes towards laws for the right to bilingual education.] Of course there was not an evident acceptance from my part, especially since I was not supporting the FRG. However I did see that there was a big opportunity for me to facilitate and make sure the passing of the reform. I asked 16 individuals around me for advice and 15 told me to accept."

When speaking to Cojtí Cuxil, it is evident that his own specific and circumstantial situation within the educational reform process contributed to accepting the position as Vice-minister. Nevertheless he makes general remarks on indigenous participation in government:

> "Before, you were disqualified if you entered the state. It was like an act of treason. Fortunately that is finally changing. Because you cannot change the situation, improve the situation, outside the state."[71]

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[70] Interview with Norma Quixtan
[71] Interview with Demetrio Cojti Cuxil

- **Miguel Angel Velasco**, ex-parliamentarian of FRG and former ambassador to Sweden,

"I first approached the URNG to seek involvement, as it, for me presented the natural choice. However these demanded me to show prior engagement with the movement during the war. I felt unable to meet the requirements, as I during my time as a journalist had written numerous articles, not only condemning the violations of the state, but also of the guerilla. The only party that I felt opened itself for my participation was the FRG. This presented a dilemma as it was the party of Rios Montt. Even though I am still fearful of the General it is my conviction that he has changed in the same way the political climate of the country has."[72]

Velasco's case is symptomatic. For him seeking involvement and influence was the most important. Furthermore he sees it as an obligation to participate when the opportunity comes. This view is recurring.

- **Rosa-Maria Tacan-Vasquez**, working with indigenous' and women's rights, and candidate for Partido Unionista in the 2003 elections:

"How can we not accept, when we ask for representation and they offer it? There is a certain limit of what changes you can achieve through civil society. Profound transformations require politics"[73]

Tacan-Vasquez' participation was not, however, unproblematic. She agreed only after negotiations for a higher position on the election ballots.

5.3   From local to national politics

Rigoberto Quemé and the Civil Committee Xel-jú

Perhaps the most high profile Mayan politician during the last decade is Rigoberto Quemé Chay. He was the mayor of Quetzaltenango (the country's second city with a substantial Mayan population) from 1995 to 2003, as the candidate for the local civil committee Xel-jú. Xel-jú is one of the oldest civil committees of Guatemala (from the early 1970s), which also has a clear essence of Mayan revindication in its political program. For the 2003 presidential elections there was an attempt to put forth his candidacy. Due to electoral rules and calculation of need for political allies, cooperation and partnerships were sought with other political movements, including existing parties. Queme's candidacy never materialized in time for the elections. The

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[72] Interview with Miguel Angel Velasco
[73] Interview with Rosa Maria Tacan Vasquez

reasons vary depending on who you ask, but an obvious factor was internal struggle. The process generated a split between Quemé and the rest of Xel-jú.

Both parties blame the other for the breakdown of relations. In Quemé's mind Xel'jú never was willing to subscribe to a shared platform in relation to the other political partners, and did not show sufficient pragmatism to compromise with the Mayan discourse. Representatives of Xel-jú, on the other hand feels that Quemé's political movements were much too wide and imprudent. There is a feeling within Xel-jú that Quemé sold out, both himself and the committee, in the building of alliances.[74]

Quemé's presidential candidacy and its breakdown in the relations with Xel-jú is interesting in a number of ways:

- According to Quemé there is a clear trade-off between sticking to a Mayan discourse and succeeding in seeking real political influence. For this, alliances with non-Mayan (and non-indigenous) actors are a requisite. Furthermore there is a need to act now. Gaining political power and influence is a must, but it cannot be achieved without alliances with parts of the rest of Guatemalan society.

This trade-off also illustrates the inherent dilemma for Mayan activists on a personal level. As other examples have shown, the ones engaging politically with none-Mayan institutions always run the danger of suspicion and being discredited by others in the movement. The key word in this conflictive dilemma is "selling-out", and one really has to calculate what can be achieved by accepting a position or a compromise.

- The example also shows the substantial gap between local and national politics in Guatemala. Hence, there are clear obstacles for bringing a local Mayan successful enterprise (as Xel-jú) onto a national level. The figures from the last general elections above point to the cleavage of representation and participation on a local and a national level. The key question of course is why there is no actual Mayan nationwide political party in Guatemala today? This was, as mentioned above, one of the recurrent questions I put to all of my interviewees.

One conclusion could be that, in line with Quemé's argument, the national political arena does not allow for a Mayan (or independent indigenous) project. His precise point is that the political space has to be shared with the ladino population, when real politics is to be exercised.

Even so, it is important to remember, as many scholars point out, that the Mayan project in its nature is politically directed towards the Guatemalan

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[74] Interviews with Rigoberto Quemé Chay, Daniel Tucux & Ricardo Cajas.

national state. Tarrazena's reference to the historical direct negotiation space between the indigenous and the Guatemalan state gives a hint in this direction. Moreover one of the principal statements by Bastos and Camus is that they chose to ascribe the Mayan movement political aspirations entirely to a national project, thereby emphasizing its qualitative distinction from other forms of indigenous political organization and participation on local level.[75]

Even though Mayan activists entering politics subscribe to a more pragmatic view and surrender to the party's agenda, the Mayan identification and struggle is not abandoned. In many ways the new arena of traditional political institutions becomes an instrument for its continuation. This is evident with the emergence of cross- party and institutional networks between Mayan activists that have its base in the ethnic background instead of in political ideology.[76]

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[75] Bastos, Santiago – Manuela, Camus, *Entre el Mecapal y el cielo – Desarrollo del movimiento maya en Guatemala,* 2003 p. 19.
[76] This effect of Mayan networks was expressed by Cojtí Cuxil, from his experience within the previous government, and by Tacan-Vasquez from within her political party.

6 A changing context – a changing movement

6.1 The importance of a changed perception of the state

In chapter four a number of explaining factors to the creation and rising impact and interest of the Mayan movement in the last two decades, is mentioned. However it also recounts how the dynamics of the movement is closely related to the relation to the Guatemalan state. This point is fundamental in our understanding of the development in recent years. Not only can the violence and repression by the state, which culminated in the early 1980s, give an explanation to indigenous resistance, but so can the relative normalization of politics and democratization explain for changing views of the state.

6.1.1 From a logic of Deconstruction…….

One of the specific reasons why it is difficult for Mayans to enter politics is the implicit or sometimes explicit notion that the political institutions of Guatemala simply are not compatible with the Mayan essence or the movement's aspirations. In accordance to Mayan revindication the movement seeks to reestablish communal (and collective) law and rights in harmony with Mayan law. Here the form essentially differs from the western notion where the subjects are exclusively individual. The movement in itself is a form, partly created to establish (or reestablish) as a communal entity of resistance and negotiation with the state.

If the deconstructivist and radical perspective is emphasized one would have to question whether the Mayan discourse is compatible with the Guatemalan state, even though it finds itself in a process of democratization. The "civic criterion" in civil society theory stipulates a basic criterion for acceptance of the social context and the state.

6.1.2 ……. To a logic of reconstruction

Let us go back to the discussion on cultural or class-based claims by Mayans. It is interested to see that issues of cultural content, in the Peace agreements, to a certain extent, have been addressed in political reforms. This comprise the vast educational reform, including the right to bilingual education, and the fact that the state has become more sensitive on matters of traditional, indigenous, communal law. When it comes to socio-economic conditions and stipulated reforms they have materialized to a lesser extent. This includes the specific

agreement on land reforms. What conclusions can be drawn from this? Maybe the structures within the Guatemalan state are more receptive for the Mayan transformation of society, than socio-economic reforms requiring redistribution of income? This cannot be stated here. However it points to an interesting fact; The perception that actual reforms on the Mayan agenda have taken place.

So if the state shows that reforms are possible, the perception of the state has to change. Also, the perception of yourself (the Mayan movement) has to change, since its articulation stem from the direct measures from and relations to the state. This study has shown that this has been the case among Mayan activists. Whether or not the reforms, which articulation originates from the Mayan movement, represent an actual, profound, transformation of the Guatemalan state can be debated. Steps in the right direction are clear, however. This opens up for the Guatemalan state to actually enhance its democratic foundation, to be more inclusive of the Mayan population – i.e. contributing to the democratization itself.

6.2   The natural way through civil society

Of course, one can see that "the Mayan way" is often natural for many indigenous for seeking influence, because it is a known and accessible platform, when the others (political parties and public institutions) are more demanding and exclusionist. This element of openness is a key feature for any civil society organization, and becomes especially apparent in Guatemala. As an indigenous seeking to become a political actor you become part of the Mayan discourse.

The Mayan discourse is articulated through many explicit fields, where the needs for engagement are evident; education, social work, rural development, human rights, etc. These organizations are more or less clear on their Mayan agenda. The point is that for many activists, it is not primarily the cultural aspects of the Mayan discourse that attracts them, but basic needs for social development. The radical cultural stance is not adopted. In the context of democratization the prospect of accomplishing political reforms through the opening window of opportunity, can be tempting or even evident and imperative.

6.3   The limits of influence and impact through civil society

In our final definition of civil society, a balance between consensus and conflict is stressed. As Guatemala has been a country torn by conflict, it is interesting to see how much it has moved in the direction of consensus. The

Mayan movement, as a representative of civil society, has constituted the example. The changing perception of the state can be seen as a move in the direction of consensus, and thus the prospect of reaching a balance. This thought points to the even more intriguing image of possible permanent interaction between state and civil society.

Furthermore the role of civil society was discussed, with a focus on its limited capabilities for promoting democracy and social justice. This study has shown that this line of thinking has bearing on the Mayan - Guatemalan context. The recurrent answer from the interviewees was that formulating programs for change is not enough. If there is a possibility of public office, through political parties and elections, or direct requests, one should seize the opportunity. This shows the weight put on the state institutions, in comparison with civil society.

7   Summing up & Conclusions

This study shows that it is essential for the political scientist to study the phenomenon of the Mayan movement. It has displayed how this is important if you want to investigate indigenous political participation in Guatemala, in the context of the **fundamental shift from class to culture.** Furthermore it has pointed out how an analysis of the forms of organization in relation to the state and the behavior of the state is important. With the help of theories on civil society, its scope and limits, this study has presented arguments why Mayan activists today chose to enter traditional political institutions. It has not been an objective to support this conclusion with quantitative data, but to gain a deeper understanding of the explaining processes of individuals taking this step. Entering into "the state" has been defined with a wide approach – like entering political parties or accepting posts in government or public institutions.

The normalization of politics in Guatemala, with changing perceptions of the Guatemalan state from Mayan activists, has led to another shift in logics – **from deconstruction to reconstruction** of the state.

Two basic factors can explain the choice to enter the "conventional arena". Or more precisely they can be seen as two sides of the same coin, based on the transformation of the Guatemalan state;
- the contextual transformations and democratization has allowed for the political institutions to be more overt, facilitating the entrance of Mayans.
- Mayan activists have changed their own perceptions of the state, allowing themselves to compromise more, in order to gain influence.

These two conclusions, of course, were early hypotheses, and my research has found evidence to support them. It has also been showed how the participation of Mayans feed into the democratization process itself. The focus on Mayan-State relations has thus generated a logic of **reciprocation in** the ongoing **democratization**.

It is important to state, however, that the continuous presence and participation of these Mayan agents depend heavily on the future capabilities of the state to meet indigenous claims for changes of society and the actual transformations of the state itself. This is thus a great and essential challenge for the democratization of the Guatemalan state. Can they continue on the road of democratization, and widen the constitutional framework for permanent indigenous recognition and participation?

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