

# Globalizations and Local Power: Information Technology, Culture and Development in rural Mayan communities of Guatemala

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This thesis analyzes how young Mayan computer and Internet users overcome barriers to access in order to achieve individual and community development. These Mayan students and technology activists utilize tools and strategies from the Information Age to adapt traditional cultural elements onto interactive and multimedia formats. These hybrid media products demonstrate the ultimate compatibility of Mayan culture and advanced technology. Drawing on theories from the fields of anthropology and globalization studies, this thesis argues that Mayan high-tech activism represents one facet of an emerging grassroots globalization that promotes an alternative to corporate-led globalization and the ideology of consumerism based on the free interchange of ideas in the context of equality, respect for diversity and cultural rights.

*Esta tesis analiza cómo jóvenes Mayas que usan computadoras y el Internet sobrepasan las barreras para el acceso informático y de esa manera lograr el desarrollo individual comunitario. Estos estudiantes y activistas en tecnología Mayas utilizan herramientas y estrategias de la Época Informática para adaptar elementos tradicionales culturales a formatos interactivos y multimedios, para generar productos híbridos las cuales enseñan la compatibilidad de la cultura Maya y la alta tecnología. Con el respaldo de teorías antropológicas y los estudios de globalización, esta tesis demuestra que el activismo Maya basado en la alta tecnología representa un aspecto de una globalización emergente de base, como una alternativa a la globalización dirigida por corporaciones transnacionales y una ideología de consumismo. Esta globalización alterna se basa en el intercambio libre de ideas en el contexto de la igualdad, el respeto para la diversidad y los derechos culturales.*

## Table of Contents

<b>Introduction: “Where do you want to go today?”</b> .....	5
<b>Chapter 1: Mayan Cultural Activism and Information and Communication Technologies</b> .....	9
1.1 Internal colonialism, the present context of exclusion and marginalization .....	10
1.2 The role of the Guatemalan State .....	15
1.3 Neoliberal hegemony: boundaries and resources .....	18
1.4 Defining development in a globalized world .....	24
1.5 Ethnographic background to the research .....	29
1.6 Summary of the rest of the paper .....	30
<b>Chapter 2: Advantages and Disadvantages of Using ICTs to Promote Development</b> .....	32
2.1 Why do many Maya believe that it is fundamental to take advantage of ICTs?.....	32
2.1.1 To build a better trained, more efficient indigenous work force.....	33
2.1.2 To have up-to-date information about the world .....	34
2.1.3 To demonstrate that Mayaness and modernity co-exist.....	36
2.1.4 To make known the Mayan culture .....	37
2.1.5 To make international connections .....	38
2.2. What barriers and challenges exist that make development based on ICT use difficult?.....	39
2.2.1 Differential access: unequal economic resources .....	40
2.2.2. Differential access: physical and communication infrastructure limitations .....	41
2.2.3. Differential access: lack of educational opportunities.....	48
2.2.4 Differential access: intergenerational conflict .....	49
2.2.5 Easy availability of inappropriate content that places a higher value on other cultures over local culture.....	51
<b>Chapter 3: Global flows, local culture</b> .....	53
3.1 Challenging theoretical assumptions of identity.....	55
3.2 What is culture? A theoretical discussion of culture in the context of globalization .....	56
3.3 Why culture matters? Reasons for preserving .....	60
3.4 How is Mayan culture changing? Racism, ladinoization and global cultural influences .....	64
3.5 How have Mayan people resisted Ladino cultural dominance? Strategic essentialism and cultural continuity .....	67
3.6. How does culture adapt? <i>Mestizaje</i> , hybridization and appropriation .....	71
<b>Chapter 4: ICTs for future development: strategies and projects to place ICTs at the service of indigenous communities</b> .....	74
4.1 Strategies for individual and collective indigenous organizing .....	75
4.1.1 Individual and community strategies .....	75
4.1.2 Regional strategies .....	77
4.1.3 Global strategies .....	78
4.2 Ongoing ICT interventions .....	81
4.2.1 Poder-Local.com .....	81
4.2.2 Enlace Quiché and ebiguatemala.org .....	82
4.2.3 <i>Centros Electronicos de Negocios</i> .....	83

4.2.4 <i>Proyecto Bibliotecas Guatemala</i> .....	84
4.2.5 Other online networks and resources .....	85
4.2.6 Characteristics of successful interventions .....	85
4.3 Conclusions .....	86
<b>Appendix: Interviews</b> .....	<b>89</b>
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>91</b>
<b>Bibliography</b> .....	<b>93</b>
<b>Vita</b> .....	<b>101</b>

## List of Tables

Table 1: Demographic breakdown of interviews.....	30
Table 2: Per capita income according to income bracket.....	40
Table 3: National statistics: poverty and technology .....	43
Table 4: Electricity in the <i>Mancomunidad</i> Huista.....	45
Table 5: Communication in the <i>Mancomunidad</i> Huista.....	45
Table 6: Cable television and the Internet in the <i>Mancomunidad</i> Huista.....	47

## **Introduction: “Where do you want to go today?”**

A promotional video developed by Microsoft for its computer education project in Guatemala opens with a familiar pastoral image: a local elder in a traditional shirt and hat looking out over a distant horizon of volcanic peaks and drifting clouds, addressing the camera in his native tongue, the Mayan language Kaqchikel.

We, the elders, have experienced many things in life, so we have to open the way for our sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters so they can learn, write, tell and teach to their sons and daughters, grandsons and granddaughters. This is what our ancestors have told us, so that we can live in harmony with our land, from whom we ask so much, and who has given us so much. That is what we try to do, so that what was left by our ancestors, who have already departed, will not die. This is what we have left so that our young people will write their own history, and tell their own stories, and pass them onto to their children, and the children of their children.

This five minute advertisement featuring the village of Chipiacul in the department of Chimaltenango in Guatemala’s central highland mountains, which Microsoft Community Affairs produced in 2002 to be viewed by Bill Gates himself, presents compelling and beautiful images of the successful blending of two seemingly incompatible worlds.<sup>1</sup> The next shot shows a foreign aid worker driving a 4x4 sports-utility vehicle up muddy mountain roads to Chipiacul, which according to the narration “doesn’t even appear on the maps, but is part of the program Getting Closer to Communities supported by Microsoft and COED, the Cooperation for Education.”

Next on screen young Enrique Tujal shares his excitement about the computer center in his village. “The sign really got my attention,” he says, “Where do you want to go today? Haa! What a question for a young man like me!”

The narration continues during a scene of an elderly woman watching over a young woman weaving on the traditional backstrap loom. “Like Enrique, 100% of the young people in Chipiacul, want to go even further. We have given them the vehicle so that they can arrive as far they want to go. Education and advanced technology.” As the narrator speaks these last words, the image smoothly shifts from a close-up of the wrinkled hand of the elder guiding the hand of the young weaver to a close-up of the hand of a woman guiding a teenage girl’s hand to control a mouse.

These video images inspire confidence and hope that new tools of the information age can solve the pressing problems that confront the people of Chipiacul and throughout rural Guatemala. In the shorthand of many advocates of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the goal is to “bridge the digital divide.”

Realistically, a five-minute video simplifies and romanticizes the experience of indigenous peoples who gain access to ICTs and attempt to use them to promote their communities’ development. Chronic problems such as poverty, illiteracy, malnutrition and the historic experience and present consequences of genocide and racism cannot be solved with the installation of a computer center alone.

The Global Forum of Indigenous People and the Information Society, held in Geneva, Switzerland in December 2003, addressed the ongoing and future efforts to put ICTs at the service of

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<sup>1</sup> “*Dejando Huella* (Leaving Traces).” Santiago, Vicente, Director. Microsoft Community Affairs and COED, *Cooperación para la Educación* (Cooperation for Education.) Chipiacul, Guatemala, 2002. Thanks to Professor Grete Pasch of Francisco Marroquin University in Guatemala City for providing access to this video.

indigenous peoples. The Latin American indigenous challenge to the Global Forum's recommendations demonstrates how even the most progressive attempts to promote community development through ICTs can fall short of directly challenging the structural inequalities and capitalist exploitation that characterize life for most indigenous peoples.

A total of 286 persons, including representatives from six member states, eighteen government departments of member states, nine UN bodies and specialized agencies, twelve private sector participants and ninety indigenous and non-governmental agencies attended this Global Forum. They adopted a declaration that calls for the construction of partnerships between "indigenous peoples, States, the international system (including financial bodies) and the private sector" for the pursuit of a comprehensive list of forty-four "courses of action to improve indigenous connectivity and equitable access to the new information society."<sup>2</sup>

These courses of action highlight some of the central goals of proponents of ICT use for development:

- Establishment and sustainability of community connectivity;
- Recognizing the potential of the Internet to promote their own culture and history beyond economic profit;
- Fund capacity building in communication projects, prioritizing access for youth, women and Elders;
- Adapt ICTs to the needs of indigenous communities, such as writing software in indigenous languages and educational programs where indigenous students can be trained to improve their technical skills;
- Other goals include the areas of the Environment, Health, Human Rights, and Traditional Knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

This declaration states that

At the heart of our vision of the Information Society is respect for the dignity and human rights of Indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, which must be affirmed, if the economic, information and digital divide which separates technology rich nations and the private sector from the most marginalized people in society including indigenous peoples, nations and tribes, is to be bridged.<sup>4</sup>

However, the multicultural and respectful rhetoric of the Declaration conceals the reproduction of inequality and the exclusion of indigenous voices at the highest levels of decision-making, at least according to a strongly worded critique published as Annex 5 of the Declaration and entitled "Declaration of the Indigenous Peoples of Latin America to the World Summit on the Information Society." Among the criticisms in the supplemental Declaration are the following:

We consider that, although there has been a dialogue and a predisposition above all from the developing countries, the summit, and in general the Declaration of Principles and Action Plan of the World Summit on the Information Society, has not included the fundamental proposals of the

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<sup>2</sup> Secretariat of the United National Permanent Forum. "The Report of the Global Forum of Indigenous Peoples and Information Society by the on Indigenous Issues, as part of the World Summit on the Information Society, held in Geneva, Dec. 8-11." United Nations, Dec. 23, 2003, p. 11. <[http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/pfii/wsis\\_gfipis.htm](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/pfii/wsis_gfipis.htm)>.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. pp. 11-15.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p. 6.

Indigenous Peoples that were made in previous preparatory meetings. Nor do these include the aspirations of the Indigenous Peoples expressed in various events on the right to develop our own forms and means of community communication.

We are concerned that the summit, in its first stage, does not consider the rights of Indigenous Peoples, that the vision of development adopted in the Summit emphasizes the technological means and instruments above human needs and perspectives; we are concerned that the development motor will be access to information technologies rather than access to equity, peace with social justice, to the exercise of rights and human liberties.

We would warn that a future society whose construction logic is based on market competition for the use and access to new information technologies would carry with it a serious risk of devaluing the sense of human communication.

The paradigm of an Information Society based principally on universal access to information technologies means ignoring the structural inequalities whose causes are not of the technological or infrastructure type but rather a response to models of excluding domination based on the private interests of transnational corporations that concentrate a great deal of technological power and attempt to generalize this through the market system as the only means of human development.

As Indigenous Peoples, we want to call the attention of the government representatives that hold in their hands final approval of the summit documents that, without significant participation of the world's indigenous peoples in the orientation and execution of the WSIS agreements, the discrimination and negation of our ancestral right will continue, and this will not only widen the digital divide, but will also worsen the current conditions and social, economic and cultural exclusion to the detriment of cultural identity and diversity of the people.

As Indigenous peoples, forming part of civil society, we emphatically express our concern that the United Nations really include a plural and humanistic vision of development that respects cultural diversity and that does not contribute - directly or indirectly - to consolidating a market vision that responds only to the private interests of powerful information corporations and that do not necessarily coincide with the interests of the people in democracy, sustainable development, social justice and peace.<sup>5</sup>

This commentary makes clear the reality that successful implementation of ICT programs in indigenous communities does not necessarily lead to community-led development, and may further marginalize community participation through the promotion of an agenda concerned more with access and connectivity than with addressing the inequalities inherent in the market system.

Thus there are no easy solutions, technological or otherwise, to the development needs of the indigenous population of rural Guatemala. Many proposed solutions that do not count on the support and consultation of the communities involved may actually create more problems than they solve, through increased exclusion, challenges to local community identity or the perpetuation of State violence and exploitation of indigenous peoples and their territories.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid. pp. 50-52.

This thesis argues that indigenous communities must take advantage of ICTs in their attempts to promote local development agendas, while taking into account the wide variety of difficulties that arise in the implementation technology solutions, including infrastructure and resource limitations, divisions within communities and the cultural impacts of ICTs. Computers and the Internet are not merely modern informational tools, but they are also in their own right agents of change that inevitably influence users' lifestyles and behaviors.

Many indigenous students and cultural activists quickly understand the positive potential that lies in ICTs even despite the reality that they often must improvise and teach themselves how best to use ICTs. This can have positive benefits which range from enhanced job prospects to the ability to access current and accurate global information. However, ICTs have much more ambiguous impacts with respect to collective organization leading to empowerment. Furthermore, as pointed out by the indigenous critics at the Global Forum, reliance on ICTs for development has the potential to reproduce existing structural inequalities, rather than challenging them. This thesis analyzes these barriers and the diverse strategies that Mayan individuals and communities are employing to overcome them. These strategies point toward the emerging signs of a potentially powerful grassroots globalization that relies on modern information and communication technologies to preserve important traditions and to adapt Mayan culture to the changing circumstances of the information age.

## Chapter 1: Mayan Cultural Activism and Information and Communication Technologies

Across the globe, the late twentieth century revolution in information technology claims to have forever altered how people work, communicate, travel and understand their identity. According to the United Nations, information and communication technologies (ICTs) “can play an especially important part in accelerating growth, eradicating poverty and promoting sustainable development in developing and transition economy countries.”<sup>6</sup> This powerful ideology of global progress and power through technology even reaches into rural indigenous communities of Guatemala, where poverty, racism and genocide conspire to oppress the Mayan people, while the Guatemalan State has sought to replace their culture with national and Western paradigms.

Despite this physical and cultural oppression, a growing sector of the Mayan population, primarily students, activists and middle-class professionals, are beginning to take advantage of the Internet to organize transnational networks, and a number of projects emerged in recent years utilizing information and communication technologies. This paper examines how Mayan cultural activists utilize ICTs, in particular computers and the Internet, to promote the development of rural communities. The perspectives and experiences of these young Mayan students and activists, many of whom make up the first generation from their towns to access these technologies, inform the general argument of this analysis that ICTs can and should play a strategic role in local development efforts.

Indigenous peoples, in Guatemala and elsewhere, experience a vast inequality of access to the power and potential of ICTs, due in part to the structural and ideological barriers of the global capitalist system and in part to the historically corrupt and racist Guatemalan State. Examples of this power imbalance include the implementation of neoliberal government policies in Guatemala, which has led to the privatization of basic utilities and limited government expenditures on education and health services, the historic and structural racism in State policy, which has disenfranchised and marginalized many indigenous communities, and the consequences of global media and commercialism that glorify consumer culture over traditional practices.

However, this global system also provides openings and resources that support indigenous resistance to exploitation and work in favor of community-led development and cultural revitalization. International and national development efforts interact with local political projects and community organizations, creating opportunities for alternative visions of local and global progress. Mass media, the Internet and e-mail are fundamental global tools that Mayan cultural activists integrate into their strategies for combating inequality and racism, organizing their communities, and promoting cultural, social and economic justice. National and international NGOs, such as Rights Action, the Rigoberta Menchú Tum Foundation and the Network in Solidarity with the People of Guatemala communicate urgent news of human rights violations and community-based development alternatives around the globe to their database of supporters.<sup>7</sup>

These efforts to utilize ICTs, while fundamental, constitute a deeply problematic strategy due to the challenges to local culture, divisions within communities, and the fact that access alone cannot solve any of the pressing problems that confront the indigenous population of Guatemala, as pointed out in the Latin American Indigenous Declaration at the UN Global Forum on Indigenous Peoples and the

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<sup>6</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council. “Development and international cooperation in the 21st Century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy.” May 18, 2000, p. 3. Available at <<http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/docs/2000/e2000-52.pdf>>.

<sup>7</sup> Rights Action, <<http://www.rightsaction.org>>; La Fundación Rigoberta Menchú Tum, <<http://www.frmt.org/>>; NISGUA, <<http://www.nisgua.org>>.

Information Society, discussed in the Introduction. Furthermore, the benefits from ICTs are not distributed evenly throughout indigenous communities, as only literate, educated Maya with the disposable income to pay for Internet usage or computer purchases can take advantage of these tools. Communities closer to urban areas also benefit more from the technological infrastructure available in those urban centers, compared to indigenous communities in rural areas of northwest Huehuetenango and northern Quiché.

Mayan activists with access to global ICT tools employ strategies of cultural adaptation to extend and expand Mayan culture - its knowledges, traditions, and forms of organization - onto a range of ICT formats from radio and desktop publishing, to e-mail networks and the Internet. These efforts at cultural promotion and revitalization seek to establish a collective modern Mayan identity, both in response to international recognition of multicultural rights and to sustain Mayan cultural difference against the pervasive influences of Western consumerism and Guatemalan nationalism.

Mayan cultural activists' work is complicated and contradictory. Middle-class intellectual leaders must remain connected to the reality of the lived Mayan experience of the rural masses despite their residence in urban areas, wearing business suits and, in some notable cases, making public policy. This results in questions about the authenticity of the Mayan intellectual class and in some cases challenges that they were co-opted by powerful interests when they accepted prominent positions in the government. However, Mayan culture cannot be reduced to the traditions and rituals of village custom authentically reproduced by the rural Mayan people. Culture is a resource that can be extended into new environments, consisting of multiple practices, knowledges and relationships that include locally-rooted traditions and customs, but also is broad enough to reflect the plurality of cultural and political expression among the twenty-two distinct Mayan ethnicities. Attempts to establish a unified, static definition of Mayan culture based on the lifestyles of the rural Mayan peasantry run the risk of reproducing internal inequalities and delegitimizing new formulations of Mayan identity as inauthentic. Modern Mayan identity encompasses flexible cultural adaptations resulting from upward class mobility, the ease of migration between rural hometowns and urban centers of political and social action and the production of new hybrid media products that blend traditional elements (language, mathematics, agricultural practices, spirituality, etc.) with the modern tools and strategies emerging from the revolution in ICTs.

This introductory chapter discusses the contemporary moment that frames Mayan efforts to realize the potential for development that ICTs offer, including the present context of exclusion in rural areas (illustrated by a description of the Mam town Todos Santos Cuchumatán) and the level of access to ICTs that currently exists in rural Guatemala. Next, this chapter discusses the ascendance of neoliberal public policy as boundaries and resources that both constrain and enable indigenous cultural and political activism. The following section presents a theoretical model that illustrates the complex and simultaneous strands of globalization and the competing ideological definitions of development. The chapter closes with an ethnographic description of the sites and groups where I conducted research for this analysis.

### **1.1 Internal colonialism, the present context of exclusion and marginalization**

Without going into overwhelming detail, Guatemala today is one of the poorest countries in the world, with 75% of the population of almost fourteen million living below the poverty line. Guatemala also has one of the most deeply unequal economies in the world as the richest 20% of the population account for 60.6% of annual income and the poorest 20% only receive 3.8% of annual income.<sup>8</sup> This

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<sup>8</sup> Statistics available at <<http://www.nationmaster.com>>.

income disparity reflects the dramatic inequality in land ownership, a legacy not only of nineteenth century land expropriations when the State took lands owned by indigenous communities for coffee plantations, but also of the 1954 CIA-orchestrated coup which occurred (among other reasons) in response to President Jacobo Arbenz's attempt to redistribute unused land. Today, a mere 2.2% of the population owns 65% of the cultivable land.<sup>9</sup> Sixty percent of the total population lives in rural areas. At least half of the population is indigenous and live predominantly in rural areas. Poverty is significantly higher among the indigenous (76% are poor) as compared with the non-indigenous population (41% are poor).<sup>10</sup>

Leading Mayan intellectuals describe the situation of the indigenous in Guatemala as one of internal colonialism, pointing to the realities of Ladino<sup>11</sup> control of the State, the ongoing linguistic and cultural oppression, efforts to force assimilation of Mayan people into the national culture, and specific policies of economic exploitation. Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil<sup>12</sup> argues that contemporary Guatemalan social relations are not simply "relations between a Western people and a non-Western people, neither are they merely relations of subordination and hegemony that would be a relative colonialism, but there exists a total colonization, a total domination of the Maya."<sup>13</sup>

Indigenous demands for redistribution of land remain a key site of resistance to and cooperation with the State - through *finca*<sup>14</sup> invasions, massive popular protests in the capital, networking through NGOs and the formation of the Agrarian Platform<sup>15</sup> and negotiating the elaborate maze of FONTIERRA, the government's land credit bureaucracy. Communities that successfully negotiate this process and receive a government loan to buy land are often left with an unproductive *finca* and a mountain of debt at a high interest rate, while the former *finca* owner receives compensation and the State holds the note. For the majority of the Mayan people, land reform struggles for territory in the real space of *cuerdas y cabellerías*<sup>16</sup> are today more important than struggles to promote Mayan identity in cyberspace. Government policies that fail to respond to these demands, no matter how benevolent, tolerant and multicultural they may seem, fall short of contemplating fundamental changes to inequality of Guatemala's historic ethnic and racial hierarchy.

### Section 1.1.1 Mayan mass media

An example of one important but ultimately superficial policy is the 2004 decision by the Guatemalan government to award the *Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala* (ALMG-Academy of

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<sup>9</sup> Cojtí Cuxil, Waqi' Q'anil Demetrio. *Ri Maya' Moloj pa Iximulew El movimiento Maya en Guatemala (The Maya Movement in Guatemala)*. 1997, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> World Bank. *Poverty in Guatemala*. 2004, p. 3.

<sup>11</sup> Ladino is the Guatemalan Spanish term for what other Latin American countries define as "mestizo." Ladino refers to the culturally non-Maya society that has been the dominant group since the Spaniards arrived.

<sup>12</sup> Leading Mayan intellectual who was written widely on Mayan culture and politics. During the administration of President Alfonso Portillo (2000-2004), he worked as Vice Minister of Education.

<sup>13</sup> Cojtí Cuxil, 1997, pp. 25-26.

<sup>14</sup> A *finca* is the common Guatemala Spanish word for any agricultural plantation or large piece of land.

<sup>15</sup> The *Plataforma Agraria*, or Agrarian Platform, is a coalition of social justice, religious and land rights organizations working to pressure the government into adopting land reforms. They reached a negotiated accord with the Berger government after a national strike in June 2004 and are lobbying for the implementation of a package of reforms, including the land credit system (FONTIERRA), reparations for victims of the war, and recognition of peasant invasions.

<sup>16</sup> *Cuerdas* and *cabellerías* are two common measures of land area in Guatemala. A cuerda is approximately 21m x 21m, or 436.81 m<sup>2</sup> (approximately 1/10 of an acre). A *caballería* is 427,956.75 m<sup>2</sup> (approximately 100 acres).

Mayan Languages of Guatemala) the rights to a national network television channel, *Canal 5*. Overlooking the painful irony that in the past the channel belonged to the military, this move attempts to fulfill one of the requirements of the Peace Accords to “create opportunities in the official media for the dissemination of expressions of indigenous culture and promote a similar opening in the private media.”<sup>17</sup> The ALMG, an autonomous State institution that receives a limited budget from the central government, is a leader in the use of ICTs among indigenous organizations in Guatemala. Although unprepared and underfunded to produce a TV station competing against the commercial networks owned by Mexican media mogul Angel Gonzalez, their efforts are a first attempt to break into the previously exclusionary field of television broadcasting. No matter how successful the television channel, this long-demanded gesture of the State cannot address the fundamental exclusion and marginalization built into the Guatemalan national system that has until now precluded any serious discussion of land reform, much less responded to the legitimate claim for political and cultural autonomy that organized Mayan civil society has demanded throughout the post-civil war period.

Access to ICTs has a negligible impact on the status quo unless it challenges the inequality, racism and historic violence in Guatemala. A key question of this investigation is thus: To what extent are indigenous activists who do have access utilizing the “electronic fabric”<sup>18</sup> of the Internet to organize and resist in their struggles for land, indigenous rights and autonomy?

### **Section 1.1.2 The legacy of violence and inequality in Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Huehuetenango**

During 2003, Rosendo Ramírez and other Mam activists working with the local Mam cooperative *Qo Aq'anán Jnux Te Kman Txun*<sup>19</sup> (Cooperative of Todos Santos) pooled their resources and opened an Internet center with a high-speed satellite connection for residents and tourists. The opening of this center signals that this small mountain town is now more connected to global information flows than ever before, but these activists continue to confront deeply rooted social, economic and racial problems, such as the impact of poverty, immigration and State-sponsored violence on community life.

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<sup>17</sup> Indigenous Rights Accord, Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Section 3 Cultural Rights, Paragraph H Mass Media. Available at <<http://www.minugua.guate.net>>.

<sup>18</sup> Marxist historian and economist Harry Cleaver argues that the use of the Internet by Zapatistas and Zapatista international supporters provides a new form of struggle in the Information Age. “While the State has all too effectively limited mass media coverage and serious discussion of Zapatista ideas, their supporters have been able, to an astonishing degree, to circumvent and offset this blockage through the use of electronic networks in conjunction with the more familiar tactics of solidarity movements...Over time the State and its strategists have become acutely aware of the effectiveness of this new form of struggle and have begun to take steps to counteract it. Both sides are now active in the cyberspatial dimension of a war which has raged out of Chiapas across Mexico and the world. The ways in which these networks have been effectively used within the larger framework of struggle deserve the closest attention by all those fighting for a democratic and freer society.” From *The Zapatistas and the Electronic Fabric of Struggle*, 1998, Posted at <<http://www.eco.utexas.edu/faculty/Cleaver/zaps.html>>.

<sup>19</sup> *QO AQ'ANAN JUNX TE QMAN TXUN* (Cooperative of Todos Santos) “is an integrated cooperative with a civil character, private, not for profit, for community development, educational, social, cultural and apolitical. Moreover, it works for the well being of the people, and is an entity for the rescue and the conservation of language, customs, traditions, music, dance and other traditions of the community. It is made up of a group of people, agricultors, students and teachers of diverse educational discipline and technologies all the from Todos Santos, Huehuetenango.” “*Es una cooperativa integral de carácter civil, privada, no lucrativa, de desarrollo comunitaria, educativa, social, cultural y apolítica. Además, de trabajar para el bienestar del pueblo, también es una entidad para el rescate y a la conservación del Idioma, costumbre, música, baile, y otras tradiciones de la comunidad. Formada por un grupo de personas agricultores, estudiantes y maestros de diversas disciplinas educativas y tecnológicas de Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Huehuetenango.*” <[http://es.geocities.com/kman\\_txun/](http://es.geocities.com/kman_txun/)>

During the annual fair of 2003 which coincides with All Saints Day (October 31 to November 2), I took photographs which are now displayed on the website that FUPEDDES maintains for Todos Santos, a majority Mam town about three hours by bus from the regional hub Huehuetenango. The dramatic horse race, colorful *traje* (traditional indigenous clothing, which men as well as women wear in Todos Santos), numerous foreign tourists and general atmosphere of drunken revelry indicated to the casual observer that life continues normally in this picturesque Maya-Mam mountain town.

However, the fair itself generated conflicts that illustrate the deeply rooted social problems that confront indigenous communities – at least 8 people were rumored to have died during the festival, several due to alcohol poisoning, fights and one at the hands of local police. The murder of a *Todosantero* by the National Police forced the invitation of the Guatemalan Army to patrol the festival to insure against the outbreak of future violence amid the mayor's public reassurances that the fair had been a good one. The murder was never investigated or explained by national authorities.

This incident is not isolated, and it demonstrates the oppressive control that State institutions seek to install in highland indigenous towns. Earlier in 2003, Todos Santos made national news because of the establishment of a curfew and a nightly patrol of local men in response to crime in the community. Due to the history of violence and the lack of confidence in the National Police, local authorities decided to institute their own policing system, basing their actions on the legally recognized right of indigenous communities to practice their own forms of local law enforcement.<sup>20</sup> Depending on one's perspective, these patrols were either "*comités de seguridad* (security committees)" or "*vigilantes* (vigilantes)." Regional and national human rights groups met with the local security force to ensure that they were not abusing their power or using excessive force in the enforcement of the curfew.<sup>21</sup>

The source of these community problems is not just a racialized conflict between local and national structures of authority, but also stems from the high rates of immigration, especially among males, to the United States for work. As many as 6,000 immigrants are currently in the United States of a total approximate municipal population of 30,000, according to one local estimate.<sup>22</sup> Municipal authorities estimate that 2,700 men emigrate every year to either the United States or the south coast. Many community problems are blamed upon these youth and men when they return, and most community development in the form of multi-story concrete-block houses is due to the remittance money they send back to their families.

Add to this explosive mix the high levels of poverty and malnutrition, collective memories of military violence during the Army's counterinsurgency campaign of the early 1980s and the resulting displacement, and local feuds (whether between the Mam and Ladinos or between indigenous families) over land, local resources or national political parties. Todos Santos also receives more tourists than any other indigenous town of comparable size in the department, largely due to its proximity to the regional hub Huehuetenango, its beautiful mountain valley setting and the colorful, easily recognizable *traje* worn by men and women, young and old. The constant presence of tourists has generated its own violent consequences, as in 1999 when Todosanteros killed a Japanese tourist along with a Guatemalan bus driver. Tourism also carries its own potential for the exacerbation of local class inequality if only local elites reap the benefits from income generated by tourists through hotels, language schools and other projects. The central government's neoliberal investment strategies in the mountains of Huehuetenango

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<sup>20</sup> International Labour Organization, Tribal Peoples Convention 169, Article 9. "To the extent compatible with the national legal system and internationally recognized human rights, the methods customarily practiced by the peoples concerned for dealing with offences committed by their members shall be respected."

<sup>21</sup> *Prensa Libre*, "Sugieren a comité no abusar de funciones (Suggest to committee not to abuse their power)." Feb. 22, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> Talk given by Felix Pérez Mendoza, candidate for Mayor with the United New Hope (UNA) party, Oct. 15, 2003.

permit mining concessions to multinational corporations without the consultation of the indigenous peoples on their lands<sup>23</sup>, which violates their legal rights<sup>24</sup> and reproduces the historic expropriation of resources that has characterized State exploitation of indigenous peoples and their lands.

These contexts of racism, inequality and “*la Violencia*”<sup>25</sup> are not unique to Todos Santos and they constitute formidable barriers for development throughout the majority indigenous populations of highland departments of Guatemala.

Rosendo and the activists of *Qo Aq’anan Jnux Te Kman Txun* believe that local development which overcomes these barriers must take advantage of the capabilities of local people, rather than simply opening up the local market to foreign businesses. Rosendo criticizes the municipal government’s handling of the installation of cable television in Todos Santos:

Well if the authorities only permitted that other businesses come and come and come, then these children from Todos Santos won’t have the opportunity to develop, to take advantage of what they can do, to auto-sustain themselves. We would keep, I guess immigration really worries me, for example if we make this work and I can survive then I am not going to think about immigrating because I can survive here, my children can also do everything possible so that they can live here in the town...I wish they weren’t just giving away these opportunities to businesses from outside, first I would want the authorities ask the people, ‘Isn’t there any one of you who is willing?’<sup>26</sup>

### **Section 1.1.3 ICT Access in rural indigenous communities**

Rural Mayan communities have achieved increasing access to ICTs, especially in cellular phones and cable television, and in the past five years the Internet has become available in numerous municipal centers, reinforcing the simplistic notion that the digital divide has been crossed. However, this analysis argues that the digital divide can never be crossed once and for all; in fact, the metaphors drawn from this image of “crossing” or “bridging” conceal the gradual and partial nature of this process and how it is limited by socioeconomic barriers and proximity to urban areas. The middle class sectors of rural

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<sup>23</sup> According to a February 2004 report issued by AEPDI *Asociacion Estorena Para El Desarrollo Integral*, (El Estor Association for Integral Development) and Rights Action, and international NGO focusing on human rights in Central America. More information available at <<http://www.rightsaction.org>>.

<sup>24</sup> ILO Convention 169, Article 15: 1. “The rights of the peoples concerned to the natural resources pertaining to their lands shall be specially safeguarded. These rights include the right of these peoples to participate in the use, management and conservation of these resources. 2. In cases in which the State retains the ownership of mineral or sub-surface resources or rights to other resources pertaining to lands, governments shall establish or maintain procedures through which they shall consult these peoples, with a view to ascertaining whether and to what degree their interests would be prejudiced, before undertaking or permitting any programmes for the exploration or exploitation of such resources pertaining to their lands. The peoples concerned shall wherever possible participate in the benefits of such activities, and shall receive fair compensation for any damages which they may sustain as a result of such activities.”

<sup>25</sup> *La Violencia*, (the violence), is a common euphemism for the worst years of the Civil War, especially the late 1970s and early 1980s.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Rosendo Ramírez, age 29, Oct. 16, 2003. “*Entonces si las autoridades solo le permite a que otras empresas vienen y vienen y vienen, entonces a estos niños o a estos todosanteros pues no tendrán la oportunidad del desarrollar, sí a aprovecharse de ellos mismos, auto-sostenerse, nosotros seguimos, tal vez a mi me preocupa mucha la inmigración, por ejemplo si logramos hacer estos y yo puedo sobrevivir yo ya no voy a pensar en inmigrare porque aquí puedo sobrevivir, mis hijos también pueda hacer todo lo posible, entonces también mis hijos pueden vivir aquí en el pueblo... yo quisiera que no se de estas oportunidades a empresas afuera, primero que yo quiero que las autoridades pregunte al pueblo, No hay alguna de Uds. que se anime?*”

indigenous society may gain access while other sectors remain marginalized from the benefits of telephones and other communication media.

According to a 2004 World Bank Guatemala country study, nationally one in six households has no access to any modern network services (electricity, piped water, sewage and telephony), but in rural areas this statistic rises to one in three households. This lack is most extreme in areas of the country with high indigenous populations that experienced the massacres and scorched earth policy of the late 1970s and 1980s that resulted in more than a million refugees and displaced people. According to the report of the *Comisión para el Esclarecimiento Histórico* (CEH-Commission for Historical Clarification) report, 75% of the 669 reported massacres occurred in three majority indigenous departments – Huehuetenango, Quiché, and Alta Verapaz.<sup>27</sup> As a result of this lack of network services, there exist sufficient resources (reliable electricity, computer infrastructure, and connectivity) for Internet usage in only selected areas of the indigenous highlands, primarily in urban centers.

Internet connection costs vary according to the type of connection. The privately-owned national telephone company TELGUA does not charge a monthly fee for Internet service, but the phone connection costs 50 *centavos* a minute, or US\$1 for sixteen minutes of slow, unreliable dial-up connection. High-speed Internet access via DSL or cable modem generally services only developed urban areas, including Guatemala City, Quetzaltenango and Antigua. Costs vary depending on the company and the velocity of the connection, but generally include a connection fee of US\$100 to \$200, with monthly charges from US\$50 to \$100. In rural areas, satellite Internet access is the only broadband service available, and typical costs include an installation fee of US\$2000 and a monthly bill of US\$200 for twenty high-speed connections.

Many perceive the recent arrival of high-speed Internet access into rural areas as a new and revolutionary development that overcomes centuries of isolation. But access to the Internet only redefines the nature of the historic and continuous relations that have inextricably tied the Mayan people to the global systems of capitalism, information, and human movement. Since the years immediately preceding the Spanish invasion into what later became the nation of Guatemala, the Mayan people have never been isolated from international and national power networks. Cortes' war on the Aztecs in 1519 brought bacteria which spread into Guatemala with devastating consequences even before Pedro Alvarado arrived in 1522 and began slaughtering the K'iche and Mam indigenous population, many of whom had already died from smallpox and other related diseases. As will be discussed below, although the Internet appears to be a new phenomenon in rural Mayan towns, this latest globalized media does not signify that globalization itself is a new reality for the rural Maya.

### **Section 1.2 The role of the Guatemalan State**

The CEH concludes that the structure and nature of economic, cultural and social relations in Guatemala are marked by profound exclusion, antagonism and conflict - a reflection of its colonial history. The proclamation of independence in 1821, an event prompted by the country's elite, saw the creation of an authoritarian State which excluded the majority of the population, was racist in its precepts and practices, and served to protect the economic interests of the privileged minority. The evidence for this, throughout Guatemala's history, but particularly so during the armed confrontation, lies in the fact that violence was fundamentally directed by the

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<sup>27</sup> Balsells Tojo, Alfredo, Otilia Lux de Cotí, and Christian Tomuschat. Guatemala Memory of Silence Tz'inil Na'tab'al. Report of the Commission for Historical Clarification Conclusions and Recommendations. 1999, p. 83. Indigenous co-author Otilia Lux de Cotí served as Minister of Sport and Culture during the FRG administration of Alfonso Portillo, 2000-2004.

State against the excluded, the poor and above all, the Mayan people, as well as those who fought for justice and greater social equality.<sup>28</sup>

### **Section 1.2.1 Colonial and national history**

The CEH report describes the historic dominance that elite-controlled State institutions exercised over indigenous people. Different eras featured different strategies of control and exploitation, from the initial violence of the military conquest in 1522, through the establishment of a colonial order in which Indians were regarded as a sub-human labor force.

Throughout the nationalist period after the 1821 Independence from Spain, the Guatemalan government promoted assimilation as a solution to what was understood as Guatemala's Indian problem. Indigenous people were expected to give up their languages and traditions to achieve full participation as citizens. This ideological and civil oppression was accompanied by continued economic exploitation, especially after 1871 and the rise of Liberal President Justo Rufino Barrios, who expropriated indigenous lands for coffee production and instituted a vagrancy law which required all indigenous men to work a specified number of days on plantations.

In the early twentieth century, influential Ladino intellectuals expanded the notion of assimilation and developed a philosophy of *indigenismo*, which they represented as a pro-Indian policy. Antonio Batres Jáuregui was the first modern Guatemalan historian to analyze race relations in his book *Los Indios, su historia y su civilización* (*Indians, their history and their civilization*) published in 1894. Batres argued for integration and assimilation of the indigenous population to preserve national interests and to prevent Indians from forming a state within the Guatemalan nation-state. He argued that the Maya would hinder Guatemala's intellectual, material and political development because of their isolation and lack of "civilization." Batres "argued that a country could not progress if the majority of its population was still made up of 'men that live more backwards now than they did in the first centuries...they are regressing and have lost their spirit to move forward.'"<sup>29</sup>

This historic project of *indigenismo*, supported throughout the progressive October Revolution of Presidents Arevalo and Arbenz from 1944 to 1954, maintained the racial and ideological hierarchy that neatly fit into the Cold War anti-Communist formulations of Guatemala's post-Arbenz military leaders. Guatemalan counterinsurgency doctrines viewed indigenous communities as easily manipulated guerrilla sympathizers and waged war directly against the people in an attempt to cut the guerrillas off from their base of support. This counterinsurgency strategy, adapted from lessons learned by Guatemalan military leaders at the School of the Americas in Fort Benning, Georgia, resulted in a genocide campaign against the Mayan people in the rural areas of Huehuetenango, Quiché, and the Verapaces.

### **Section 1.2.2 The Peace Accords and the failure of the *consulta popular***

In 1995 and 1996, the State, the Army and guerrilla leaders negotiated a series of peace treaties under the auspices of a group of friendly nations led by Norway and the United States. These agreements included the Indigenous Rights Accord, an Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples. While this document contemplated far-reaching changes in the relations between indigenous

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<sup>28</sup> CEH report, 1999, p. 17.

<sup>29</sup> Carey, David, Jr. "Indigenismo and Guatemalan History in the Twentieth century." *Inter-American Review of Bibliography* 48.2, 1998: 380. Posted at <<http://www.iacd.oas.org/RIB%202%2098/carey298.htm>>.

peoples and the State, including the establishment of mechanisms for the return of expropriated State lands to indigenous communities, the “accords were not, in fact, binding agreements but rather calls for further discussion, Congressional legislation, and constitutional reform. To implement the peace accords, there would have to be consensus on how to operationalize them and then referendums or constitutional assemblies to ratify reforms.”<sup>30</sup>

The 1999 referendum, referred to as the *consulta popular* in Spanish, was conducted to institute as national law the changes mandated by the Peace Accords. The referendum consisted of four separate questions, with most of the issues related to indigenous rights contained in the first question, which ultimately failed by a margin of 47% of voters in support, 53% against. Nationally, only 18% of eligible voters participated in the referendum, and although the Yes vote on the first question took the majority in most departments with majority indigenous populations (with the exception of Quetzaltenango), the margins of victory in these indigenous departments were insufficient to counter the overwhelming support for the No position in Guatemala city and the eastern, primarily Ladino departments.

A number of factors contributed to the failure of the proposed reforms, including the complexity of the questions on the ballot. As little as two months before the vote, the Congress had not informed the public as to exactly what they would be voting on: one item, or fifty separate constitutional amendments. Additionally, the legislature combined elements from different reform agendas into the same questions. For example, one explanation for the failure of Quetzaltenango, led by indigenous mayor Roberto Quemé Chay, to support the Yes position on question one was that the creation of community development councils also contemplated in the same question could have potentially weakened the autonomy of strong municipal governments.

Opponents of the reforms contained in the referendum also appealed to nationalist and ethnic solidarity to deny the extension of privileges to indigenous communities based on their ethnic status. This electoral racism used scare tactics to warn against the possibility of ethnic conflict as an inevitable result of the passage of reforms. Warren writes that these threats included forced learning of indigenous languages, special rights for indigenous people, recognition of “pagan” religion, and fears of land redistribution. The failure of the referendum illustrates how the State and its Constitutional framework draw boundaries around contemporary Mayan organizing. While the State no longer pursues genocide, it now constrains and confines Mayan demands through actions designed to undermine the possibilities for radical change. In this sense, the Guatemalan national government continues to oppress the Mayan majority by refusing to institute the changes contained in the Peace Accords. The FRG leadership under Portillo frequently lamented that their hands had been tied by the results of the referendum, and thus they could not proceed in their agenda for the implementation of the Peace Accords.

### **Section 1.2.3 The State as a site of contestation and cooperation**

The State also provides opportunities for the advancement of particular Mayan projects, and Mayan activists simultaneously oppose and cooperate with State institutions. Anthropologist Kay Warren argues the Pan-Mayan movement combines a utopian ideal of total autonomy from dominant states with a pragmatic willingness to compromise and work from within the State system.<sup>31</sup> Relations with the State illustrate the plurality of political views within the Pan-Mayan movement, as indigenous leaders hold different posts within recent administrations and other leaders maintain their opposition to political parties’ manipulation and cooptation of indigenous leaders in an effort to increase their support

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<sup>30</sup> Warren, Kay. “Voting Against Indigenous Rights in Guatemala, Lessons from the 1999 Referendum.” *Indigenous Movements, Self-representation, and the State in Latin America*. Eds. Kay B. Warren and Jean E. Jackson, 2002, p. 158.

<sup>31</sup> Warren, 2002, pp. 152-157.

among indigenous voters.

As this discussion demonstrates, the Guatemalan State has sought to exercise control over indigenous communities through policies and ideologies that relegate the Maya to second-class status. The failure of the *consulta popular* to implement the Indigenous Rights Accord, which rhetorically affirmed Guatemala as “multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual in nature,” exemplifies the institutionalized racism and lack of national political will to extend rights to the Mayan majority population of Guatemala.

### **Section 1.3 Neoliberal hegemony: boundaries and resources**

The end of the Civil War in Guatemala during the 1990s made possible the ascendance of neoliberal government principles in Guatemala, driven by the political will of the countries that supported Guatemala’s peace process, led by the United States. This opening permitted the inflow of foreign assistance to the national government and numerous non-governmental organizations, but also forced the government to accept the conditions and requirements of lending organizations, such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Inter American Development Bank (IDB). These conditions include limitations on social welfare programs in favor of mandatory debt payments, emphasis on the development of a rule of law based exclusively on individual rights, privatization and deregulation of utilities and infrastructure, and the reduction of tariffs on imported products (in the phrasing of free trade advocates, the “opening of markets” that was negotiated in the CAFTA treaty during 2003 and is awaiting approval from the legislatures of the six countries in the agreement.)

These conditions dictated by international lending institutions seemingly oppose the intent of the Peace Accord on Socioeconomic Aspect and the Agrarian Situation, which charges the government with fundamental obligations for the economic development of the poor and extremely poor in Guatemala, including access to land and productive projects. However, the IMF continues to support the implementation of the Peace Accords with loans supporting the government’s “appropriate” strategy for economic growth, which is “focused on macroeconomic stability, financial sector reform, improved governance and transparency, and mobilization of additional resources for social spending,” according to Eduardo Aninat, Deputy Managing Director and Acting Chair of the IMF Executive Board, quoted in a press release of June 19, 2003.<sup>32</sup>

This neoliberal framework should be understood as a complex system that sets boundaries and limitations on the course of possible economic development, while simultaneously providing resources that can, but do not always, support community-led initiatives. With respect to ICTs, neoliberal policies established boundaries that seek to establish greater equity in access but favor private corporate interests over community agendas. At the same time, the neoliberal ideology supports multiculturalism, decentralization and international support for NGOs, all potential resources for community and indigenous activism.

#### **Section 1.3.1 Neoliberal boundaries: telecommunications reform**

According to the World Bank country study, “The Telecommunications Law of 1996 paved the way for one of the most radical market liberalizations witnessed in the region.”<sup>33</sup> With the exception of the rural telephone network, all assets of the State telephone monopoly, GUATEL, were transferred to a new company, TELGUA, which was sold via auction to a group of Guatemalan businessman in 1999 for US\$800 million. This consortium, led by Ricardo Bueso who ran for President in 2003 with the

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<sup>32</sup> International Monetary Fund Press Release. “IMF Approves Nine-Month US\$120 Stand-By Arrangement for Guatemala.” June 19, 2003. <<http://www.imf.org/external/np/sec/pr/2003/pr0390.htm>>.

<sup>33</sup> World Bank, 2004, p. 8.

Guatemalan Democratic Christian party, then resold TELGUA to the Mexican conglomerate Telmex, a division of Carso Global Telecom and the owner of *América Móvil*.

The FRG government, under Portillo, challenged this series of transactions, described by the *Prensa Libre* as “not transparent and highly questioned.”<sup>34</sup> The lawsuit, which was ultimately dropped, sought additional money from the businessmen who profited from the resale of the company. According to the same *Prensa Libre* article, the company is considered to be the most profitable business in the country, with net profits that topped US\$77 million for the first six months of 2003.<sup>35</sup>

Privatization has led to slight increases in the availability of land phone lines in rural areas, but only 3% of rural households have a fixed line telephone, compared to the national average of 15% and the urban average of 31%. Overall teledensity (fixed lines plus cellular phones) has risen dramatically since privatization, from 4.2% of the population to almost 20%. However, the bulk of this increase is due to increases in cell phone usage, which now account for 57% of the total.<sup>36</sup> In 2000, 18% of urban residents had a cellular phone, compared to 3% of rural residents, and half of new cellular phone subscriptions are second phones for the richest 20% of Guatemalans.<sup>37</sup>

Cell phones have not solved the lack of telephone services for poor and rural users. Cell phones represent a significant investment (initial purchase of a phone costs upward of US\$50 and costs thereafter are 1Q per minute) and coverage in rural areas is often inadequate due to the lack of transmission towers away from major roads. Moreover, the mountainous terrain limits the reach of the towers that have been built. The trend in cellular telephony toward blanket coverage by all competing companies in lucrative urban markets while rural residents remain underserved illustrates the lack of market incentives for companies to expand into less densely populated rural areas, a reality acknowledged by the UN’s Economic and Social Council: “It is unlikely that markets alone will address the many problems and inequities that currently prevent the full realization of the developmental potential of the ICT revolution.”<sup>38</sup>

### 1.3.2 Neoliberal boundaries: electricity reform

Although neoliberal reforms of the electricity industry also slightly increased the availability of service in rural areas, Guatemala’s rural indigenous population remains the demographic least served by electricity connections. The passage of the Electricity Law of 1996 led to a small increase in the likelihood that a rural indigenous household would receive an electricity connection. In 2000, 56% of rural residents had electricity connections, compared to the national average of 73% and the urban average of 95%. During the period from 1993 to 1996, the public electricity provider installed 208,528 new connections, which was surpassed by 58% for the period from 1996 to 2000, with 329,734 new connections. Of these new connections since the Peace Accords, 43% were for indigenous households, only a slight increase over the previous period.

A social tariff, first introduced in 1996 and modified in 2001, caps electricity costs at approximately US\$0.08 per kWh for the first 300 kWh of consumption per month. The 2004 World Bank study concludes that the social tariff actually benefits households above the poverty line more than poor

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<sup>34</sup> *Prensa Libre*. “Suben ganancias de Telgua en el 2003 (Telgua’s profits increase in 2003).” Oct. 25, 2003.

<sup>35</sup> *Prensa Libre*. “Ganancias de Telgua son por US\$77 millones (Telgua’s profits are US\$77 million).” Aug. 5, 2003.

<sup>36</sup> World Bank, 2004, pp. 8-9.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* p. 138.

<sup>38</sup> United Nations Economic and Social Council. “Development and international cooperation in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: the role of information technology in the context of a knowledge-based global economy.” May 18, 2000, p. 17.

<<http://www.un.org/documents/ecosoc/docs/2000/e2000-52.pdf>>.

families, since the average poor household with an electricity connection only consumes around 100kWh per month. Thus middle class households with higher energy consumption rates absorb as much as 90% of the benefits of the cost ceiling, while 60% of poor households do not benefit from the plan at all, as they have no electricity connections, and may spend up to US\$11 per kWh per month for lighting with candles.

This World Bank assessment recommends that the government subsidies for electricity consumption, about US\$50 million annually, should instead be channeled toward increasing the number of connections in the poorest regions, since 70% of households without electricity belong to the poorest segments of the population, and cites the failure to do so as an example of a well-intended government regulation that actually penalizes those it intends to help.

### **Section 1.3.3 Neoliberal boundaries: intellectual property rights**

A third example of neoliberal reforms occurred in 2000 when Guatemala passed legislation to increase the protections for holders of intellectual property rights, in accordance with the neoliberal emphasis on insuring a strong investment climate for multinational corporations. This reform has important consequences for users of information technology due to the activities of the Business Software Alliance (BSA). The BSA, an international non-profit founded by Microsoft, Intel and other hardware and software companies, combats illegal distribution of software products. A BSA study states that today 77% of all software being used in Guatemala is unlicensed, down from 94% in 1995. In response, the BSA office in Guatemala offers technical advice on updating IP laws with regard to computer software, trains investigators in the *Ministerio Publico* on how to investigate and prosecute computer pirates, and conducts raids (*allanamientos*) to catch businesses with unlicensed software. According to their website, the value of illegal software seized in raids can be as low as US\$4,000.<sup>39</sup> Licensing fees in developing world countries are a principal source of revenue for many software companies, as software prices often exceed those in the United States, reflecting a common business strategy that underscores the inability of purely market solutions to put ICTs at the service of development. This strategy calls for marketing and pricing products only to national elite, without taking into consideration the population excluded from access to these products.<sup>40</sup>

The consequences of the neoliberal ideology are not limited to these three examples but also include the establishment of “free trade” zones of *maquiladoras* that provide low-wage industrial jobs for export processing and assembly, primarily in textiles. Guatemala currently authorizes twenty-one such zones, twelve of which are operating, and companies that open factories in these areas are free from income taxes for ten years. According to a US State Department review of Guatemala’s investment climate, “many workers, especially in agriculture, do not receive the full compensation package mandated by the labor law, and in practice many labor rights are not well enforced.”<sup>41</sup> The election in December 2003 of Oscar Berger, who has strong ties to the business elite, confirms Guatemala’s full participation in neoliberal governance. The ratification of CAFTA (Central American Free Trade Agreement) in 2004 further insures the expansion of the neoliberal free trade ideology without establishing new labor or environmental standards or enforcing the minimal standards that already exist, to the detriment of small farmers, industrial workers and the country’s health and education

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<sup>39</sup> <<http://www.bsa.org/guatemala>>, for specifics on raids in 2001 see

<<http://www.bsa.org/guatemala/press/newsreleases/BSA-Presenta-Resumen-de-Labores-2001.cfm>>.

<sup>40</sup> Informal data on software prices in 2004 reflects these higher prices: Windows XP with a license costs approximately \$220 and Windows Office 2003 with a license costs approximately \$640.

<sup>41</sup> Wetzel, H. “Investment Climate,” ID: 118127. July 17, 2003. <<http://www.export.gov>>, (registration required).

infrastructure.

### Section 1.3.4 Neoliberal openings: multiculturalism

The ascendancy of neoliberalism also provides resources for popular and potentially democratic reforms. Foremost among these resources is the ideology of multiculturalism and its potentially far-reaching implications for the establishment of indigenous rights, customary law and equal citizenship while recognizing cultural difference. The Peace Accords call for a multicultural State policy towards indigenous peoples, superseding the historical project of assimilation. Of course, rhetorical affirmation of a multicultural nation merely serves as a first step toward implementing State policy that ensures equity to the indigenous majority. Indigenous communities and leaders are demanding that the State fulfill its commitments in diverse areas: educational reform and the institution of bilingual education, judicial reform and the recognition of customary law, equality of access to State institutions for monolingual Mayan language speakers, reparations for families who were victims of State violence during the Civil War, and access to land for displaced and historically marginalized indigenous communities.

These demands for action instead of mere promises are based in the international human rights framework established by the United Nations and other multilateral institutions, including such documents as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the American Convention on Human Rights of the Organization of American States, and the International Labour Organization Tribal Peoples Convention 169 (signed by Guatemala in 1996).

Anthropologist Charles Hale argues that while neoliberal multiculturalism and recognition of cultural difference opens spaces for cultural activism that can challenge State power, this same message “carries considerable potential for menace.”<sup>42</sup> This menace arises as “powerful political and economic actors use neoliberal multiculturalism to affirm cultural difference, while retaining the prerogative to discern between cultural rights consistent with the ideal of liberal, democratic pluralism, and cultural rights inimical to the ideal.”<sup>43</sup> Thus governments and corporation discredit activists who push for radical challenges to existing class and ethnic hierarchies as ethnic extremists and their demands are marginalized.

State-supported multiculturalism is a mixed blessing for Mayan cultural activism in that it provides a powerful discourse based on human and cultural rights but can also be used to isolate activism that directly challenges the logic of neoliberal development. The focus on multiculturalism defines the parameters of specific struggles: collective rights against individual rights, cosmetic and superficial recognition of cultural difference without the institutionalization of rights based on that recognition, and community control of local development against the capitalistic agendas of multinational corporations and their supporters in business and government. The *Mancomunidad* Huista’s<sup>44</sup> decision to pursue the construction of a hydroelectric dam on the *Río Azul* illustrates this contradiction. While many around the world protest dam construction by multinationals for the purpose of exporting energy, this association of mayors believes that this project, under local control, can take

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<sup>42</sup> Hale, Charles R. “Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala.” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 34, 2002, p. 491.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 491.

<sup>44</sup> A *Mancomunidad* is a regional association of mayors. This institution has emerged in recent years to increase the lobbying power of relatively weak and isolated municipalities. The *Mancomunidad* Huista, one of the primary case studies of this thesis, consists of eight municipalities in the northwest extremity of Huehuetenango: La Democracia, Todos Santos Cuchumatán, San Miguel Acatán, Jacaltenango, San Antonio Huista, Santa Ana Huista, Concepción Huista, Nentón.

advantage of abundant water resources to provide reliable electricity to local residents and generate income for the *Mancomunidad*. Thus the problem with such infrastructure projects is not specifically the nature of the project, but who is in control and who will benefit from the profits.

Multiculturalism, and neoliberalism more broadly, function as a strategy of government control that simultaneously enables and limits political possibilities. Hale writes that the increasing prominence of multiculturalism has the effect of “separating acceptable demands for cultural rights from inappropriate ones, recognizing the former and foreclosing the latter, and thereby creating a means to ‘manage’ multiculturalism while removing its radical or threatening edge.”<sup>45</sup>

### 1.3.5 Neoliberal openings: decentralization

The principles of neoliberal government promote decentralization of State power as a means to increase public sector efficiency, limit corruption, and promote government accountability to its citizens. The Guatemalan government affirmed its commitment to decentralization in 2002 with the passage of the *Ley General de Descentralización* (General Law of Decentralization) and the establishment of the *Comisión Presidencial para la Reforma del Estado, la Descentralización y la Participación Ciudadana de Guatemala* (Presidential Commission for State Reform, Decentralization and Citizen Participation of Guatemala). The government also included decentralization as one of the General Principles in the national “Strategy for the Reduction of Poverty.”<sup>46</sup> The 2004 World Bank country study hails the passage of the decentralization law – alongside two other laws reestablishing Rural and Urban Development Councils and reforming the municipal code – as an “important step towards creating a legal framework for the empowerment of local communities.”<sup>47</sup>

While these legal changes are indeed fundamental to promote citizen participation and further the process of democratization, decentralization is not an immediate and coherent solution for the crisis of governing that exists. Critics of the laws point out that the central government is attempting to micromanage the process by requiring municipal government to get permission from the Executive branch before carrying out a project.<sup>48</sup> Further, the initial commission to oversee the implementation of decentralization included only one representative of the National Association of Municipalities and six representatives of the institutions of the Executive Branch.<sup>49</sup> The institutions charged with carrying out decentralization undermine their own mandate by failing to encourage citizen participation in their mission.

Juan Luis Velásquez Carrera, an activist with the multi-ethnic indigenous coalition *Movimiento Tzuk Kim Pop* argues that the decentralization law

does not propose citizen participation within the cycle of the process of decentralization, which gives the proposal a centralizing nature, from the top-down and from the outside-in; it implies that propositive and participative democracy are not significantly advancing for the development of the country. (The law) only indirectly suggests citizen participation in decision-making, but

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<sup>45</sup> Hale, 2002, p. 507.

<sup>46</sup> World Bank, 2004, p. xi.

<sup>47</sup> World Bank, 2004, p. 9.

<sup>48</sup> Larra, M. “*La Descentralización en el Congreso* (The Decentralization in Congress),” *Poder-Local Magazine*. 2002.<<http://www.poder-local.com>>.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. The six representatives from State institutions include the Vice President of the Republic, the Minister of Public Finances, the Presidential Commissioner for Modernization and Decentralization, the Executive Secretary of the President, the Planning Secretary and a representative of INFOM, the Institute of Municipal Growth.

the methods and procedures to generate that participation remain unclear in the text of the established framework. In this sense, organized communities will have the eventual possibility to 'carry out development projects,' which is a reduced vision of the capacity and responsibility which belongs to the communities in making their own decisions, as well as strengthening the traditional processes of exclusion that the country has experienced.<sup>50</sup>

In addition to the possibility for exclusion of local actors in the decision-making, as Velásquez argues, the possibility also exists for the devolution of decision-making power to local institutions without a corresponding decentralization of funds to carry out the community initiated projects.

Estheiman Amaya, co-director of FUPEDDES, points out that local governments can potentially repeat the same errors that characterize the central government: corruption, waste, inefficiency and the lack of community input or oversight. Amaya writes, "The macro level pattern can repeat itself at the level of the municipalities if civil society, whether organized or disorganized, cannot rely on procedures which guarantee their participation and channels of expression the permit their voices to be heard."<sup>51</sup>

An additional difficulty in decentralizing State power is the potential for the exclusion of already existing local institutions from shared power. This is especially problematic in indigenous communities with historic community organizations unrecognized by the State, including councils of elders, religious *cofradías* and community meetings. State policy must take these institutions into account and utilize them as a means for generating community participation.

Velásquez Carrera describes the negotiations necessary to ensure that decentralization truly serves the needs of communities. He writes,

This is not an argument for a dogmatic rejection of the process or for stopping it, but rather calls for an analysis of the government's proposals and strategies and for active and legitimate participation to support a process of decentralization that provides for changes which imply the incorporation of a wider and integrated understanding of decentralization...the corollary of these reflections turns around the dichotomy between the questions: what kind of decentralization do we want to build?; and what kind of decentralization do they want to give us?<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Velásquez Carrera, J.L. "Descentralización Centralista (Centralized Decentralization)," *Poder-Local Magazine*. 2002. <<http://www.poder-local.com>>. "No se propone una participación ciudadana en el ciclo del proceso de descentralización, lo cual es un planteamiento centralista, desde arriba y desde afuera; implica que no se está avanzando significativamente en la democratización propositiva y participativa del desarrollo del país. Sólo se sugiere indirectamente la participación ciudadana en la toma de decisiones, pero no quedan claros en el texto de la ley marco, los métodos y procedimientos para generar dicha participación. En este sentido, las comunidades debidamente organizadas tendrán la eventual posibilidad de 'ejecutar proyectos de desarrollo,' lo cual es una visión reducida de la capacidad y responsabilidad que le compete a la misma en la toma de decisiones, además de eternizar los procesos tradicionales de exclusión que ha experimentado el país."

<sup>51</sup> Amaya, Estheiman. "Porque Guatemala es mucho más que Guate (Why Guatemala is much more than Guatemala City)," *Poder-Local Magazine*. 2002. <<http://www.poder-local.com>>. "El esquema macro en el ámbito nacional puede repetirse al nivel de los municipios si la sociedad civil organizada y no organizada no cuentan con canales que garanticen su participación y con canales de expresión que permitan que su voz sea oída."

<sup>52</sup> Velásquez Carrera, 2002. "No se trata pues, de rechazar dogmáticamente el proceso o de detenerlo, sino de analizar la propuesta y la estrategia del gobierno y participar activa y legítimamente para fomentar un proceso de descentralización que propicie cambios que impliquen la incorporación de un sentido amplio e integral de descentralización...El corolario de estas reflexiones giraría en torno a la dicotomía entre ¿qué descentralización queremos construir? y ¿qué descentralización nos quieren dar?"

### Section 1.3.6 Neoliberal openings: international funds for local projects

A third area of neoliberal opening is purely financial, as the signing of the Peace Accords enabled a host of actors – including government institutions, State-created autonomous entities, regional organizations and NGOs – to seek out grants, loans and credit from international NGOs and lending organizations. Donor institutions often seek to maximize the impact of their donations by focusing on underserved sectors of the population such as indigenous women and children or rural health initiatives. A number of initiatives target physical and ICT infrastructure due to the enhanced productivity and economic potential that highways and improved communication offer.

The scholarship program for indigenous journalism students at FUPEDES is an example of targeted international donations. This program received support from the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation, NORAD, and the Swiss International Development Agency, SIDA. Chapter 4 of this investigation examines other ICT projects with international funding and analyzes how Mayan activists take advantage of ICTs to create strategic international alliances that promote local development.

### Section 1.4 Defining development in a globalized world

Despite many steps forward in social and economic conditions around the world in recent decades, there remain huge disparities in the quality of human existence. We are now at a critical juncture. Unprecedented global flows in information, products, people, capital and ideas offer great potential for radical improvements in human development, but left unabated, they may also serve to worsen and entrench the spiral of poverty which already exists in many communities and countries...

Providing such strategic interventions are properly conceived and implemented, interaction between them has the potential to create significant multiplier and network effects. These can ignite a virtuous circle of sustainable social and economic development - "a development dynamic." ... There is a need to secure the participation and commitment of all key stakeholders- local communities, NGOs, governments, the private sector and multilateral institutions... Through innovative vision and leadership, win-win situations can be created, thus aligning stakeholders' critical objectives and unleashing the potential of new collaborative alliances and strategic compacts to harness the power of ICT for development.<sup>53</sup>

---From the Digital Opportunities Initiative, a report published by  
Accenture, the UNDP and the Merkle Foundation

While this forecast optimistically imagines an environment that protects corporate profits while accelerating development for the impoverished, it fails to take into account that development itself is a contested goal. Different stakeholders envision radically divergent definitions of development and their conflicting agendas can prevent growth or even increase inequality.

For example, the World Bank report concedes that "Despite Guatemala's historically reasonable *economic growth rates*, current growth is neither sufficiently fast nor oriented toward the poor."<sup>54</sup> Thus the neoliberal Washington consensus definition of development as macroeconomic stability has not

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<sup>53</sup> Accenture, Merkle Foundation and UNDP. "Creating a Development Dynamic: Final Report of the Digital Opportunity Initiative." July 2001. Posted at <<http://www.opt-init.org/framework.html>>.

<sup>54</sup> World Bank, 2004, p. 5.

significantly benefited the poor, according to their own analysis.<sup>55</sup> Similarly, national-level stakeholders, primarily the elite who control Guatemala's government and industry, seek to maintain their exclusive hold on land and productive capital. The current implementation of the *Plan Puebla-Panamá*<sup>56</sup> calls for development defined as large infrastructure projects to facilitate transportation for national export industries, creating an improved climate for international investors, and building up tourism services and related infrastructure. This investment does not necessarily benefit the communities where these projects take place, as their primary goals are to increase industrial competitiveness and maximize profits.

Local leaders promote a vision of integral development that views culture as a fundamental axis of organization, even as the acceleration of global cultural flows challenges the autonomy and preservation of cultural practice. Culture is not an isolated goal pursued for its own sake; instead it is integrated into community development strategies.

In October 2003, at a *Mancomunidad* Huista planning meeting, representatives from each municipal government discussed how to spend funds that INFOM (*Instituto de Fomento Municipal*, Institute of Municipal Growth<sup>57</sup>) planned to allocate to the *Mancomunidad*. Infrastructure concerns, such as building highways and constructing a hydroelectric dam to produce energy for the region, topped the list of priorities. But they also agreed to conduct a pre-investment study on the possibility of cleaning and restoring archaeological sites and ceremonial centers. The consensus at the meeting regarded these sites as not only vital for the cultural health of their communities, but also recognized their possible value as ecotourism sites to lure foreign visitors off the well-established tourist trail. Thus these leaders saw in local traditions not only the inherent importance of cultural preservation but also their simultaneous potential for generating income in a poverty stricken region.

Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai provides a theoretical model that takes into account different stakeholders' perspectives and privileges development goals promoted at the grassroots level. In order to understand the power relations inherent in globalization and global cultural flows, Appadurai presents an interrelated series of terms to map the movements of ideas, people, and power around the globe: ethnoscaples, technoscaples, finanscaples, ideoscaples and mediascaples. In each instance, the suffix -scape "allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes."<sup>58</sup>

Appadurai continues

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<sup>55</sup> Nobel Prize winning economist and former World Bank director Joseph E. Stiglitz criticizes the failure of economic globalization to spread its benefits equally across all classes. "Today, globalization is being challenged around the world. There is discontent with globalization, and rightfully so. Globalization can be a force for good: the globalization of ideas about democracy and of civil society have changed the way people think, while global political movements have led to debt relief and the treaty on land mines. Globalization has helped hundreds of millions of people attain higher standards of living, beyond what they, or most economists, thought imaginable but a short while ago...But for millions of people globalization has not worked. Many have actually been made worse off, as they have seen their jobs destroyed and their lives become more insecure. They have felt increasingly powerless against forces beyond their control. They have seen their democracies undermined, their cultures eroded...If the reforms in this last chapter are taken seriously, then there is hope that a more human process of globalization can be a powerful force for the good, with the vast majority of those living in the developing countries benefiting from it and welcoming it. If this is done, the discontent with globalization would have served us all well." Stiglitz, Joseph E. Globalization and its Discontents. 2002, pp. 248-249.

<sup>56</sup> This plan, promoted by Mexican president Vicente Fox, is a series of infrastructure projects linking southeast Mexico to the Central American countries. The official web site of the project is <<http://ppp.sre.gob.mx/>>.

<sup>57</sup> More information at <<http://www.infom.org.gt/>>

<sup>58</sup> Appadurai, Arjun. "Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Economy." Public Culture 2.2, 1990, p. 7.

these are not objectively given relations which look the same from every angle of vision, but rather that they are deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic and political situatedness of different sorts of actors: nation-states, multinationals, diasporic communities, as well as sub-national groupings and movements (whether religious, political or economic), and even intimate face-to-face groups, such as villages, neighborhoods or families. Indeed, the individual actor is the last locus of this perspectival set of landscapes, for these landscapes are eventually navigated by agents who both experience and constitute larger formations, in part by their own sense of what these landscapes offer.<sup>59</sup>

From the perspective of local, individual actors, these disjunctive relations, in which power and resources are distributed unevenly, result in “problems that manifest themselves in intensely local forms but have contexts that are anything but local.”<sup>60</sup> The previous discussion of the impacts of neoliberal politics illustrates the interconnectedness and inseparability of local and global issues, as international financial institutions exert pressures that ultimately both constrain and enable local decision makers.

This notion of globalization, defined broadly as the “the compression of the world,”<sup>61</sup> captures the multiple global processes occurring simultaneously and experienced differently by different actors around the world. One of these processes, flexible global capital mobility,

extends the earlier logics of empire, trade and political dominion...its most striking feature is the runaway quality of global finance, which appears remarkably independent of traditional constraints of information transfer, national regulation industrial proclivity or ‘real’ wealth in any particular society, country or region.<sup>62</sup>

Appadurai continues, “the scale, penetration and velocity of global capital have all grown significantly in the last few decades of this century, especially when new information technologies are factored in as measures of integration and interconnectivity.”<sup>63</sup>

As this final quote indicates, the Internet has the potential to be a far more powerful tool on behalf of global capital than in the hands of community activists. Media critic Robert McChesney argues against naïve technological optimism and claims that the “notion that the Internet is inevitably democratic – that it will remain or become available to the public on anything close to egalitarian terms – seems dubious at best.”<sup>64</sup>

Another global process which presents a challenge to local cultural practices is the pervasive influence of U.S. and Western media, including music, advertising, movies and television programming. Latin American media critics have long denounced U.S. media imperialism<sup>65</sup>; many today continue to equate globalization with an inevitable process of Westernization or Americanization. However powerful the trend toward cultural homogenization may appear, globalization also provides resources

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. p. 7.

<sup>60</sup> Appadurai, Arjun. “Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination.” *Globalization*. Ed. Arjun Appadurai. 2001, p. 6.

<sup>61</sup> Robertson, Roland. “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity.” *Global Modernities*. Eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson. 1995, p. 40.

<sup>62</sup> Appadurai, 2001, p. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. p. 18.

<sup>64</sup> McChesney, Robert. *Rich Media, Poor Democracy: Communication Politics in Dubious Times*. 1998, pp. 181-182.

<sup>65</sup> An early example is the essay “How to read Donald Duck” by Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, 1971.

and opens new media possibilities for the affirmation of cultural heterogeneity. Although cultural theorists employ various terms to capture this dynamic process – hybridization<sup>66</sup>, glocalization<sup>67</sup>, indigenization<sup>68</sup> – they agree that local actors are not passive recipients of global culture, but instead actively manipulate, reformulate and modify global cultural flows to their own ends. With respect to ICTs and development in Guatemala, Mayan cultural adaptation extends Mayan culture into cyberspace and multimedia formats by taking advantage of technological tools for the mobilization of ethnic identity. This adaptation occurs simultaneously with other processes, such as cultural change and cultural resistance, as will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3.

Appadurai argues that individual and collective imagination has a new role in a globalized world, reinforcing the power and potential of local actors to transcend historic boundaries and to conceive and construct alternatives to corporate-led, commercial globalization. Arguing that the imagination has become a social fact, he writes,

The imagination is no longer a matter of individual genius, escapism from ordinary life, or just a dimension of aesthetics. It is a faculty that informs the daily lives of ordinary people in myriad ways: it allows people to consider migration, resist State violence, seek social redress, and design new forms of civic association and collaboration, often across national boundaries.<sup>69</sup>

This alternate globalization is driven by the imagination and organizing of increasing numbers of local actors who gain access to the resources and strategies of the information revolution, whether through migration, the spread of new communication technologies or transnational networks. These activists operate through existing traditional institutions or through a wide variety of NGOs and “rely on strategies, visions and horizons for globalization on behalf of the poor that can be characterized as ‘globalization’ or, put in a slightly different way, as ‘globalization from below’...which strives for a democratic and autonomous standing in respect to the various forms by which global power further seeks to extend its dominion.”<sup>70</sup> Appadurai locates one potential source of transformation in the creation of international civil society based on this grassroots globalization.

The primary conclusion to draw from this discussion is that there is no singular, homogenous globalization. Rather, multiple global processes operate simultaneously, not only transforming how multinational corporations do business but also creating new spaces for global activism and transnational social movements. This recognition that distinct and even oppositional ideologies underlie globalization calls for the careful examination of the implicit assumption that globalization leads to development, as the concept of development itself is defined according to ideological goals.

The United Nations established a development agenda with the institution of the Millennium Development Goals<sup>71</sup> (MDGs), a far-reaching project for poverty eradication through incremental increases in quantitative income, health and education statistics, such as infant mortality, literacy, life

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<sup>66</sup> Canclini, Nestor Garcia. *Culturas híbridas: estrategias para entrar y salir de la modernidad (Hybrid cultures: Strategies for entering and exiting modernity)*. 2001.

<sup>67</sup> Robertson, Roland. “Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity.” *Global Modernities*. Eds. Mike Featherstone, Scott Lash and Roland Robertson. 1995.

<sup>68</sup> Appadurai, 1990, pp. 5-6.

<sup>69</sup> Appadurai, 2001, p. 6.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid. p. 3.

<sup>71</sup> A 2002 summary of Guatemala’s performance in reaching the Millennium Development Goals is published in Spanish on the PNUD web site: <<http://www.pnudguatemala.org/documentos/pdfs/milenio/PROBRE~1.PDF>>.

expectancy and the poverty line. According to the 2004 World Bank country study, “given projected growth rates, it does not seem likely that Guatemala will meet most of the more ambitious targets for health and education established by the international MDGs.”<sup>72</sup> Yet this same World Bank study considers that the top priority action should be to promote economic growth through “maintaining macroeconomic stability...and fostering a climate that is conducive to private investment.”<sup>73</sup>

Local indigenous communities promote a wide range of other goals that constitute development from their perspective: political and cultural autonomy, access to land, and reparations for the violence and displacement of the civil war. Although these two sets of goals are not necessarily mutually exclusive, the policies implemented are too often decided by those in positions of national or international power without taking local needs and community input into consideration. The simplistic view that Internet access bridges the digital divide typifies a notion of development that fails to address systemic problems of lack of education, poverty and racism.

The research and analysis presented here recognizes a notion of development stemming from the grassroots globalization occurring in rural Mayan communities in Guatemala that challenges corporate-led globalization. The experiences of young Mayan cultural activists taking advantage of ICTs generate alternative discourses that integrate Mayan cultural practices into their understanding of community-led development based on cultural adaptability, intercultural respect and modern strategies for mobilizing resources. This production of new expressions of Mayan culture through modern mass media play a fundamental role in strengthening and re-elaborating Mayan identity. At the same time, as Mayan communities progress and develop, their consumption of foreign media and consumer goods also increases. Choices that people make about which goods to consume will play a determining role in the future of how their communities develop. Of course, culture can never be reduced to mere consumption, but mass media products shape the perceptions and values of their audiences and contribute to identity formation. In the case of some areas of rural Huehuetenango, where the only television channels available are Mexican stations, the lack of choice among different media options – some culturally relevant, some not – can result in an reordering of cultural priorities, as foreign media and ideological influence take precedence over local, historic values.

Culturally relevant mass media, whether through radio, television, print or multimedia and Internet formats, generates positive reinforcement of cultural values through celebrations of Mayan practice and the active participation of diverse sectors of the population: including the elder generation through the involvement of spiritual guides and midwives, encouraging youth to create songs, plays and music; and developing the capabilities of all age and genders groups to take advantage of new, increasingly cheap technologies for mass reproduction in digital formats. Since these media products are competing in an asymmetric global mediascape against Hollywood and Disney, successful media efforts will depend at least in part on producing high quality, culturally proximate media that truly interest the masses of Mayan consumers. The best product on the market today is the educational software *Jun E*, produced by Enlace Quiché, which won a prize at the World Society on the Information Society in 2003. According to Enlace’s project report “Thanks to the *Jun E* software, these young students saw familiar-looking scenes on the computer screen, heard the computer speak in their native language, and read text in their language as well. When teachers explained computer use to the students it was done wholly in the Mayan language. This captures the true essence of the (computers center for bilingual education) model and Guatemala’s educational reform process.”<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> World Bank, 2004, p. 5.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid. p. 14.

<sup>74</sup> Enlace Quiché. “Final Report: Using ICT tools to support bilingual education.” 2004, p. 18.

While numerous Mayan organizations are already producing such hybrid media products<sup>75</sup>, their principal challenge is to develop financially sustainable media businesses and cultural projects. Although this thesis focuses on the nascent efforts to take advantage of the Internet to produce new cultural expressions, online publishing is but one (and, at least for now, one of the least accessible) of the many formats that Mayan activists utilize to promote a holistic and culturally relevant notion of development in rural communities.

### Section 1.5 Ethnographic background to the research

During ten months of fieldwork in 2004, I was privileged to work in several environments that provided different insights on rural development issues. For much of the time, I lived in Quetzaltenango and worked with FUPEDDES, *Fundación de Periodismo para el Desarrollo* (Foundation of Journalism for Development), an educational NGO focused on social communication and journalism. I collaborated in two of FUPEDDES' principal programs: a university-level journalism degree (*Título profesional*) for indigenous students with scholarships from rural areas and Poder-Local.com, a network of web sites for municipalities.

Approximately twenty-five students studied at FUPEDDES during 2003 and I worked primarily with the seven second-year students. Many of these students had only recently moved from rural areas to live in Xela, and for the first time were learning to take advantage of ICTs in their personal and academic lives. Their perspectives on the Internet and cultural issues, which they shared with me in extended interviews, helped shape the arguments of this investigation. Their practice of interculturality and adaptation embody a powerful grassroots globalization. I also conducted interviews with several of FUPEDDES' staff members.

As part of their instruction, the FUPEDDES students also research and write the contents of the Internet network Poder-Local.com, which consists of web sites for seventeen municipalities and includes resources for municipal governments, such as relevant national laws. In addition to providing practical training for the students, Poder-Local.com "works for the strengthening of municipal management, for and through decentralization of citizen participation, peace and democracy in Guatemala."<sup>76</sup> Collaborating on this project, which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, provided me with a regional case study on which to focus my investigation. The eight municipalities of the Mancomunidad Huista are members of Poder-Local.com, so I also spent time in seven of these towns in rural northwest Huehuetenango to discuss the state of local ICT infrastructure and other development issues with local residents and officials of the municipal governments. These research trips, alongside the perspectives of students from rural areas living in Xela, illustrate the relative ease of mobility from areas without access to ICTs to the modern conveniences of Xela, but reinforce how digital divide exists on multiple levels,

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<sup>75</sup> While this thesis describes the efforts of some of these projects, particularly those publishing through the Internet, other projects include: *Cholsamaj* and *Naval Wuj*, who print books on topics of Mayan interest and produce Mayan language interactive computer games and graphic design materials, <<http://www.cholsamaj.org.gt>>; the Mayan newspaper *Rutzijol*, produced by *Centro Maya Saqb'e* in Chimaltenango; the ALMG's new venture into television production and their continued publication of magazines and audio materials dedicated to promoting Mayan languages; the radio program *Mayab' Winaq* (discussed in Fischer, Edward. *Cultural Logics and Global Economics*. 2001, pp. 133-134); and a new effort by the *Federación Guatemalteca de Escuelas Radiofónicas* (Guatemalan Federation of Radio Schools) to produce *Maya K'at*, a bilingual radio news program which will begin national broadcasts on September 2, 2004.

<sup>76</sup> FUPEDDES. "Poder-Local.com: Red Virtual de Municipalidades de Guatemala (Poder-Local.com: Virtual Network of Municipalities of Guatemala.)" 2003, p. 3. "...trabaja por el fortalecimiento de la gestión municipal, por y para la descentralización, la participación ciudadana, la paz y la democracia en Guatemala."

and even exists between towns (and people from different classes and ethnicities) in the same region.

A third opportunity to learn about grassroots development through ICTs arose through the experience of teaching computer classes in Cantel, a small K'iche' town only a twenty-minute bus ride from Xela. For two months I commuted in the afternoons and worked as a volunteer teacher in a startup computer center, a social development project of the local Presbyterian church. In Cantel I worked with seventeen students from ages 8 to 42, divided into four classes. We worked on five used PCs with minimal software and learned the basics of Windows and word processing, and the adult students participated in a computer questionnaire on their experience and viewpoints.

A final group of ICT experts working in local technology projects gave me insight into their experiences in a number of different regions in the country. These projects include Enlace Quiche in Santa Cruz del Quiche, *Proyecto Bibliotecas Guatemala* (PROBIGUA-Library Project of Guatemala) based in Antigua, Mayacom.org in Sololá, the cooperative *Qo Aq'anán Jnux Te Kman Txun* of Todos Santos Cuchumatán, AGEXPRONT and the project *Centros Electronicos de Negocios* (Electronic Business Centers), and indigenous entrepreneurs in San Pedro la Laguna, Sololá and Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango. In total, I conducted thirty-six formal interviews, divided into three general categories: students using ICTs in their academic lives, ICT promoters (whether NGO employees or computer center owners/committee members), and municipal employees. Table 1 shows the breakdown of this group according to age, gender and ethnicity.<sup>77</sup>

**Table 1: Demographic breakdown of interviews**

Interviewees	Total	Male	Female	18-30	30-45	Over 45	Maya	Ladino
Students	14	12	2	12	1	0	14	0
ICT promoters	11	2	3	4	6	1	8	3
Municipal employees	11	10	1	2	5	4	6	5

Source: Field Interviews

This breakdown reveals that the typical interviews subject is young, male and indigenous. While this does not reflect overall demographic trends in Guatemala, it does accurately represent the spread of opportunities for ICT access across demographic categories. Women and elders are the sectors of the population least likely to have the opportunity, income and educational levels necessary for consumption of computer-based technologies. Thus youth and men are over represented in the interview sample, just as they are over represented in terms of who actually has access to these technologies.

### Section 1.6 Summary of the rest of the paper

The remaining chapters raise a series of questions to analyze more deeply the ongoing attempts by Mayan activists to utilize ICTs on behalf of their communities and in their political and cultural projects. Chapter 2 asks Why is it important that Maya gain access to ICTs? What benefits can it bring their communities? What new challenges and difficulties does IT use present? Chapter 3 focuses on the cultural dimensions of globalization and continue the discussion about the centrality of culture to community-led development. The questions posed include: How does globalization challenge the preservation of traditional local culture? How do Maya resist and adapt their culture to modern

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<sup>77</sup> For more detailed demographic information on interview subjects, please see the Appendix.

circumstances? The final chapter describes several ongoing ICT projects to identify what attempts are currently underway to put ICTs at the service of indigenous communities. The important questions to ask include What development strategies are resulting from the use of ICTs ? What ongoing ICT initiatives are promoting development in rural areas? And to what extent do they challenge and transform the existing order, or reproduce them?

## Chapter 2: Advantages and Disadvantages of using ICTs to Promote Development

This chapter analyzes the range of responses to the fundamental question driving this research: Why is it important that rural indigenous communities take advantage of ICTs? After discussing the benefits of ICT use, it analyzes the barriers that preclude access and the challenges that arise out of use itself.

### 2.1 Why do many Maya believe that it is fundamental to take advantage of ICTs?

The common theme that emerged throughout the interviews with Mayan students, activists and community leaders is that many of those who have begun to use computers and the Internet see the potential for these tools to improve and transform the lives of indigenous people. This potential for accelerated development in rural areas stems from a widespread belief that the ability to use a computer is a fundamental job skill necessary for obtaining work in a competitive marketplace, and that learning to use a computer leads to improved work efficiency. However, an important distinction must be drawn between access to computers and access to the Internet. Computers themselves are generally seen as a necessary tool for work and learning with only positive benefits for the individual computer user, and computer-based ICTs are viewed as tools to achieve personal or community cultural and political goals. But the Internet should not be seen merely as a value-neutral tool, since it is a media to access information, and not just a machine. When discussing the benefits and challenges of ICT use, lumping computers and the Internet together results in confusion, as many of the potential negative impacts of using the Internet do not result from everyday use of the computer for word processing, data management, printing, scanning, etc. This dichotomy reflects the dual nature of ICTs as both practical instruments that require training to master and as modern systems based on an ideology of progress through advanced technology which inevitably exerts subtle cultural influences on all users.

Often, indigenous students from rural areas do not have access to computers unless they travel to study at a regional high school, such as the *Escuela Normal Regional del Occidente*, located in Santa Lucia Utatlan, Sololá, which has satellite Internet access, or they study at computer academies which are opening in many rural towns as a result of private initiatives and NGO-supported businesses, such as the Spanish organization *Intervida* and USAID. While scholarships and affordable computer study programs exist in some areas, the lack of these academies and the lack of computer equipment in most secondary schools in many rural towns and villages prevents the learning of these skills.

Individual perspectives on the use of ICTs depend heavily on the individual, unique circumstances that characterize differences within the Mayan population. For example, a young person growing up in Jacaltenango can work in one of three high speed Internet centers at a cost of Q10 an hour. In an adjacent community, San Miguel Acatán, there are no computer centers.

The initiative on the part of the *Iglesia Presbiteriana Primitiva* (Primitive Presbyterian Church) in Cantel, Quetzaltenango, is one effort to fill the existing need for computer instruction for young people. Cantel is an historically Maya-K'iche' town just southeast of the city of Quetzaltenango (popularly referred to by its indigenous name, Xela). Compared to many indigenous towns in western Guatemala, Cantel benefits from its close location to Xela and many students and workers from Cantel travel the five miles daily back and forth. The highway cuts across a valley from Xela through *Aldea la Fabrica*, where pickups and buses depart for the other *aldeas* (villages) or you can walk fifteen minutes up to the city center, which sits on a ridge overlooking the valley and the textile factory that employs many in the area.

Despite the proximity to computer resources in Xela, until 2003 no computer center existed in the center of Cantel, although one is in operation in *Aldea La Estancia*, across the highway. The local

Presbyterian church, in coordination with CESSMAQ, the *Centro Evangélico de Servicio y Socorro Maya Quiche* (Evangelical Center of Service and Assistance Maya Quiche), received six donated computers and two laser printers from the United States and decided to start a computer center which charged minimal fees for instruction for children and adults. Despite the lack of software (the donated machines arrived with only English versions of Windows '95 or '98 installed), classes began in June of 2003. Although this was a modest beginning, the committee of the church named the center in accordance with their vision for promoting community development through the use of ICTs: *Centro de Computación para el Desarrollo Social* (Center of Computation for Social Development), *Iglesia Presbiteriana Primitiva*, Cantel.

With the coordination of CESSMAQ, I worked as a volunteer teacher for the first round of classes in the center, during approximately two months. Most of the seventeen students (fourteen men and boys, three girls, ranging in age from eight to forty-two) had never worked on a computer before. Despite the limitations of the center, most students believed at a minimum that they were learning skills that were fundamentally necessary for their personal development, and they envisioned different ways that the computer center would benefit the community and country as a whole.

### **2.1.1 To build a better trained, more efficient indigenous work force**

The primary reason why students and organizers at the center in Cantel gave to explain their interest in learning how to use the computer was to enhance their job prospects. This group consisted of six male students (the other eleven were children and teenagers, including three girls), and the three active members of the organizing committee, including two men and one woman. Only the younger students in the group had previous experience with computers and only two had graduated from high school. They work in a variety of professions, shoemaking, cable television installation, teacher or tailor, and as a group they agreed that computer skills would give them more job opportunities.

One of the members of the church committee that oversees the center's operations described how necessary computer skills are for the young people of Cantel, drawing a parallel between lack of computer skills and illiteracy:

In any job that one applies for, they will always eventually ask if you know how to use a computer and if you can't, they will simply tell you that there is no work for you...Someone who doesn't know computers, today they are like an illiterate, imagine it, someone who doesn't know computers is an illiterate.<sup>78</sup>

According to one student, "Knowing how to work on a computer and use all of the programs is necessary in any job that one performs."<sup>79</sup> His classmate agreed, "I know that today in order to find work I have to know how to use this computer."<sup>80</sup>

While the lack of computer facilities in many rural towns prohibits many young people from learning to use a computer during their schooling, they must still compete with young people from urban areas for jobs and for opportunities.

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Florentine Ordoñez Chun, age 43, July 22, 2003. "*En cualquier trabajo que llegan a solicitar, siempre últimamente preguntan si puede manejar computadora y si no puede, simplemente le dice ahora que no tiene trabajo...El que no sabe de computación, actualmente es que es un analfabeto, imagínese, el quien no sabe de computación es analfabeto.*"

<sup>79</sup> Interview with student in Cantel Center of Computation, July 25, 2003. "*En que todo trabajo que uno desempeña es necesario el conocimiento del manejo de las computadoras y todos los programas que lo integran.*"

<sup>80</sup> Interview with student in Cantel Center of Computation, July 25, 2003. "*Yo sé que hoy día para encontrar empleo necesito saber manejar esta máquina.*"

Rigoberto Zamora Charuc of PROBIGUA, highlights the different impacts of computers as work and study tools and the computer as an information media:

If we're talking only about the use of the computer, the advantage is, the fact that these young adults have the opportunity to use a computer, to know how a computer works, how to use it, this has become an enormous advantage in the sense that these young people will be able to continue their studies and become better students. The majority of young people are inclined toward technology, they want a degree in computers, to become experts or technicians in computers, etc.<sup>81</sup>

### 2.1.2 To have up-to-date information about the world

Another common response from the students not just in Cantel but also at FUPEDDES is that access to ICTs provides an up-to-the-minute resource on world events. Many people in rural areas have very little access to information from outside their local area. For example, the most circulated paper in the country is the tabloid daily *Nuestro Diario*. The distribution averages daily 230,000, and it consists almost exclusively of sensationalistic photos: gruesome deaths, runway models, fire eaters y fútbol.<sup>82</sup>

As the final project for their journalism degree, the FUPEDDES conducted an investigation into the use of communication media by municipal authorities in the *Mancomunidad Huista*. They found that "The region of the *Mancomunidad Huista* has been an excluded sector by the large communication media in the country, since information has been centralized in urban areas."<sup>83</sup> The report continues:

In other words, there should be good communication, in that the communities should be active actors and not just passive in the meeting of their needs. The results of this Study on public communication in the *Mancomunidad Huista* reflects the reality of communication in this region. The system continues as it traditionally has linked to community leaders and authorities. The presence of national communication media is precarious and access to them is difficult. In some municipalities there are local media, especially radio stations, but they are not fully effective because they still have not discovered the transparency and the role that social communication can play in a truly democratic society.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Interview with PROBIGUA director Rigoberto Zamora Charuc, November 20, 2003. "Si hablamos solamente sobre el uso de la computadora, la ventaja, el hecho de que los jóvenes tengan la oportunidad de usar una maquina, de saber como funciona una maquina, como usarla, eso ya es una ventaja enorme en el sentido de que esos jóvenes podrán continuar sus estudios y podrán hacerse buenos estudiantes, la mayoría de jóvenes se inclinan por la tecnología, quieren bachillerato en computación, perito en computación, técnico en computación, etc."

<sup>82</sup> Berganza, Gustavo. *Los Medios de Comunicación y la sociedad guatemalteca a través de sus discursos (Communication Media and Guatemalan Society through their Discourses)*. 2002, p. 65. Other average circulation figures for daily newspapers include: *Siglo Veintiuno*, 21,043; *Al Día*, 34, 986; *Prensa Libre*, 116, 079; *El Quetzalteco* (three times a week) 7,500; *el Periódico*, 26, 646.

<sup>83</sup> FUPEDDES. *Estudio sobre la comunicación pública de la Mancomunidad Huista (Study on public communication in the Mancomunidad Huista)*. May 2004, p. 3. "La región de la Mancomunidad Huista ha sido un sector excluido por los grandes medios de comunicación del país, debido a que la información ha sido centralizada en las áreas urbanas."

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.* p.3. "En otras palabras, debe haber una buena comunicación, en las que las comunidades sean actores activos y no pasivos en la resolución de sus necesidades. Los resultados del Estudio sobre la comunicación en la Mancomunidad Huista refleja la realidad de la comunicación en esta región. El sistema sigue siendo tradicional y vincula a líderes comunitarios y autoridades. La presencia de los medios de comunicación del país es precaria y el acceso a ellos se hace difícil. En algunos municipios se cuenta

Thus many students and IT activists see the potential for direct access to news about world events through the Internet, information that is not available in local libraries or through national media. One student in Cantel responded that

I needed to be informed about everything that's occurring around the world through the Internet...The advantages are that we can be informing ourselves about what happens on a global scale because the Internet is a window that permits us to see and inform ourselves about what's happening in other places.<sup>85</sup>

A community activist in Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Huehuetenango, established a computer center so that more young people in his town could access the Internet.

For me the advantages are that, if we're talking about education, it's like an enormous encyclopedia, and for any kind of investigation, or knowledge, about what has happened, or what could be imagined in the future, the information is there. Even including examples of how other countries have developed, there is information about those countries, and for us as a people, we can take those as examples for how we can develop. These are the great advantages that the Internet has.<sup>86</sup>

This right to information is codified in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive, and impart information and ideas through any media regardless of frontiers."<sup>87</sup>

The FUPEDDES project Poder-Local.com aims to address the historic and ongoing violation of this right:

(The Project) seeks to provide to the municipalities an instrument that could resolve many of the problems that the mayors currently suffer related to the lack of information...(with the objective of) Promoting local and regional communication media, with the motive of achieving decentralization in the country, which would permit communities to exercise their right to information.<sup>88</sup>

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*con medios locales especialmente radioemisoras, pero no le sacan el provecho necesario aún no encuentran el significado de la transparencia y el papel que representa la comunicación social en una sociedad verdaderamente democrática."*

<sup>85</sup> Interview with student in Cantel Center of Computation, July 25, 2003. "Necesitaba estar informado de todo lo que ocurría alrededor del mundo a través del Internet...Pues las ventajas que habrían es que estaríamos informándonos de lo que acontece a nivel mundial porque el Internet es una ventana que nos permite ver e informarnos de lo que sucede en otros lugares."

<sup>86</sup> Interview with community activist Rosendo Pablo Ramírez, age 29, October 16, 2003. "Para mi las ventajas es como, si hablamos de para estudios, es como un encyclopedia que es grandísimo, y todo lo que la investigación, del conocimiento, de lo que ha pasado, de que se puede imaginar, mañana pasado, allá está la información, hasta incluso otros países como se han desarrollado, hay información allí como se han desarrollado los otros países, que como nosotros como pueblos nosotros podemos tomar esos ejemplos para que nosotros podemos desarrollar. Esas son las grandes ventajas que tiene Internet."

<sup>87</sup> <<http://www.un.org/overview/rights.html>>.

<sup>88</sup> FUPEDDES, 2003, p. 4. "Pretende entregar a las municipales un instrumento que podría resolver muchos de los problemas que sufren actualmente los alcaldes relacionados con la carencia de información...(con el objetivo de) Promover medios de

### 2.1.3 To demonstrate that Mayaness and modernity co-exist

These first two motivations respond to practical education and information needs that will give more opportunities to young people in rural communities. Another common motivation responds instead to an ideological reality: historically, indigenous people have not had access to modern technology and failure to take advantage of ICT resources would only repeat the pattern of exclusion that characterizes Guatemalan society.

Eulalia Camposeco, a Maya-Popti' and one of the directors of FUPEDDES, argues forcefully, "I think it is fundamental, as peoples, it is important, in my opinion, to not continue to be isolated at the margins of access to technology, because on the contrary, we are missing out on valuable information that flows around the world."<sup>89</sup>

A member of the committee in Cantel agreed that Maya must use ICT skills to have access to jobs that historically only have been available to Ladinos. He stated that

One of the advantages of learning, as Mayan people that we are in our culture, is to have opportunities to undertake other types of jobs, for example, in offices, perhaps in some kind of institution, so that it won't be any longer as it was before when only the, excuse the expression, but only the Ladino had those kind of opportunities.<sup>90</sup>

A student from FUPEDDES agreed with this line of commentary:

We will not just remain in the past, but rather we also can keep up with technology but without losing our way, our culture, truly, staying current with technology because we are also humans, we need this...yes it is important to be involved in this because if we don't, we would just fall even farther behind with respect to development, communication and technology.<sup>91</sup>

These perspectives directly contest the historically racist social idea that equates indigenous culture with a pre-modern lifestyle and also reserves technological work for Ladinos. Anthropologist Diane Nelson discusses a full-page newspaper ad paid for through the Secretary of the Presidency in response to indigenous mobilization around the 1992 Quincentennial celebrations. The text of the ad reads "*Un Solo Pueblo, 12 de Octubre*" (One people, October 12). Nelson writes,

Surrounding the phrase are photos of indigenous *cofradía* (religious brotherhood) members in

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*comunicación locales y regionales, bajo la premisa de lograr la descentralización del país, que permita a la comunidades el ejercicio del derecho a la información."*

<sup>89</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES director Eulalia Camposeco, age 38, May 30, 2003. "Yo pienso que es fundamental, como pueblos, es importante, en mi opinion, no seguirmos quedando al margen del acceso a la tecnología, porque de lo contrario, nos estamos perdiendo de alguna manera, digamos, valiosa información que pasa alrededor del mundo."

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Florentin Ordoñez Chun, age 43, July 22, 2003. "Una de las ventajas es que al aprender, como personas Mayas que somos en nuestra cultura, llega a tener oportunidades a desempeñar otros tipos de trabajos por ejemplo en oficinas, tal vez en alguna institución, entonces ya no es como antes que solo el, disculpe tal vez la expresión, pero tal vez solo el Ladino tenía oportunidad a eso."

<sup>91</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES student from Cantel, age 24, July 7, 2003. "Nosotros no solo nos quedamos en lo antiguo, sino que nosotros también vamos a la par de la tecnología pero no perder nuestra línea, nuestra cultura, verdad, ir al lado de eso, al lado de tecnología porque también somos humanos, necesitamos de eso...si es importante estar en esto porque si nosotros no vamos a eso, nosotros nos quedaríamos mas atrasados en cuanto al desarrollo, la comunicación y la tecnología."

traditional garb, an indigenous *campesino* (peasant) wielding a hoe, and Ladinos wielding high technology - working at telephones and computers, thus reiterating the 'natural' relation of Ladinos with modernity and Maya with tradition."<sup>92</sup>

#### 2.1.4 To make known the Mayan culture

Section 2.1.2 illustrated how important the Internet can be in providing access to global information; this point demonstrates that indigenous people do not just view the Internet as a media for receiving information, but it also makes possible the presentation of indigenous culture on the Internet as a means for indigenous communities to transmit information as well.

This is one of the primary purposes of FUPEDES' project Poder-Local.com, as described by one of the student journalists working on the project:

For us it is also important that we make known our cultures, just like the project we are working on now, that we are making known the municipalities of here in Guatemala and not just our own, where I live, let's say, but we are making known other municipalities, describing how they dress, the culture, and the traditions.<sup>93</sup>

In July 2003, during the annual festival of San Antonio Huista, a Ladino town in the Huista region of Huehuetenango, the mayor Bernardo Jiménez acknowledged and thanked the two FUPEDES student journalists who covered the festival for the town's web site, hosted at Poder-Local.com. He proudly announced to the people of San Antonio

The entire world can now know about the needs of San Antonio Huista, the Toneca culture, what it is that we have, what is hidden here in this corner of the world...It is a great achievement that today this can be known around the world, which fills us with pride, all of us, because we are all San Antonio and our town deserves the best.<sup>94</sup>

Another student, who had the opportunity to participate in a web design course sponsored by USAID and mayacom.org sees the potential for the Internet to promote her hometown, Santa Lucía Utatlán:

Well, I consider that (the Internet) always brings positive results, from my point of view, for example when I participated in a course to learn the Internet, I realized that there are many communities who do not know my town, or other towns, many people do not know my community, and so with the help of that class we were able to create various pages about the municipality of Santa Lucia and the organizations that exist, so that now I think it really benefits

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<sup>92</sup> Nelson, Diane M. *Finger in the Wound: Body Politics in Quincentennial Guatemala*. 1999, p. 13.

<sup>93</sup> Interview with FUPEDES student from Totonicapán, age 19, July 3, 2003. "*Para nosotros también es importante que demos a conocer lo que es nuestras culturas, así como el proyecto que estamos realizando ahora, que estamos dando a conocer lo que son los municipios de aquí de Guatemala y no solo los de nosotros, donde yo vivo digamos, sino estamos dando a conocer otros municipios también dando a conocer lo que son los trajes, las culturas, la tradiciones.*"

<sup>94</sup> Mayor Bernardo Jiménez's speech at town meeting in San Antonio Huista, June 12, 2003. "*El mundo entero puede conocer ahora las necesidades de San Antonio Huista, la cultura toneca, que es lo que tenemos, que está escondido aquí en este rincón del mundo...Es un gran logro que hoy pueden conocer al nivel del mundo, nos llena de orgullo, a todos nosotros, porque todos somos San Antonio y nuestro pueblo merece todo.*"

and also helps the community, because even more interesting projects can come about to benefit the people and the community in general. Thus I consider that it is a very important tool that has come to benefit the culture my community.<sup>95</sup>

The online presentation of local indigenous cultures (or even local Ladino culture, as in the case of San Antonio) is more problematic than these comments assert. The first difficulty results from the assumption that the Internet automatically provides a mass audience, when just the act of developing a web site does not guarantee that anyone will ever visit the page. Developing a web site into a truly useful space of media consumption requires frequent updating of information, promotion of the pages in the potential communities of users, and interactivity to support the exchange of information via the site. In indigenous communities, ICTs must also take the local context into account and place appropriate emphasis on local languages and culturally relevant content.

A second problem, one of representation, arises at the moment of the actual creation of the pages. Just as the traditional national mass media, in particular the network television channels, exclude indigenous people in the production of media about their own communities, so too the creation of web sites is often carried out by Ladinos, who are more likely to possess sufficient technical skills to build pages.

The leadership of FUPEDDES, building on their past experience publishing *El Regional*, a weekly multilingual (Spanish, Popti', K'iche' and Mam) paper devoted to the northwest region of Guatemala, recognized the lack of qualified indigenous journalist. This recognition led to the establishment of the ongoing scholarship program, and the strategy of sending these indigenous students journalists into rural areas to develop the content and stories for the Poder-Local.com web site. However, the page design itself is still done by Ladino staff of FUPEDDES.

### 2.1.5 To make international connections

Since the Peace Accords were signed in 1996, over US\$2 billion have entered the country in the form of international support.<sup>96</sup> While much of this money has gone the Guatemalan State, it also supports a proliferation of NGOs and local actors with independent connections to international donors. The strategic use of Internet-based communication facilitates this process by enabling direct contact between local institutions and international donors, bypassing the potential corruption of the State.

The goals of Poder-Local.com include:

The creation of links in the network which permit the mayors to put themselves in direct contact with national and international institutions which can support their efforts to develop each community, consult possible solutions and find channels for appropriate advice and

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<sup>95</sup> Interview with student from Santa Lucía Utatlán, October 17, 2003. *"Bueno yo considero que trae siempre cosas positivas, desde mi punto de vista, por ejemplo cuando yo participé en un curso de Internet, me di cuenta que hay varias comunidades que no conocen mi municipio, o otros municipios, o muchas personas no conocen mi comunidad, y entonces con la ayuda de ese curso logramos hacer varias paginas del municipio de Santa Lucía con las organizaciones que existen, entonces actualmente creo que sí beneficie bastante y además ayuda a la comunidad, porque pueden surgir proyectos mas interesantes que benefician a las personas y en si a la comunidad general. Entonces considero que es una herramienta bastante importante que viene a beneficiar la cultura de mi comunidad."*

<sup>96</sup> This rough estimate was provided to me in an informal interview with Matthew Creelman, director of *Inforpress Centroamericana*, a weekly publication (in English and Spanish) of political, social and economic analysis of the Central American region.

cooperation.<sup>97</sup>

Alfredo Cardenas, the director of the *Mancomunidad Huista*, quickly realized the strategic potential of the web page and making connections via e-mail.

Whenever I write someone, I invite them to visit the page, so that they can read the strategic plan, get to know the *Mancomunidad Huista*, that's how it occurred to me to write to more than forty organizations, someone is going to answer me, I thought...I wrote to forty organizations, such as the Ford Foundation, Rockefeller, to everyone that I found out about. So then I invited them to get to know the *Mancomunidad Huista*, I know that someone is going to get to know us, and they could offer us support.<sup>98</sup>

As will be further discussed in Chapter 4, increased ability to connect with foreign donors is not the only global strategy for the use of Internet-based communication. The Internet also provides the possibility to promote tourism, market local products, communicate with indigenous peoples in other countries, access international human rights conventions, and keep in touch with immigrant family and friends abroad.

## 2.2. What barriers and challenges exist that make development based on ICT use difficult?

While the majority of Mayan people remain to varying degrees isolated from the Information Revolution due to a confluence of economic, educational and geographic barriers, a small percentage of the Mayan population already demonstrates how ICTs can be creatively used to facilitate indigenous activism. Diane Nelson coined the term "Maya-hacker" to describe the work of tech-savvy Mayan NGO activists. She writes "it is precisely these middlemen and middlewomen who have begun to appropriate information technologies and deploy them for alternative aims. They are using literacy, desktop publishing, linguistic theories, radio and computers to promote cultural survival."<sup>99</sup> A small number of relatively high profile national organizations fit into this category, including the book publisher *Cholsamaj* and its partner, the graphic design company *Nawal Wuj*, the linguistic research group *Oxlajuuj Keej Mayab' Ajtz'iib'* (OKMA) and the *Academia of Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala* (Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala).

However, this analysis is focused not on the well-established organizations which have already succeeded in gaining access to and taking advantage of ICTs. The students at FUPEDES and in Cantel belong to a second generation of Maya-hackers, who benefit from the same conditions that made possible the rise of these organizations including "the emergence of a critical mass of educated people, shifts in transnational organization that increasingly emphasize the information economy and the technological

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<sup>97</sup> FUPEDES, 2003, p. 5. "Crear vínculos en la red que le permita a los alcaldes ponerse en contacto directo con las instituciones nacionales e internacionales que puedan apoyar sus esfuerzos de desarrollo en cada comunidad, consultar posibles soluciones y encontrar canales de consultoría y cooperación apropiadas."

<sup>98</sup> Interview with director of *Mancomunidad Huista* Alfredo Cardenas, age 50, October 24, 2003. "Siempre le escribo alguien, yo le invito a conocer esta pagina, para que conocen el plan estratégico, conocen la *Mancomunidad Huista*, así se me ocurrió escribirle como a cuarenta organizaciones, alguien me va a contestar, dije yo...escribí a como cuarenta organizaciones, a Fundación Ford, a este Rockefeller, a todos que encontré. Entonces yo les invito a que conoce la *Mancomunidad*, yo sé más que alguno nos va a conocer, y nos puede ofrecer apoyo."

<sup>99</sup> Nelson, 1999, p. 253.

changes that have made the relevant hardware and software increasingly available.”<sup>100</sup>

The various ways that many indigenous young people overcome barriers to ICT access challenge the binary categorizations often used to explain the digital divide: rich vs. poor, educated vs. illiterate, urban vs. rural and Maya vs. Ladino. Analyzing each of these axes of exclusion demonstrates that there is no clearly defined digital barrier to be crossed once and for all for the Mayan people. The digital divide not only exists between countries, but also within countries and even within communities, since the factors that limit access – financial resources, education and proximity to urban centers – vary from municipality to municipality and even from village to village within the same community or family to family within the same village. Thus indigenous individuals and communities face diverse experiences of overcoming the barriers to access in their home communities and through mobility to areas where ICT resources already exist.

But access itself should not be the ultimate goal of ICT proponents, due to the problematic nature of ICT use in rural areas. While gaining access itself presents a formidable challenge, what to do with that access once it exists creates an entirely new set of barriers. The following sections discuss barriers to access and the problems resulting from access from the multiple partial perspectives of rural users, some of whom already have access to ICTs and have witnessed these problems in their communities.

### 2.2.1 Differential access: unequal economic resources

Lack of financial resources raises the most prominent barrier of access to purchase computer equipment or to pay the usage fees at community Internet centers. Even rural computer centers with international support charge a nominal fee for computer and Internet usage, which can be as low as 8Q an hour or as high as 25Q.<sup>101</sup> These costs, and the cost structures for cellular phones and other communication technologies, must be placed in the context of average per capita income. The overall average annual income for Guatemala is Q5,578 (approximately US\$700), but this number is skewed upward due to the extreme concentration of income in upper income brackets. The following table shows average per capita income broken down by income bracket.

**Table 2: Per capita income according to income bracket**

Income Quintile	Average per capita income, quetzales	Average per capita income, US\$, 1US\$=Q8
Q1 Top 20%	15,500	1937.5
Q2	5,000	625
Q3	3,500	437.5
Q4	2,400	300
Q5 Bottom 20%	1,500	187.5

Source: World Bank 2004.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p. 255.

<sup>101</sup> During 2004, increased competition among DSL and cable modem Internet service providers in urban areas has resulted in extremely cheap Internet prices. For example, in Xela and Antigua Internet centers charge as low as Q2.50 an hour, or approximately US\$0.30. In rural areas, costs are constrained by flat fees for satellite internet connections, so prices have generally been stable at Q10 to Q20 an hour.

The 2004 World Bank report Poverty in Guatemala determined that the poverty line in Guatemala exists at Q4300 per household, justifying the assertion that over half of the Guatemalan population lives in chronic poverty (also see Table 2 above). The same report also determined the extreme poverty line at Q1900 per household.<sup>102</sup> In 2004, the government increased the minimum wages for daily labor in agricultural (16% increase) and non-agricultural (21% increase) work. The daily minimum wage now stands at Q28.36 (approximately US\$3.50) for agricultural work and Q34.20 (approximately US\$4.28) for non-agricultural work.<sup>103</sup>

The FUPEDES students, whose access to ICTs as part of their university program is facilitated by scholarships provided by NORAD (Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation), recognize this as a fundamental obstacle that prevents many of their peers from gaining access. One student commented, "One disadvantage is that perhaps not everyone has access to computers because you have to pay a fee to learn to use them."<sup>104</sup> Another student added, "The computer is very important but in my case recently I have had some problems. I really like to investigate, but sometimes the lack of resources prevents me, because I know that there are many things to research, but the same lack of resources limits us."<sup>105</sup>

Estheiman Amaya, one of FUPEDES directors, commented from the perspective of municipal governments looking to invest in technology:

The primary, fundamental barrier, are the economic limitations that exist...the municipal governments are actually very poor, and we could talk about the largest municipal government in the western part of Guatemala which is Quetzaltenango, and it is a government that is broke. Here there is no money for anything, thus there may be plenty of will to get things done but there is no money to do them, and all of this has economic implications, each measure that one desires to take requires economic support. Fundamentally, the principal barrier for me is economic.<sup>106</sup>

However, within indigenous communities there exists a range of socioeconomic possibilities that reveals a growing population of families and individuals who spend their limited economic resources on computers and Internet use. A local ICT entrepreneur in San Pedro la Laguna, Sololá, has sold more than seventy-five computers to his neighbors since he began his business in 2003, offering an installment plan and free technical assistance.<sup>107</sup> In Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango, three locally owned Internet businesses have opened in the last two years. FUPEDES director Camposeco, originally from Jacaltenango, commented that while computer and Internet access is not generalized through the educational system, "this resource is much more accessible perhaps for people who may have a little bit more money to be

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<sup>102</sup> World Bank, 2004, p. 30.

<sup>103</sup> Smith, Eduardo. *Prensa Libre*. "En firme nuevo salario minimo (New minimum wage firm)." July 30, 2004.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with student from Santa Lucía Utatlán, October 17, 2003. "Una desventaja es que tal vez no todas las personas tienen acceso a computadoras porque se paga una cuota para aprender a manejarlo."

<sup>105</sup> Interview with FUPEDES student from Jacaltenango, July 11, 2003. "La computadora es muy importante, pero en mi caso actualmente crecí pequeños problemas. Me gusta mucho investigar, pero a veces los recursos lo impide, porque yo sé que hay muchas cosas que investigar, pero es el mismo recurso que nos limita."

<sup>106</sup> Interview with FUPEDES director Estheiman Amaya, age 40, July 24, 2003. "La barrera principal, fundamental, son unas limitaciones económicas que hay...las comunas son municipalidades realmente muy pobres, y podría hablar de la municipalidad más grande de Occidente que es Quetzaltenango, es una municipalidad que está en quiebra. Aquí no hay plata para nada, entonces puede ver mucha voluntad para hacer cosas pero no hay dinero con que hacerlas, y todo esto tiene implicaciones económicas, cada medida que se quiere hacer tiene implicación económica. Fundamentalmente, la principal barrera para mí es económica."

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Felipe Tuy Navichoc, age 30, November 15, 2003.

able to access a computer."<sup>108</sup>

Economic stratification also reflects ethnic differences, although this varies from town to town. According to Aroldo Camposeco Montejo, a Maya-Popti' researcher, San Antonio Huista and Jacaltenango (Montejo's hometown) exhibit different trends: in majority Ladino San Antonio Huista, Ladinos dominate the town's economic middle class; while in Jacaltenango there are both Popti' and Ladinos among the ranks of the middle class. Camposeco writes, "The Ladinos who arrived to this municipality (Jacaltenango) appointed as public administrators, settled here by taking advantage of these positions and authority appropriated resources, which today continue to be the source of their wealth."<sup>109</sup> However, economic stratification also affects relations between indigenous peoples of different ethnicities, such as in Jacaltenango, where some communities of Mames and Akatekos have settled. According to Camposeco Montejo, these immigrants generally work in lower paying jobs, such as day laborers or as domestic workers. He writes, "(the ethnic question) has generated a certain inequality, even within the indigenous population. This can be between the Popti' and the Mams or the Akatekos."<sup>110</sup>

Indigenous entrepreneurs seeking to provide Internet services to their community find that the costs involved require charging prices too high for locals. A Maya-Mam community activist in Todos Santos Cuchumatán established an Internet center in 2003, but cannot offer the computer classes for kids that he envisioned because the center relies on the hourly charges for Internet use to cover operating costs, which come from both tourists and from locals. He commented,

Recently I haven't given as many classes for children because I don't have enough computers and furthermore there are expenses here that the Center has to cover, and one of my objectives has always been to teach children, but I haven't been able to meet this objected because I can't, I don't have the means, the resources to teach the children. Even though some kids or parents maybe have enough money to pay for classes, there are also families who don't have enough, and what I would like to do is have a computer center completely dedicated for the children."<sup>111</sup>

This paradox highlights how financial limitations exist as a barrier to access, even after Internet services have become available in their communities.

### 2.2.2. Differential access: physical and communication infrastructure limitations

After poverty, the lack of infrastructure in many rural communities erects the second most

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<sup>108</sup> Interview with FUPEDS director Eulalia Camposeco, age 38, May 30, 2003. "Este recurso es mucho más accesible quizás para la gente que tenga un poco más de recursos puede acceder a una computadora."

<sup>109</sup> Camposeco Montejo, Aroldo Gamaliel. *Diferenciación étnica y estratificación social en la comunidad Popti' (Ethnic differentiation and social stratification in the Popti' community)*. 2001, p. 144. "Los Ladinos llegaron a dicho municipio nombrados como administradores públicos, así se establecieron o radicaron, aprovechándose de dicha posición y de la autoridad que ejercían se apropiaron de recursos que hoy en día son fuente de su riqueza."

<sup>110</sup> Ibid. p. 147. "Ha generado cierta desigualdad social, inclusive entre la población indígena. Esto se da de los popti' hacia los mames o los akatekos."

<sup>111</sup> Interview with community activist Rosendo Pablo Ramírez, age 29, October 16, 2003. "Ahora pues no he dado tantas clases para niños porque no tengo suficientes maquinas y además se genera aquí hay un gasto que casi es el Centro que tiene que generar, cubrir los gastos, y por eso uno de mis objetivos es enseñar a los niños y es uno de los que no he cumplido aún porque no tengo como, no tengo el medio, los recursos para enseñar a los niños. Hasta incluso algunos niños o algunos padres tal vez tienen suficiente dinero para pagar los cursos, hay padres que tal vez no tienen, y eso es lo que yo quisiera hacer es tener un centro de computación absolutamente ya dedicado para los niños."

prominent barrier to ICT access, including physical infrastructure such as reliable electrical energy and roads as well as communication infrastructure such as land phone lines. Table 3 demonstrates how both of these barriers are more acute in rural areas. Although it is difficult to find reliable data that breaks down socioeconomic and communication data by ethnicity, the higher proportions of Mayan peoples in rural areas generally indicates that indigenous communities have higher levels of poverty and lower levels of access to communication and transportation services than Ladinos. According to the 2004 World Bank Guatemala country study, "Poverty is predominantly rural, and higher among the indigenous...there is a significant poverty belt in the Northern and North-Western regions."<sup>112</sup>

**Table 3: National statistics: poverty and technology**

Key Statistics	Total	Urban	Rural
Population (July 2003 est.)	13,909,384	40%	60%
Poverty (2004)	56.2%	27.4%	75%
Extreme poverty (2004)	15.7%	2.8%	25%
Surfaced Roads (2003)	39.8%	65.3%	28.3%
Electricity (2004)	73%	95%	56%
Community public telephone (2004)	64%	89%	44%
Fixed telephone lines (2004)	15%	31%	03%
Cellular mobile subscribers	1,577,100 (2002), 10% (2004)	18%	03%
Internet users	400,000 (2002)		
Internet density	333.42 per 10,000 inhabitants (2002)		
Access to cable television	70% (2003)		

Sources: World Bank (2004, 2003) *Prensa Libre*

However, these are not absolute limitations, as demonstrated by the use of satellite Internet in rural areas, which overcomes the lack of phone lines, and solar power when electricity is unavailable.<sup>113</sup>

<sup>112</sup> World Bank, 2004, p. 3.

<sup>113</sup> FUPEDDES administrator Anabella de Leon shared the story of her friend Maria Esteban, from Playa Grande, Ixcán, a remote region in northern Quiché where numerous communities of returned refugees have settled. Anabella went with Maria to Sweden in 2003, where Maria participated in the World Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child. "I can give you an example, I met Maria Esteban this year, she lives in a community with very few resource, with very little access, the closest place where there is a municipal organization is about two hours away by bus. I met her in the offices of the Population Center in Resistance, which is the organization that supports development there...(they have) a computer and those who know how to use the Internet and have an email address can use it. I never thought that you would find that in her community, because they don't even have electricity, with the help of an organization they achieved the installation of solar panels, so now they have electricity that isn't constant...only a few hours each day they have access to electricity through the solar panels and with this energy they run the computers and access the Internet...In this community in the Ixcán, they are Q'anjob'ales, but they arrived there because they were fleeing from the conflicts, their origin is in the north of Huehuetenango. So she has gotten access to the Internet, so in the time we were together, we opened an email account for her and she can now communicate with her friends from around the world, because that's the only way, there is not even a post office nearby, she can't even write a letter and

The experiences of the FUPEDDES students illustrate how varied access to infrastructure is in rural Guatemala. For example, the students from Cantel, due to its proximity enjoy relatively convenient access to the modern telecommunications services available in Xela, which include high speed Internet at the average, affordable (at least for some) price of US\$0.50 per hour.

Distance from the municipal center emerges as a second factor that determines access to urban services. A student from a rural canton of Totonicapán described how computer services are available in the municipal center, but

My community is very small, there really isn't any technology... Thus the villages that are more developed and the people more organized, there are computer centers, computer programs and also typewriting, with typewriters, and there are also Internet classes, but this is only in other communities and if people want to go to these communities or to the urban centers, they have to travel. Specifically in my community, they don't exist.<sup>114</sup>

A Maya-Chuj student from San Mateo Ixtatán, Huehuetenango told of the communication difficulties in his town, which only recently received telephone services. He was unable to pursue a study opportunity due to the inability to stay in contact with the granting organization. Neither were computers available in his town, but he traveled to Barillas, several hours by bus, to study at a computer center there.<sup>115</sup>

The following charts demonstrate how infrastructure developed in the Huista region of the rural northwest Huehuetenango. The range of services available illustrates how this ongoing process varies from town to town even within the same region of rural Guatemala.

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send it. 'The Internet is incredible,' she told me, 'I can't believe that I can now communicate with my friend in Vietnam.'" Interview with Anabella de Leon, age 30, July 25, 2003.

*"Te pongo un ejemplo yo conocí a María Esteban este año vive en una comunidad con muy pocos recursos, con muy pocos accesos, el lugar más cercano donde hay una organización municipal y todo eso le queda como dos horas en bus, yo conocía allá en la oficina de la CPR, que es la organización que apoya el desarrollo...una computadora y los que saben utilizar Internet o los que tienen un correo electrónico, pueden usarla, Yo no creía que en la comunidad de María que si pudiera ver, porque ellos ni siquiera tienen energía eléctrica, a través del apoyo de una organización lograron instalar paneles solares, entonces es una energía que no está constante,...por lo menos, unas horas por día, acceso a la energía a través de paneles solares, y con esta energía corren las computadoras y accesan al Internet...en la comunidad en el Ixcán, son q'anjob'ales, pero aparecieron en este lado justamente por andar huyendo del conflicto, porque su origen creo que es el norte de Huehuetenango, entonces ella si consiguió acceso al Internet, entonces en el tiempo que estuvimos juntos, logramos abrirla una dirección de correo electrónico y comunicarse con todo sus amigos que tiene alrededor del mundo, porque es la única forma, porque tampoco hay una oficina de correo cerca, tampoco puede escribir una carta y mandarlo, entonces mire, el Internet es increíble, ella me decía 'No puedo creer que me puedo comunicar ahorita con mi amigo en Vietnam'."*

<sup>114</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES student from Totonicapán, age 19, July 3, 2003. *"Mi comunidad es muy pequeña, no existe, o sea no hay ni un tipo de tecnología...Entonces esas aldeas están más desarrolladas y las personas más organizadas, allí hay centros de computación, programas de computación también de mecanografía, con las maquinas de escribir, y también hay clases de Internet, pero es solo en otras comunidades y si las personas desean ir en otras comunidades o al pueblo, o al centro pues, tienen que viajar. Propiamente de la comunidad no existe."*

<sup>115</sup> Some higher education programs are taking advantage of distance learning possibilities for rural students. FUPEDDES, for example, also offers their university-level development journalism degree through a distance learning program targeted at rural journalists. The students send in weekly assignments via email and visit Xela once a month for workshops and discussions.

**Table 4: Electricity in the Mancomunidad Huista**

Municipality	Approx. date of initial installation of electricity	Actual Coverage
San Miguel Acatán	1985	70%
Santa Ana Huista	1980	No estimate
San Antonio Huista	1970	80%
Concepción Huista	1975	90%
Jacaltenango	1980	No estimate
Todos Santos Cuchumatán	1975	90%
La Democracia	1980	95%

Source: Municipal offices

As Table 4 demonstrates, although these municipalities are in the extreme northwest corner of Huehuetenango, electricity began serving the municipal centers for over two decades ago. Electricity arrived to the rural *aldeas* much later, however, and some villages in every municipality remain without electricity. And even where this service does exist, it is unreliable, with prolonged power outages and an unstable current that can damage computers and other machines.

Cardenas, the manager of the *Mancomunidad*, asked if I had experienced an outage during one of my visits: "I don't know if you had the luck, the bad luck, to be here during a blackout, but the lights go out all the time here, the electricity is always going out constantly, not just here but all other municipalities."<sup>116</sup> Other common descriptors for the electricity services in these areas were "*pésimo*" (awful) or "*inestable*" (unstable). Avoiding permanent damage due to sudden outages or surges in current requires using a voltage regulator or UPS, or universal power supply, is required to. One UPS can cost between US\$50 and \$100, and each computer (or printer, photocopy machine, etc) requires one.

The computer center in Cantel experienced the same problems with unreliable electricity, despite their proximity to urban Xela and the presence of two overlapping electricity providers: the public utility and OCSA, a private company. Initially, the computers did not have voltage protection and one of the six machines failed in the first weeks of classes. Classes ended promptly at 6 pm; as people in their homes began turning on household lights, the lights in the center would dim and computers would shut down, potentially resulting in a damaged hard drive. Frequently, even using one of the laser printers would also cause machines to shut down.

**Table 5: Communication in the Mancomunidad Huista**

Municipality	Telgua land telephone lines	Celular telephones	Community satellite phones
San Miguel Acatán	No	No	Yes
Santa Ana Huista	2004	No	Yes

<sup>116</sup> Interview with director of *Mancomunidad* Huista Alfredo Cardenas, age 50, October 24, 2003. "*No se si tuviste la suerte, la buena o mala suerte, de vivir un apagón por acá, pero acá constantemente se va la luz, se va constantemente la energía y eso no solo acá pero todo el nivel de los municipios.*"

San Antonio Huista	2000	2004, Comcel	No
Concepción Huista	No	No	1999, but they no longer function
Jacaltenango	2002	No	In villages
Todos Santos Cuchumatán	2002		Yes
La Democracia	2004	2003, PCS	Yes

Source: Municipal offices

Table 5 illustrates the uneven distribution of telephone service in the Huista region. As of the end of 2003, four of the seven municipal offices surveyed awaited the installation of a Telgua land line in their office. The national telephone company, Telgua, was privatized in 1998, but the government continues to own Guatel, which oversees the rural public telephone network and rural land line installations. According to the World Bank, “the number of rural public telephones increased by 80% since the Peace Accords,”<sup>117</sup> indicating that Guatel is making improvements in rural telephone service. Anecdotal evidence from residents of the Huista region reveals that applicants for a home phone line must still wait long periods for service to be connected, and people also complain that when Telgua does finally connect service to a town, technical constraints limit the number of phone lines. Considerable unmet demand continues to exist. Land phone lines make possible Internet connections through the free ISP service provided by Telgua, although the dialup connections are slow and prone to disconnect. The price can be prohibitive for low-income users, as the call is equivalent to charges levied for calling a cellular phone, 50 centavos a minute, or US\$1 per sixteen minutes of connection to the Internet.

The overall teledensity increased almost fivefold during the period from 1997 to 2001; most of this increase is due to the dramatic increase in cell phone ownership. According to the World Bank:

Although the richest quintile (top 20% income bracket) accounts for half of new cellular subscriptions (as second telephones), there is evidence that cellular phones are having a wider social impact. In rural areas, cellular phones are as common as fixed lines and two-thirds represent first telephones for households that lack a fixed-line service. Moreover, there is considerable anecdotal evidence that cell phones are being used to provide an informal public “pay phone” service for rural communities.<sup>118</sup>

However, the public good resulting from the increase in cellular telephony should not be overstated. The national government does not regulate this sector; most companies offer service through pre-paid cards that require a significant initial capital investment, usually more than Q400 (US\$50.) A cell phone owner must then buy cards at a rate of one minute for one quetzal. Furthermore, the mountainous topography prevents wide service networks; for example, the construction of a tower in the municipal center of Todos Santos Cuchumatán does not provide service for residents of the neighboring municipality Concepción Huista. Furthermore, phones on one network do not work with another network’s tower, resulting in very patchy coverage areas in rural areas. This problem is particularly acute in Huehuetenango; many FUPEDS students carry cellular phones that function in Xela but quit working once they leave Huehuetenango City and head into the highlands mountains and lowlands closer to the Mexican border.

<sup>117</sup> World Bank, 2004, p. 138.

<sup>118</sup> World Bank, 2004, p. 138.

**Table 6: Cable television and Internet in the *Mancomunidad Huista***

Municipality	Cable television	Computers in municipal office	Internet centers
San Miguel Acatán	1997	2002	No
Santa Ana Huista	2003	2000	No
San Antonio Huista	1998	2002	2003 (1 center)
Concepción Huista	No	No	No
Jacaltenango	2000	Yes	2002 (3 centers)
Todos Santos Cuchumatán	2004	1999	2003 (1 center)
La Democracia	2003	2002	2002 (2 centers)

Source: Municipal offices

Probably no media has had a greater impact in the last decade on rural indigenous communities than cable television. According to the Ministry of Communications, Infrastructure and Housing more than 300 cable companies provide service in Guatemala, and at least sixty-nine of these are pirate stations.<sup>119</sup> Cable service is available to 70% of the population and 76% of the rural population, although the actual number of subscribers is far lower, as many cannot afford to pay the monthly fees for cable service.<sup>120</sup> Cable in rural areas is far more likely to feature local programming than the broadcast networks, which are under the monopoly control of Mexican media mogul Angel Gonzalez. In this sense, cable is credited for democratizing national television<sup>121</sup> and providing more options for local and national news rather than programming from Mexico or the US. The lack of disposable income in rural areas to spend on television programming provides the primary barrier to cable penetration, although pirate and cooperative cable networks have decreased these prices. Internet via cable is only available in Guatemala City and a handful of other urban areas. It is an impractical solution in rural areas because it requires high quality digital cable lines and a cable modem for each end user.

In the last few years municipal offices integrated computers into their work with corresponding increases in productivity and speed of service in producing documents for petitioners. While computers are seen as a benefit, the mayor of San Miguel Acatán pointed out that they are difficult and expensive to maintain, as they have to take their equipment to Huehuetenango for service. The presence of Internet centers in these rural towns demonstrates that ICTs can penetrate these communities despite the infrastructure and other barriers. All of these centers rely on satellite Internet connections. San Antonio and Jacaltenango have centers that are private business initiatives led by local people. In Todos Santos, the Internet center is run by a local cooperative that also runs the local community radio station. *Intervida*, a Spanish NGO, funds and supports two centers in La Democracia.

<sup>119</sup> *Prensa Libre*. "Persiguen piratería de canales de cable (Pirate cable channels persecuted)." March 31, 2004.

<sup>120</sup> *Prensa Libre*. "Televisión, 65% prefiere el cable (Television, 65% prefer cable)." February 9, 2003.

<sup>121</sup> *Prensa Libre*. "Televisión por cable irrumpe en el área rural (Cable television explodes in rural areas)." August 19, 2001.

### 2.2.3. Differential access: lack of educational opportunities

Another barrier that prevents many from gaining access to ICTs or taking advantage of the access that does exist is the lack of educational opportunities that provide the necessary base of skills for ICT use. Most prominent are the high levels of illiteracy in rural areas, a problem more acute among women and older people, two demographics for whom access is the most problematic. While the national literacy rate is 88% for men and 76% for women, disparities exist according to ethnicity (indigenous 70%, non-indigenous to 89%) and location (rural 74%, urban 93%). The regions with the lowest literacy rates are the northern (62%) and northwest regions (64%).<sup>122</sup>

While the high levels of illiteracy in rural areas remain a barrier to access, community-level strategies for information dissemination can overcome this barrier, if trained users develop accessible media, for example, community radio programming based on information obtained via Internet. A student from a rural village of Santa Cruz de Quiche recognizes this possibility:

Well one of the advantages of the Internet is that we, or people in my community, the ones who already know a little about using the Internet, we could access information from other countries to make it known in the same community, because there exists an isolation of information in these communities, therefore sometimes they find out about what is going on in other countries but the information they receive is totally distorted, even to the point it could be a lie. Thus the Internet we can use as a media that provides us true information.<sup>123</sup>

But the problem of insufficient educational resources in a community has consequences even for those who do get access to computers and the Internet. First, due to the lack of trained ICT professionals in most rural communities, most people gain access without having received training about how to best take advantage of the information and communication tools that the Internet provides. Computer academies and computer labs in schools are not widespread enough to adequately address this need. The Tz'utujil computer vendor in San Pedro La Laguna sees this secondary barrier among his customers:

There are many people with computers in their homes but they only use them to write, and that's it. And after that nothing else. It's very little. They don't want to start going any farther. They just use Word, Excel, and that's it, they say 'I can use a computer' but that is not all a computer is good for...That's only using about 5%, but the other 95% is wasted, and they don't see the benefits.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> United Nations Development Program. *Metas del Milenio: Informe de Avance de Guatemala (Millenium Goals: Report on Guatemala's Advancement)*. United Nations Report, October 7, 2003.

<<http://www.pnudguatemala.org/documentos/pdfs/milenio/PROBRE~1.PDF>>.

<sup>123</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES student from Santa Cruz de Quiche, age 22, July 11, 2003. "Bueno una de las ventajas del Internet es que nosotros, o sea en la comunidad, los que sabemos un poco ya para manejar el Internet, adquirir tal vez información de otros países para darlos a conocer en la misma comunidad, porque existe un aislamiento de información en estas comunidades, por lo tanto ellos a veces se enteran de lo que sucede otros países pero está totalmente distorsionado la información que reciben, hasta a veces puede ser mentira, entonces ya el Internet lo podemos utilizar como un medio que nos proporcione información verídica."

<sup>124</sup> Interview with Felipe Navichoc, age 30, November 15, 2003. "Hay mucha gente que tiene computadora en su casa pero solo les sirve para escribir, y ya. Y de allí no hay más. Es muy corto. No quieren empezar más allá. Solo usan Word, usan Excel y ya, dicen que 'ya manejo una computadora,' pero eso no es todo de una computadora...Es útil, tal vez en un 5%, pero el 95% es tirado, entonces no ven los beneficios."

Second, many young people require orientation about what exists on the Internet that is potentially detrimental to the community of users, including but not limited to, pornography, anti-social behavior, or information that reproduces discriminatory stereotypes about women and even indigenous people themselves. While many view this moral orientation as the primary responsibility of the family, they also recognize that most indigenous parents do not have the knowledge and understanding of the Internet sufficient to challenge its presumed authority.

As a result of this lack of orientation, most young people must figure out on their own how to take advantage of the valuable information and communication possibilities of the Internet. FUPEDS director Eulalia Camposeco stated,

I think that in many ways this orientation doesn't exist in the school, I think for example that if the schools did have this service it would be much easier...Really, I think that there is a lot of responsibility on the parents, without a doubt, but one cannot rely on parents, obviously, because the parents of this generation of young people generally do not have the knowledge of the appropriate use of the computer...One cannot rely on the teacher, nor on the family, nor on the parents, thus I think that many young people are practically improvising this.<sup>125</sup>

#### 2.2.4 Differential access: intergenerational conflict

The connectivity that does exist in rural areas is disproportionately available to young people, in part because they are more likely to take advantage of computer centers and in part because higher levels of education make computer use easier for young people. Rigoberto Zamora of PROBIGUA sees this development as positive and works with young people to build the computer skills necessary to enhance their job and educational prospects: "this has become an enormous advantage in the sense that these young people will be able to continue their studies and become better students. The majority of young people are inclined toward technology."<sup>126</sup> However, this development has drawbacks as well, as many young people view the Internet (and technology in general) as a source of authority that undermines the traditional authority of local elders, who have little contact with electronic information.

A student from Cantel analyzes this disparity:

Basically if we focus on the Internet, I think that the influence isn't that great, because the Internet usually doesn't reach the whole community, it only reaches the students, the public office holders, university graduates, people who are professionals...when it reaches the young people it also begins to change their ideology, we have seen cases in which, the father of the family tells his son 'you shouldn't do something, you shouldn't be doing this' but the child responds and says that 'those are the ways of the past.' This is because the child's ideology, we can say, is much more advanced in the ways of technology, because the mass media and all the wide range of

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<sup>125</sup> Interview with FUPEDS director Eulalia Camposeco, age 38, May 30, 2003. "Yo pienso que de alguna manera que no exista esa orientación en las escuelas, creo que por ejemplo si las escuelas tuvieran este servicio creo que sería mucho más fácil...Realmente, creo que obviamente hay mucha responsabilidad de los padres, verdad, sin embargo, uno no puede esperar, obviamente, los padres de estas generaciones jóvenes en su mayoría no tienen el conocimiento, digamos, del uso adecuado de la tecnología...No se puede esperar ni del maestro, ni de la familia, ni de los padres, entonces yo creo los jóvenes prácticamente están improvisando esto."

<sup>126</sup> Interview with PROBIGUA director Rigoberto Zamora Charuc, November 20, 2003. "Eso ya es una ventaja enorme en el sentido de que esos jóvenes podrán continuar sus estudios y podrán hacerse buenos estudiantes, la mayoría de jóvenes se inclinan por la tecnología..."

information that comes from outside the community, like it or not, this comes in and provokes changes in the ideologies of the young people, among the young ladies, this is where it can be seen the most.<sup>127</sup>

The effects of immigration compounds the problem, both in the case of migrant parents unable to closely supervise their children and in the case of younger immigrants who return to their communities after living in the United States. A student from Jacaltenango speaks to the first situation:

From there another problem arises, many parents leave, the children stay and no one orients them...they begin to learn, they begin to take up new vices, and they don't focus on learning something productive, for example on education, to read or to do something creative which shows their capabilities, no, to the contrary they learn and do what they see on television, and all of those styles, this is a problem that is very difficult to combat and is what is happening now.<sup>128</sup>

The Ladino municipal secretary of Todos Santos, speaking for the older generation, points out the negative cultural changes among the youth of the town:

Because now we see that the youth, they have become poorly dressed with their caps on sideways, ripped pants and wearing ruined clothes, excuse me for speaking like this, but the ideas of the youth...because they are going to other places, and those that are coming from other countries, they come back already smoking marijuana, drugging themselves, letting their hair grow long, using earrings, in total a bunch of different things. That is not from here.<sup>129</sup>

These commentaries suggest that community divisions result from the influence of international mass media (including the Internet for a small segment of the population with access) and the experience of migration, creating tensions between community traditionalists and young people whose behavior is shaped by outside influences.

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<sup>127</sup> Interview with FUPEDS student from Cantel, age 24, July 7, 2003. "Básicamente si nos enfocamos en el Internet yo creo que la influencia no es demasiado porque muchas veces también el Internet no llega a toda la comunidad, solo llega a los estudiantes, a los funcionarios públicos, a los universitarios, y cosas o sea, les llega esta información a personas que son profesionales...si le llega al hijo también como que le va cambiando la ideología y pues hemos visto casos de que, pues, el padre de familia le dice al hijo 'eso no debe hacer,' 'eso no se tiene que hacer,' pero el hijo le responde y le dice que eso es cosa del pasado. Es porque la ideología que el maneja lo tiene como que mucho más avanzado podríamos decir en el nivel tecnológico, porque como también los medios masivos y todo la gran gama de información que viene del extranjero, quiera o no, eso viene a provocar un cambio a la ideología entre los jóvenes, entre las señoritas, es allí donde más creo que se da."

<sup>128</sup> Interview with FUPEDS student from Jacaltenango, age 25, July 11, 2003. "Entonces de allí también surge otro problema, los padres se van, los hijos se quedan crecen y nadie los orienta...empiezan a aprender, empiezan a agarrar nuevos vicios, pero no se enfoca en aprender algo productivo, por ejemplo en educación, a leer o hacer algo creativo, que demuestra su capacidad, no, al contrario es aprender y hacer lo que vi en la television, y todo de estos estilos, eso es un problema que a veces muy difícil combatirlo y que se está viendo ahora."

<sup>129</sup> Interview with Manuel Lopez, age 52, October 16, 2003. "Porque ahora ya vemos la juventud, ya que son mal vestidos con las gorras así, los pantalones rotos y todos desbaratados, disculpe que hablé así, pero ya las ideas de la juventud...porque ya van a otros lugares, pero los que vienen de otros países, ya vienen que fumando marijuana, drogándose, dejando que crecer el pelo, que usando arete, que en fin un montón de cosas. Y no es de acá, pues."

### 2.2.5 Easy availability of inappropriate content that places a higher value on other cultures over local culture

Mayan young people with access to ICTs improvise their way through the Internet, learning how to find useful information, while recognizing that the Internet contains information irrelevant or even detrimental to personal and cultural development. Without orientation and training, individuals must often decide for themselves what is useful and appropriate and what is potentially damaging.

A student from San Mateo commented that

There in the Internet we can see many things so that it has to depend on you, or, if you take this as a positive or negative depends on how you act. As we have said with other friends that the Internet is a lot like money, with money you can buy evil things, or you can buy good things. That is how it is because you can see lots of bad things there, for example how to make a bomb, I would consider that evil, and you can also find (on the Internet) how to pray, for example, which for me is a positive.<sup>130</sup>

A student from Jacaltenango agreed that young people have a responsibility for their use of ICTs,

It has to be repeated to the youth, that they use the technology well, that they use for their formation as human beings, in order to share with others, and that they don't use it just to look for satisfactions, to look for some kind of violence or to be able to destroy other human beings that exist and have the same rights as us.<sup>131</sup>

The following comment, from a student from Totonicapán, argues that the Internet has a negative influence on many indigenous people due to the foreign cultural influences:

On the other hand to say that (the Internet) brings us some kind of benefit, that it helps us to think, that it helps us to value what is ours, I don't think that it helps us in this sense. Thus it could be that this is a disadvantage because we as indigenous often we don't want to value that which, or, we don't want to value that which is our culture because we are being taught other things.<sup>132</sup>

These commentaries demonstrate that these indigenous students became aware of the pitfalls

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<sup>130</sup> Interview with FUPEDS student from San Mateo Ixtatán, age 23, July 7, 2003. *"Allí en Internet podemos ver muchas cosas entonces ya allí se tiene que partir de UDS. O si es que tomas como positivo o negativo depende de la actuación que va a ser de Ud. Según hemos comentado con otros compañeros que el Internet casi viene haciendo como el dinero. Con el dinero puedes comprar cosas malas, o puedes comprar cosas buenas. Así está entonces porque allí puedes ver muchas cosas malas en la vida, en cuanto a como hacer una bomba, pues considero de que eso es malo, y también allí puedes encontrar de cómo rezar por ejemplo. Bueno, para mi eso es lo positivo."*

<sup>131</sup> Interview with FUPEDS student from Jacaltenango, age 26, July 7, 2003. *"Hay que recomendarles bastante a los jóvenes, que usen bien la tecnología; que lo usen para su formación como seres humanos, para poder compartir con los demás, y no lo usen para poder buscar satisfacciones, para poder buscar alguna violencia o para poder destruir a otros seres humanos que existen y que tienen el mismo derecho que nosotros."*

<sup>132</sup> Interview with FUPEDS student from Totonicapán, age 19, July 3, 2003. *"En cambio ya si por decir de que nosotros nos traiga algo de beneficio, de que nos ayude a pensar, de que nos ayude a valorar nuestra, no creo yo que nos ayude en este sentido el Internet. Entonces puede que éste sea una desventaja, porque nosotros los indígenas muchas a veces no quieren valorar lo que, no queremos valorar lo que es nuestra cultura porque nos están enseñando otras cosas."*

associated with Internet use and that they utilize a strategy of improvisation to determine what contents are appropriate and which can have negative consequences for their cultural identity. Chapter 3 examines this theme in detail.

### Chapter 3: Global flows, local culture

The power imbalances, asymmetric flows and cultural exchanges that constitute relations between the global and the local have generated numerous frameworks for analyzing processes of cultural change, cultural resistance and cultural adaptation. Many of these frameworks ultimately undermine individual and community agency in the modern world due to a misconception of indigenous peoples as somehow isolated from the previous effects of globalization, and thus they focus analysis on the positive and negative impacts of global culture and information flows on people unprepared for the onslaught of modernity.<sup>133</sup>

Instead, any discussion of the impacts of global media on local culture must be based upon the historic process of unequal access to power that has characterized relations between the Maya of Guatemala and the *kaxlan*<sup>134</sup> world since the beginning of the colonial period. Since the Spanish invasion, the Maya have become increasingly linked to global processes, whether as converts to Catholicism, through land expropriations and forced labor on coffee and other export agricultural plantations, as laborers in constructing the urban centers of Quetzaltenango and Guatemala City, or through their consumption of increasing quantities of products from transnational corporations. Add to these historical interconnections the recent internal displacement toward urban areas as a result of the civil war, migration to the United States in search of work opportunities and the emerging Mayan urban professional class, and the result is that it becomes impossible to analytically separate the global from the local or to imagine indigenous communities as previously untouched by the various cultural and economic influences of globalization. Sociologist Mike Featherstone writes that “what does seem clear is that it is not helpful to regard the global and the local as dichotomies separated in space or time; it would seem that the processes of globalization and localization are inextricably bound together in the current phase.”<sup>135</sup>

Thus this analysis has as one of its goals to “fundamentally disrupt impact models and open the way for more politically enabling understandings”<sup>136</sup> by grounding itself in the historic and specific

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<sup>133</sup> Thomas Friedman, the popular Foreign Affairs columnist for the New York Times, is a good example of a commentator on globalization who emphasizes a narrative of homogenization and de-emphasizes the complex ways that local communities are manifesting global and local agency. His book *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999) compares the modern to the Lexus and the traditional to the olive tree: “The biggest threat today to your olive tree is likely to come from the Lexus – from all the anonymous, transnational, homogenizing, standardizing market forces and technologies that make up today’s globalizing economic system. There are some things about this system that can make the Lexus so overpowering it can overrun and overwhelm every olive tree in sight – and this can produce a real backlash. But there are other things about this system that empower even the smallest, weakest political community to actually use the new technologies to preserve their olive trees, their culture and identity. Traveling the world in recent years, I have been fascinated to see this simultaneous wrestling match, tug-of-war, balancing act, between the Lexus and the olive tree.” (29) Despite Friedman’s acknowledgement of this historic struggle, he maintains that “Culturally speaking, globalization is largely, though not entirely, the spread of Americanization – from Big Macs to iMacs to Mickey Mouse – on a global scale.” (8) This thesis explores the dimension of globalization that Friedman mentions tends to marginalize; Mayan cultural activism through ICTS demonstrates that local communities take advantage of global tools and strategies to promote their cultural survival and, by extension, global heterogeneity.

<sup>134</sup> *Kaxlan* is used in a number of Mayan languages to mean foreign, or non-indigenous. In K’iche’, for example, food is *wa* and bread is called *kaxla’n wa*.

<sup>135</sup> Featherstone, Mike. “Localism, Globalism and Cultural Identity.” *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality*. Martin, Linda, and Mendieta, Eduardo, eds. p. 343.

<sup>136</sup> Hart, Gillian. “Re-placing Power in Post-Apartheid South Africa.” 2000, p. 52.

contexts that determine the multiplicity of contemporary indigenous social realities, which are not merely the product or effect of global flows, but actively constitute those flows. The young, computer literate Maya, the primary source of insight upon which this analysis is based, do not function merely as empty vessels to receive cultural information from transnational sources. Neither are they essentially and unchangeably Maya, unthinkingly reproducing the authentic cultural practices of their ancestors. Instead, they actively and selectively create new cultural practices through the deployment of multi-layered identities, guided by the logic and socialization of their families and communities while employing the tools and strategies of the Information Age.

They understand their culture as a resource and a foundation for their resistance to the foreign influences of transnational consumerism in spite of their increasingly fluid identities, which require the mastery of multiple cultural repertoires. This cultural consciousness capitalizes on and responds to the opening offered by the hegemonic framework – indigenous rights – but it also arises as a result of the crisis of their entrance into modernity, the contradictory need to belong to a culturally distinct people despite the constant and positional negotiations of cross-boundary interactions. Mayan efforts to take advantage of ICTs for integral development materialize this cultural distinctiveness; they give shape, form and expression to the collective sentiment that affirms the value of their culture for the future of their people.

The Mayan cultural affirmation movement not only faces challenges from the globalizing forces of modernity but also from within. One challenge is the difficulty of including the diverse needs and expressions of Mayan communities – more than twenty distinct ethnicities and languages<sup>137</sup>, women and children, old and young, with sometimes diverging interests on issues relating to class, religion, and ethnic consciousness. Pan-Mayan activism must encompass and encourage diverse strains of Mayan thought to foster the creativity of cultural revitalization, and the spread of low-cost technology for cultural production and mass media should contribute to the diversity of cultural expression.

A second challenge is one of authenticity and results from internal divisions within Mayan demographics, as professional jobs are available primarily in urban areas and the educated elite must migrate even as they seek to maintain connections with their hometowns. Today, increased access to communications can strengthen those connections, even while they enable rural communities increasing access to global ideas and expand their imagination for possible regional, national and international networks. Sustaining cultural authenticity throughout this process does not imply the existence of a static, rural, mechanically reproduced culture, but instead calls for the creation and recreation of cultural practice to fit the changing experience of the Mayan people, utilizing cultural elements as resources to organize communities and affirm cultural distinctiveness.

This chapter interweaves theoretical concepts from the fields of anthropology and globalization studies, with statements from leading Mayan intellectuals and commentaries from Mayan computer users dealing with these contradictions in their everyday lives. Section 3.1 provides an ethnographic narrative of the flexible nature of Mayan identity through the lived experience of the youth of Cantel. Section 3.2 establishes a theoretical basis for the discussion, while Section 3.3 discusses the importance of preserving Mayan culture in the context of racism and globalization. Section 3.4 examines attitudes toward cultural change and discusses the academic and popular debate over how cultural change occurs. Section 3.5 analyzes Mayan cultural resistance throughout history and discusses the authenticity discourse prominent among Guatemalan Mayan intellectual leaders. Section 3.6 discusses the final

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<sup>137</sup> Colop, Sam. “Violadores de la ley : Se reconoce el “idioma Chalchiteko”, sin contar con el dictamen técnico de la ALMG (Violators of the Law: the *Chalchiteko* language is recognized without the technical declaration of the ALMG).” *Prensa Libre*. June 28, 2003.

framework for understanding the intersections of culture and global flows, cultural adaptation. The result of these overlapping, simultaneous processes are hybridized cultural products and cultural appropriation that refocus attention from the homogenizing nature of globalization to the heterogeneous constructions of modern indigenous identity.

### 3.1 Challenging theoretical assumptions of identity

A complex understanding of the flexible and context driven nature of identities is key to the arguments of this paper. Personally, this became apparent to me when I began teaching computer classes in the Maya-K'iche' town Cantel, just south of Quetzaltenango. Having already studied K'iche' for two months, I hoped that working in Cantel would give me an opportunity to practice speaking with the students and encourage their reflection on the importance of language to individual and community identity in the context of learning to use computers with English-language operating systems and software.

My strategy was to establish a tri-lingual classroom environment in which we would communicate with each other in Spanish, learn English vocabulary to manipulate programs, and practice translating relevant English and Spanish terms into K'iche' to demonstrate the compatibility of the community's traditional language with modern technology.

My naïve intentions to correct the language prestige effects of English-only technology quickly met the reality of language shift in Cantel. Of my seventeen students, only two, ages 36 and 42, spoke K'iche' fluently. The rest, including a group of students in their twenties and another group from eight to fifteen, spoke and understood very little of the language of their parents and grandparents. My optimism quickly gave way to unease, as my brief but intensive study of conversational K'iche' gave me a larger vocabulary than most of my students, and my questions as to how to think about translating computer words like "shut down" and "file" were met with blank stares.

Once I began to get to know these students, I found that I could not make any assumptions about their indigenous identity based on their monolingualism - the girls wear *traje*, the boys work in their families' corn fields and all of them enjoy and take pride in their K'iche' culture and its local Cantel manifestations. While they expressed more desire to learn and speak English than K'iche' - they often shouted "goodbye, teacher!" as they left class - I cannot conclude that their identity as Maya-K'iche' is somehow incomplete without taking into consideration the power structures underlying our interactions which ascribe to English a higher status than K'iche' or even Spanish: the English-only computers donated by international supporters as both symbols and tools of modern technology, my own presence as teacher and native speaker of English, and the numerous tales of family and friends from Cantel who have migrated to the United States and learned English as a survival strategy.

Thus my fieldwork experience taught me that superficial assumptions equating language and identity are not particularly useful at the level of an individual's understanding of their ethnicity and culture. As described by Maya K'iche' scholar Irma Velasquez, the K'iche' petit bourgeoisie of Quetzaltenango have adopted a cultural survival strategy that has balanced a decline in the use of their indigenous language without a corresponding disappearance of their identity as K'iche'.<sup>138</sup> This complex

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<sup>138</sup> Velasquez writes "The petty bourgeoisie K'ichee' have an internal logic within the struggle to protect and conserve their K'ichee' culture. At the same time, this sector negotiates with the Ladino culture the influences that they have on the the K'ichee' culture...In the cultural negotiation between Ladinos and K'ichee's the official language of Guatemala is Spanish, the schools function in Spanish, the judicial system functions in Spanish, etc. These are only a few examples of the unequal 'cultural negotiation' that exists between Ladinos and K'ichee's. For this, if the K'ichee's of this sector were not to send their children to the school, where the majority of the students are Ladino

negotiation is only complicated by anthropological theory that fails to account for simultaneously multiple and multi-layered identities. The precocious and talented children of Cantel directly challenged any facile understanding I brought into my fieldwork about the inseparability of language and culture.

### 3.2 What is culture? A theoretical discussion of culture in the context of globalization

Historically, anthropology has understood culture through lists of traits, including language, dress, kinship patterns, sexuality and religious rituals. A narrow focus on the practice and reproduction of culture conceals the mechanisms for cultural continuity, which occur at the level of individual and group socialization, within the context of local, national and global structural inequalities. Social theorist Pierre Bourdieu argues “it is necessary to abandon all theories which explicitly or implicitly treat practice as a mechanical reaction, directly determined by the antecedent conditions and entirely reducible to the mechanical functioning of pre-established assemblies.”<sup>139</sup> Bourdieu approaches a minimal definition of culture when he sets forth his idea of the habitus, “understood as a system of lasting, transposable dispositions which, integrating past experiences, functions at every moment as a matrix of perceptions, appreciations, and actions and makes possible the achievement of infinitely diversified tasks.”<sup>140</sup>

Culture should be understood as not only the traits and practices that mark the bearers of the culture, but also includes the diversity of conditions, histories, values, and shared structural positions of a particular community over time. Thus cultural practice is not completely unpredictable, but can be located within these constantly shifting boundaries.

The principal theoretical starting point to describe how cultural boundaries are established, maintained and challenged is Benedict Anderson’s concept of the “imagined community.” The authors of the 2003 CIRMA study “*Las relaciones étnicas en Guatemala, 1944-2000* (Ethnic Relations in Guatemala, 1944-2000)” extend Anderson’s concept of the imagined community, which originally was used to explain the rise of nationalist identities after the rise of print capitalism and mass media, to describe how modern Maya understand their identity:

The indigenous peoples have maintained a certain level of common identity around their ‘ancestry.’ As it is evidently impossible for millions of indigenous people – specifically for those who come from the tradition of Mayan languages – to trace their common ancestry in the form of genealogies, their origin is a reality that exists as an imagined community. Certain communities share in common ancestral myths, others speak languages that belong to the same Mayan linguistic family, and other affirm that they have lived in the territory that the currently occupy since time immemorial. But, even beyond these common bases, it is probable that no one

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children then they would not master the Spanish and this would have negative consequences for them...For these reasons, the members of this K’ichee’ sector have sent their children to Ladino schools and universities, and one of the results is that a significant sector of the younger generations of K’ichee’s do not know their K’ichee’ language very well.” (“*La pequeña burguesía k’ichee’ tiene una lógica interna con la lucha para proteger y conservar su cultura k’ichee’.* Al mismo tiempo, este sector negocia con la cultura ladina las influencias que ésta podría tener sobre su cultura k’ichee’...En la negociación cultural entre ladinos y k’ichee’s el lenguaje oficial de Guatemala es el español, las escuelas funcionan en español, el sistema judicial funciona en español, etc. Los anteriores son solo algunos ejemplos de la desigual ‘negociación cultural’ que existe entre los ladinos y los k’ichee’s. Por eso, si los k’ichee’s de este sector no mandaran a sus hijos a las escuelas, donde la mayoría de estudiantes son niños ladinos y no dominaran el español tendrían consecuencias negativas para ellos...Por estas razones, los miembros de este sector k’ichee’ han enviado a sus hijos a las escuelas y a las universidades ladinas, y uno de los resultados es que un significativo sector de las generaciones jóvenes k’ichee’s conocen poco de su idioma k’ichee’.”) Velasquez, 2002, pp. 151, 153.

<sup>139</sup> Bourdieu, Pierre. “Structures and the Habitus.” 1972, p. 73.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid. pp. 82-83.

indigenous person has known personally even 1% of the millions of other indigenous persons. The strongest elements that these groups share are their prioritized identification with other indigenous and the ties of solidarity with certain real indigenous communities.<sup>141</sup>

This concept provide a theoretical base to understand the multi-layered identities that characterize many Maya, in particular the young cohort of Maya-hackers who negotiate the globalized terrain of ICTs. The initial socialization for many indigenous children in rural areas often occurs in the local Mayan language and establishes the local community as the primary reference for identity, such as a *municipio* or a smaller political unit such as an *aldea*, *caserío*, *cantón* or *paraje*. Thus the first experienced imagined community arises dues to ties with a geographical place, and grounds itself in the shared cultural practices of the local community.

Spanish language primary education, the only option historically available for indigenous communities, is frequently the first site of contact and difference with Ladino teachers and classmates, the Spanish language, and the nation of Guatemala through the learning of the national hymn, symbols and the Ladino version of national history. Contact with Ladinos living in rural areas reinforces this local indigenous identity, which the national culture marks as different and inferior. Historically and currently, Ladino exercise power in rural areas out of proportion to their numbers in land ownership, local government and through working as labor recruiters for plantations on the south coast and *coyotes* who smuggle hopeful immigrants through Mexico. These unequal social interactions establish the fundamental dichotomy which buttresses Guatemalan racism. These are not racial categories marked exclusively by genetic or biological differences, but maintained through social relations based upon cultural difference. With respect to the spread of ICTs in rural areas, Ladinos have historically enjoyed more access to modern technology, a social fact commented upon by a student from rural San Mateo Ixtatán: “with respect to computers...there are no more than a few people who have computers, only the ones who study or teachers or directors of the schools. But they are all from the other culture, for example, Ladinos as they are called, are those that have them.”<sup>142</sup>

However, these binary racial categories simplify the lived experiences of indigenous people, ignoring the multiple imagined communities that inform ethnic identity. While *municipio* of origin defines identity first, the ethno-linguistic group defines a second identity community, which includes other indigenous *municipios* where the same Mayan language is spoken. The links that unite these communities encompass not only a common language, but also include other shared cultural practices

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<sup>141</sup> Adams, Richard and Santiago Bastos. *Las relaciones étnicas en Guatemala, 1944-2000 (Ethnic Relations in Guatemala, 1944-2000)*. 2003, p. 45. “Los pueblos indígenas han mantenido cierto grado de identidad común en torno a la “ascendencia.” Como es evidentemente imposible para millones de indígenas – específicamente para quienes provienen de la tradición de las lenguas mayas – trazar su ascendencia común en forma de genealogías, sus orígenes son una realidad que existe en el nivel de la comunidad imaginada. Ciertas comunidades poseen en común mitos ancestrales, otras hablan lenguas que pertenecen a una misma familia lingüística maya, y algunas afirman que han vivido en el territorio que actualmente ocupan desde tiempo inmemorial. Pero, más allá de estos fundamentos comunes, es probable que ningún indígena haya conocido personalmente ni siquiera al 1% de los millones de sus compatriotas indígenas. Los elementos de mayor fuerza que comparten estos grupos son su identificación prioritaria con otros indígenas y el mantenimiento de lazos de solidaridad con ciertas comunidades indígenas actuales.”

<sup>142</sup> Interview with FUPEDS student from San Miguel Ixtatán, age 23, July 7, 2003. “Ya en cuanto a las computadoras... son algunas personas nada más son los que tienen computadoras, los que están estudiando o los maestros o directores de las escuelas únicamente. Pero así son personas de otra cultura, por ejemplo de los Ladinos que le llaman, son los que tienen.”

including *milpa* subsistence farming,<sup>143</sup> religious rituals and ceremonial centers, and the shared history of racism and exclusion.

As pointed out by the excerpt from the CIRMA book above, another imagined community unites the experiences of the twenty-two different Mayan ethnicities into the category of Maya, described as the Pan-Mayan movement. This identity category, not necessarily even bounded by national borders, can include the Maya of Chiapas and Yucatán, Mexico, as well as Mayas who migrated to the United States and other countries. International conferences demonstrate the existence of such transnational unity, such as the Fourth Linguistic and Cultural Meeting of the Mayan Peoples of Guatemala, Mexico, Belize, Honduras and El Salvador, held at the headquarters of the ALMG in Guatemala City August 6 to August 9, 2003.

Relations with other social actors, local, national and international structures, racist ideologies, and individual trajectories continually contest and construct these simultaneous and overlapping identity categories. Thus any indigenous person manipulates these identities depending on the context of a specific situation. Taking a hypothetical example of an indigenous student from Jacaltenango studying at the national public university in Guatemala City, the same student might identify himself as Jakalteko in his hometown, as part of the linguistic community Popti' among other indigenous, as Maya-Popti' to identify himself as related to other Mayan ethnic groups, and may further be identified by others as a Ladino due to his mastery of Spanish and access to higher education. Situation-dependent passing as a Ladino (or *mestizo*) is another possibility, as this type of racial passing (made possible by the cultural, rather than biological, nature of racism in Guatemala) can be deployed strategically and does not necessarily imply permanent culture change. The general absence of obvious physiological differences between indigenous, *mestizos* and Ladinos makes possible this strategic manipulation of identity categories and demonstrates how racial categories stem from social relations and not physical characteristics. The simultaneous and multi-layered nature of modern indigenous identity challenges the historical model of one-way, irreversible acculturation, as individual Mayan people continually redefine their identity according to the situation without totally rejecting their indigenous heritage.

The flexible nature of these identity categories was driven home to me through the friendships I developed with a group of Mayan women university students who worked as language instructors at the *Centro Maya de Idiomas* (Mayan Center of Languages). This school in Quetzaltenango, which is run cooperatively by three indigenous men, offers classes in Spanish and Mayan languages and uses part of the tuition to provide scholarships to indigenous women from rural areas who desire to study at the local campus of the public university, San Carlos University. During the spring of 2003, we decided to join some of the teachers in an excursion to a party at San Carlos, celebrating the annual coronation of the *Rey Feo* (Ugly King). We arrived to the girls' apartment a little early, and I was a little surprised when I saw them. Rather than dressing in their regional *traje*, as they always did at the language school, all of the girls were wearing blue jeans, blouses and makeup. When we asked them about the change of wardrobe, they laughed and said that this wasn't the kind of party where they wanted to wear *traje*. Reflecting on their decision, I realized that I could not make any judgments on their "authenticity" as Maya simply based on their decision not to wear *traje* to a social event. They affirmed the flexible attitudes that many young indigenous have toward their culture in their recognition that they do not jeopardize their Mayan identity simply by choosing to dress in Ladino style. Such decisions are not irrevocable, and point out the complex situation-dependent negotiations that are a daily fact of life for modern Mayan people.

Arjun Appadurai argues that in the modern global cultural economy, imagination and

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<sup>143</sup> *Milpa* agriculture is the traditional system of Mayan farming. It involves planting corn, beans and squash in the same plot of land and periodic burning to replenish nutrients in the soil.

detrterritorialization have become two fundamental determinants of identities, which can no longer be grounded exclusively in a single place, but instead are shaped by global flows.

“What is new is that this is a world in which both points of departure and points of arrival are in cultural flux, and thus the search for steady points of reference, as critical life choices are made, can be very difficult. It is in this atmosphere that the invention of tradition (and of ethnicity, kinship and other identity-markers) can become slippery, as the search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational communication...culture becomes less what Bordieu would have called a habitus (a tacit realm of reproducible practices and dispositions) and more an arena of conscious choice, justification and representation, the latter often to multiple, and spatially dislocated audiences.”<sup>144</sup>

Appadurai’s commentary illustrates how cultural and ethnic identity categories are contested and socially constructed in relation to global flows of ideas, markets, mass media, people and technology. Appadurai continues,

The central paradox of ethnic politics in today’s world is that primordia (whether of language or skin color or neighborhood or kinship) have become globalized. That is, sentiments whose greatest force is in their ability to ignite intimacy into a political sentiment and turn locality into a staging ground for identity, have become spread over vast and irregular spaces as groups move, yet stay linked to one another through sophisticated media capabilities.<sup>145</sup>

This argument anticipates the strategies to utilize ICTs to promote the spread and revitalization of Mayan culture, as the Internet consists of a vast, irregular space that is simultaneously but unequally available all over the world, due to differences in access to the necessary infrastructure and skills.

The discussion of culture to follow is thus premised on an understanding of culture as socially constructed through interactions with, contestations, and appropriations of the global cultural flows that constitute ICTs and local interethnic social relations. FUPEDS director Estheiman Amaya pointed out clearly that

Technology brings with it an entire culture, technology in and of itself is a culture, a culture that ends up permeating the subject that accesses the technology. In some way or another, we could say that access to technology also implies the suffering of changes to the interior of a community, cultural changes, behavior changes.<sup>146</sup>

All indigenous people, however, do not experience these changes equally, and this discussion seeks to describe the differences within indigenous communities that negate the possible existence of an inevitable singular path leading to culture change. Following the warnings of Anthropologist Lila Abu-Lughod, this ethnography seeks to avoid generalization and the “effects of homogeneity, coherence and

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<sup>144</sup> Appadurai, Arjun. “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy.” 1990, p. 18.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid. p. 15.

<sup>146</sup> Interview with Estheiman Amaya, age 40, July 24, 2003. “*La tecnología trae consigo toda una cultura, la tecnología en si mismo es una cultura, una cultura que termina permeabilizando al sujeto que accesa a la tecnología. De alguna manera, digamos el acceso a la tecnología implica también el sufrimiento de cambios al interior de la comunidad, cambios culturales, cambios en comportamiento.*”

timelessness it tends to produce"<sup>147</sup> and instead focuses on the particular historical circumstances of indigenous individuals experiencing and navigating the technoscapes of modern existence.

### 3.3 Why culture matters? Reasons for preserving indigenous culture

With this conceptual understanding of culture in place, we turn now to an analysis of culture as Maya live and experience it. This shifts the question from an analysis of how culture is constructed to a more basic level: why does culture matter at all? This fundamental question must be addressed in light of the debate over racism in Guatemala, one strand of which argues that Mayan culture is nothing more than a fabrication and rights based upon official and equal recognition of Mayan culture would irreparably divide the nation.

#### 3.3.1 Because racism in Guatemala is based on culture

Only recently has racism become a topic widely debated in the national print media in Guatemala. While notions of what exactly constitutes racism are bitterly contested, the neo-colonial reality and structural inequalities that define life for the majority indigenous population indicate that racial and ethnic hierarchies persist. The practice and experience of racism is generally based upon cultural attributes; thus indigenous can avoid suffering some of the more blatant effects of racism by mastering and displaying Ladino cultural markers such as dress and language.

Cojtí Cuxil argues that in the current practice of racism

the biological variety of racism has lost strength and the cultural component has increased in intensity...several examples evidence the primacy of the cultural component of Guatemalan racism. For example, in order to have acceptance and social progress, and even just to have simple tranquility and avoid routine sexual harassment, indigenous women are obliged to dress as Ladinas.<sup>148</sup>

Conspicuous, visible racism remains a dramatic fact of national society, recently put on display at a meeting of the Constitutional Court in June 2003. The Court was considering one of the challenges to Ríos Montt's candidacy for President, which was eventually approved by a slim majority of FRG-appointed judges. Indigenous leader and Nobel Prize winner Rigoberta Menchú, in attendance at the hearing, was surrounded by a group of FRG supporters as she tried to leave the building. The light-skinned FRG activists verbally and physically assaulted Menchú; according to press reports, they shouted "*Andá a vender tomates a La Terminal* (Go sell tomatoes in the market)"<sup>149</sup> while waving the three-finger FRG salute in her face. Subsequent investigations revealed that the mob consisted of highly-connected FRG members; ultimately courts convicted two party activists who secured their release by paying a fine after spending a weekend in jail. Former director of the Office of Civil Service Oscar Rivas became a fugitive rather than face charges.

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<sup>147</sup> Abu-Lughod, Lila. "Writing Against Culture." 1991, p. 152.

<sup>148</sup> Cojtí Cuxil, Demetrio. "*Heterofobia y Racismo Guatemalteco: Perfil y Estado Actual* (Heterophobia and Guatemalan Racism: Profile and Currents Status)." 1999, p.206. "*la variedad biológico del racismo ha perdido fuerza y ha ascendido en intensidad el componente cultural...varios ejemplos evidencian esta primacía del componente cultural en el racismo guatemalteco. Por ejemplo, para tener aceptación y progreso social, e incluso para tener simplemente tranquilidad y evitar el acoso sexual rutinario, la mujer indígena se ve obligada a vestirse de ladina.*"

<sup>149</sup> *Prensa Libre*. "Agreden a Menchu (Attacks on Menchú)." Oct. 10, 2003, p. 5.

Racism also played a key role in the efforts to defeat the Constitutional referendum of 1999, which would have instituted key changes to national law to support indigenous rights and codify the measures adopted in the 1996 Indigenous Rights Accord, Agreement on Identity and Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Opponents to the changes argued that the reforms would convert Guatemala into an indigenous state, and divide the Guatemalan people, leading to race war.<sup>150</sup> Jonas writes,

Especially in Guatemala City, racism was stoked by the No campaign, which played to the fears of the Ladino population. Such racism has always been latent in Guatemala, and the No organizers were able to bring it out into the open through dire warnings that the reforms would turn the country over to the Mayan population and give them exclusive “privileges.”<sup>151</sup>

The business sector (led by CACIF, *Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas Comerciales Industriales y Financieras*, Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations) and evangelical church leaders directed the well-funded campaign against the reforms, supported by politicians who included a number of other reforms on the ballot in addition to those called for by the Peace Accords.

The CEH report

concludes that the undeniable existence of racism expressed repeatedly by the State as a doctrine of superiority, is a basic explanatory factor for the indiscriminate nature and particular brutality with which military operations were carried out against hundreds of Mayan communities in the west and north-west of the country.<sup>152</sup>

Ladino racism, of course, cannot define what indigenous culture is, it only responds to and contests its practice. The ongoing existence of anti-Maya racism is worth taking into account not as a constitutive element of Mayan culture, but as a fundamental aspect of the ongoing oppression and hierarchical social structure in Guatemalan society.

### **3.3.2 Culture is important because “it identifies what we are”**

Culture serves the practical purpose of giving people a sense of who they are, based in the geographical area in which they grew up. A student from Cantel commented:

The importance that our culture has is really big because it makes us what we are, it identifies what we are, so we don’t lose ourselves to other cultures or other traditions, in some cases many identify themselves by where they are, where they are from and what language they speak.<sup>153</sup>

This self-knowledge is even more important in light of the racist history that continues to be taught in many public schools, which considers the Maya to be an historical culture in whose heritage modern Guatemalans share equally. Camposeco stated,

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<sup>150</sup> Jonas, Susanne. *Of Centaurs and Doves: Guatemala’s Peace Process*. 2000, p. 197.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.* p. 208.

<sup>152</sup> CEH Report, 1999, p. 24.

<sup>153</sup> Interview with FUPEDS student from Cantel, age 19, July 3, 2003. “*la importancia que (nuestra cultura) tiene si es muy grande porque eso nos hace ser, nos hace identificar lo que somos, no nos hace perder hacia otras culturas o otros costumbres, en caso de que muchos se identifican en donde son, de donde vienen y el idioma que habla.*”

Indeed the Guatemalan educational system has taught us a different history than the true history of Guatemala. Thus obviously I believe that the majority we have been victims of discrimination in the classrooms, truly, precisely because the true history is unknown. Obviously the youth...despite that they are indigenous, do not really know what it means to be indigenous.<sup>154</sup>

### 3.3.3 Culture provides an important resource for future development

Others view their local, Mayan culture as important because it contains knowledges and practices that are relevant for the future development of the Mayan people, contesting the idea of culture as folklore. That many Mayan activists understand their culture as a resource for future development implies a shift from a simplistic understanding of culture as merely the reproduction of local traditions to a belief in the value of culture as a means to effect political change.<sup>155</sup> A student from Jacaltenango said,

Many people say that the Mayan culture is backwards, or that I speak a (Mayan) language and that's why I can't, but I think that if you begin to value what you have, your language, your clothes, and everything, the traditions, all of the legends that exist I believe that they are riches that can contribute to development if the people also develop their intellectual capacity to write those values, these cultures and make them known to the world.<sup>156</sup>

Another comment, from a community activist in Todos Santos, compares the Maya-Mam culture to an untapped source of wealth:

I believe that the Mayan culture is very important, and one reason why it is so important for us, it is a resource that we have that we haven't taken advantage of, it is as if we have some money but it is hidden and we aren't using it so that it generates some interest. So I think that it is an advantage that we have over other peoples that with this we can really develop ourselves.<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES director Eulalia Camposeco, age 38, May 30, 2003. *"Efectivamente el sistema educativo guatemalteco, nos ha enseñado una historia distinta a la verdadera historia de Guatemala. Entonces obviamente creo que la mayoría hemos sido víctimas de la discriminación en las aulas, verdad, precisamente porque se desconoce esa historia real entonces obviamente los jóvenes... por más indígenas que sean ellos (los estudiantes), desconocen muchísimo de lo que implica ser indígena."*

<sup>155</sup> Cultural theorist George Yúdice writes "In our era, representations of and claims to cultural difference are expedient insofar as they multiply commodities and empower community. Yet, as Virginia R. Domínguez writes, to understand what culture means when it 'is invoked to describe analyze, argue, justify, and theorize," one has to focus on 'what is being accomplished socially, politically, discursively' (1992: 21)." Yúdice, George. *The Expediency of Culture: The Uses of Culture in the Global Era*. 2003, p. 25.

<sup>156</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES student from Jacaltenango, age 25, July 11, 2003. *"Muchas personas dicen que la cultura Maya es un atraso, o que hablo un idioma y por eso no puedo, pero yo creo que si uno empieza a valorar lo que tiene, su idioma, su traje, y todo, las tradiciones, los costumbres, toda la leyenda que existe yo creo que es una riqueza que puede contribuir para el desarrollo si las personas también desarrollen su capacidad intelectual para escribir estos valores, estas culturas y dar a conocer al mundo."*

<sup>157</sup> Interview with community activist Rosendo Ramírez, age 29, October 16, 2003. *"Yo creo que la cultura Maya es de mucha importancia, y una del porque es tan importante para nosotros, casi es el recurso que nosotros tenemos que no hemos aprovechado, como que nosotros tenemos un dinero pero solo está guardado y no estamos dando para que genera algunos intereses entonces yo creo que es la ventaja que nosotros tenemos ante las naciones que con esa nosotros podemos desarrollar fuertemente."*

One area of knowledge that remains a vital source of modern indigenous identity is the varied forms of organizing that persist in different ways in different communities. This includes the *cargo* (community responsibilities) system and *cofradías* (religious brotherhoods), through which indigenous men and women gain respect and authority through holding community service offices and other, honored local posts, such as indigenous auxiliary mayors, midwives, spiritual guides and diviners, local law enforcement mechanisms and traditional methods for resolving community disputes.

One student commented on this last aspect of community organizing as fundamental to the maintenance of community identity:

I believe in the Mayan culture, because I believe that one of the most important things is the form of organization, how it is organized and how problems are solved. I believe that in many communities they have had problems with thieves...they solve it in a different manner, it is not like in the cities with laws and all this, so I believe that a really important element for the Mayan people we can say is the manner that they organize themselves...it is how that very same community sees how to solve problems.<sup>158</sup>

### **3.3.4 Culture is important because it represents the plurality of modern Mayan identity**

The following quote from Victor Montejo illustrates a fourth reason for valuing local traditional cultural practices, which represent the complexity of the Mayan people and provide a basis for Pan-Mayan identity. Montejo is a Maya-Popti originally from Jacaltenango who was forced into exile during the Civil War and became an anthropologist in the United States. He returned to Guatemala in 2003 as the third candidate on the national deputy list for the coalition of political parties GANA, led by Oscar Berger. Berger defeated Alvaro Colom of the party *Unidad Nacional Esperanza* in the presidential election and took power on January 14, 2004. Montejo was the only indigenous national deputy proposed by GANA, and is now also working in Berger's government as Secretary for Peace, the ministry charged with implementation of the Peace Accords.

Therefore, it is evident that the Mayan culture is very complex and that it is the expression of various levels of comprehension or visions of the world, which are being reworked by each one of the linguistic communities which make up the Mayan region. It is also the expression of different sectors of the Mayan population: intellectuals, peasants and traditional religious leaders, as much men as women. It is necessary to listen to all of the voices so as not to radicalize the action, which at the same time would limit the access and the expression of each Mayan Guatemalan sector. We should understand the political environment, not just in the local level but also in the national and international levels. The world is changing drastically and we should strengthen our national feelings through the recognition of other ways of thinking. Therefore, Pan-Mayanism brings to light the value and creativity of the Mayan culture. We want our culture to be seen not just as a relic of the past (Classic Maya) but rather also in the present, as Mayas

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<sup>158</sup> Interview with FUPEDS student from Cantel, age 19, July 3, 2003. *"Yo creo que la Cultura Maya, porque yo creo que uno de los más principales es la forma de organización, de cómo se organicen y de cómo solucionen los problemas. Yo creo que en muchas comunidades se ha visto que el problema de robos,...la solucionan en una forma diferente no es como en las ciudades con leyes y todo eso, entonces yo creo que un elemento muy importante del Pueblo Maya podemos decir es en la forma en como se organizan...es una forma en que la misma comunidad ve como solucionar este problema."*

who are creating and recreating our culture, even in the context of war and violence, as it has been in the history of Guatemala.<sup>159</sup>

### 3.4 How is Mayan culture changing? Racism, ladinoization and global cultural influences

Taking into account the context of contemporary race relations in Guatemala, culture change has been described exclusively as processes of acculturation or Ladinoization, through which indigenous people give up cultural markers, such as dress, language or spirituality, in order to fully participate in the Ladino national society. Underlying this simplistic notion is an assumption that modernity requires an inevitable shift away from indigenous lifestyles to colonial and national languages, dress and culture. While the idea of Ladinoization still holds popular currency in Guatemalan social relations, especially, for example, among the urban poor of Guatemala City, as a tool for analysis it inadequately represents the complexity of modern cultural processes.

The CIRMA study published in 2003 discounts both analytical terms because they tend to assert that

Culture change is uni-directional, and, in a similar manner, usually is used to mean an already completed process of assimilation. The expressions 'an acculturated Indian' or 'a Ladinized Indian' could be referring indiscriminately to a person who limits himself to assuming several new cultural practices or to someone who has completely rejected his original culture, and in consequence also his identity, and has assimilated. To avoid confusions, we have eliminated both terms in our study.<sup>160</sup>

These terms confuse more than they explain because they fail to consider individual processes of adaptation to different places and how individuals manipulate multi-layered identities according to changing social relations.

While the terminology used by the dominant society to describe cultural change in indigenous communities is inaccurate and reproduces the stereotype of indigenous culture as inferior, this does not

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<sup>159</sup> Montejo, Victor. "Pan Mayanismo: La Pluriformidad de la Cultura Maya y el Proceso de Autorepresentación de los Mayas (Pan-Mayanism: The pluriformity of the Maya culture and the process of self-representation of the Mayas)." 1997. p. 116. *"Por lo tanto, es evidente que la cultura maya es muy compleja y que es la expresión de varios niveles de comprensión o visiones del mundo, los cuales están siendo reelaborados por cada uno de las comunidades lingüísticas que componen la región maya. Es también la expresión de diferentes sectores de la población maya: intelectuales, campesinos y líderes religiosos tradicionales, tanto hombres como mujeres. Es preciso escuchar todas las voces para no radicalizar la acción, lo que a su vez limitaría el acceso y la expresión de cada sector maya guatemalteco. Debemos comprender el ambiente político, no solo en el nivel local sino también en los niveles nacional e internacional. El mundo está cambiando drásticamente y debemos fortalecer nuestros sentimientos nacionales mediante el reconocimiento de otras maneras de pensar. Por consiguiente, el pan-mayanismo saca a luz el valor y la creatividad de la cultura maya. Queremos que nuestra cultura sea vista no sólo como una reliquia del pasado (mayas clásicos) sino también en el presente, como mayas que estamos creando y recreando nuestra cultura, incluso en el contexto de guerra y violencia, como lo ha sido la historia pasada de Guatemala."*

<sup>160</sup> Adams and Bastos, Vol.2, 2003, p. 55. *"el cambio cultural es unidireccional y, de manera similar, suele emplearse para denotar un proceso ya culminado de asimilación. Las expresiones 'un indio aculturado' o 'un indio ladinizado' pueden referirse indistintamente a una persona que se limita a asumir algunas practicas culturales nuevas, o a quien ha rechazado por completo su cultura original, y en consecuencia también su identidad, y se ha asimilado. Para evitar confusiones, prescindiremos de ambos términos en nuestro estudio."*

mean that cultural change is not occurring in indigenous communities. Many of the people consulted for this study see these changes, especially in the behavior and attitudes of young people. The influence of transnational media, especially through cable television – the fastest growing media in the countryside – coincides with the historic trajectory of Ladino assimilationist ideologies that value foreign cultures over indigenous culture.

A student from Jacaltenango comments on the negative influence that media has had on his community:

In my opinion, for the moment, I see that technology and the communication media, don't have, almost don't have any kind of positive impact. I see it like that, that people are learning, that the children have learned to imitate, the youth have learned to imitate what they see on the television... Thus, I believe that in my village the influence of communication media I see in a negative light because the people don't understand, they don't comprehend the importance of the communication media, thus they learn and that's how I see it, I am sure they are learning the negative. And the worst is that there aren't even Guatemalan channels, Guatemalan communication media, nothing. Radio, nothing, television, still worse, the newspaper, because the people won't buy a paper they can't understand, they don't like to read. Only one station from Huehuetenango reaches us, but this is, I'll say it like some of my friends do, it is an empty space. It just plays music, greetings and music, and nothing more. But never news, or some issue of interest which could benefit the population, thus I see that the communication media that is available is really bad, it doesn't contribute anything that wakes people up.<sup>161</sup>

A student from San Mateo Ixtatán echoes this sentiment and sees a similar pattern with the spread of Internet use:

For example, on the computer, on the Internet, on the television, there it shows us another culture that is totally different, and this, for me, I think that this brings about a lot of the negativity that exists, because many people from my area have given up their culture, and have adopted what they see on television, here on the Internet, even including some don't even speak their language any more.<sup>162</sup>

Compounding the influence of transnational media is the experience of migration to the United

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<sup>161</sup> Interview with FUPEDS student from Jacaltenango, age 25, July 11, 2003. *"En mi opinión, por el momento, yo lo veo que la tecnología, los medios de comunicación no tienen, casi no tienen un impacto positivo. Yo lo veo así, que la gente aprenda, que empieza a imitar los niños, los jóvenes lo que ven en la televisión... Entonces, yo creo que en mi aldea la influencia de los medios de comunicación la veo en una forma negativa porque la gente no entiende pues, no comprende la importancia de los medios de comunicación, entonces, aprende y yo lo veo así, y yo estoy seguro que aprendan casi lo negativo. Y lo peor es que no hay canales guatemaltecos, medios de comunicación guatemalteco, nada. Radios, nada, televisión, peor, el periódico, porque la gente ni para cobrar un periódico que no se entiende, no le gusta leer. Solo una emisora de Huehuetenango llega, pero esa, hablo también como decía algunos amigos, es como un espacio vacío. Solo transmite música, saludos y música, y nada más. Pero jamás noticias, o algún tema de interés, que beneficie la población, entonces yo lo veo que los medios de comunicación que llegan están muy mal, no contribuyen nada para que la gente se despierten."*

<sup>162</sup> Interview with FUPEDS student from San Miguel Ixtatán, age 23, July 7, 2003. *"Por ejemplo, en la computadora, en el Internet, en la televisión, allí nos demuestra totalmente otra cultura muy diferente, y esto para mí, creo de que sí trae mucha de lo negativo que hay, porque muchos de mis paisanos se han dejado su cultura, y han adoptado todo lo vea allí en la televisión, aquí en el Internet, hasta incluso muchas ya no hablan su idioma."*

States in search of work, a common survival strategy for many residents of the northwest region of Huehuetenango, especially among young men. Official migration statistics from 2002 estimate that 16,229 Guatemalans immigrated legally into the United States,<sup>163</sup> while the total number of immigrants from Guatemala who are in the United States without authorization is between 100,000 to 300,000.<sup>164</sup> While many Mayan immigrants take advantage of ethnic networks, settle in areas with already established Mayan populations and help to recreate Mayan cultural institutions and practices in their new homes,<sup>165</sup> the vast majority of Mayan immigrants are alienated from their culture and integrated into the invisible masses of undocumented workers collectively known as illegals.

Cultural shift is generally measured by visible and audible markers, especially dress and language. As these commentaries indicate, even young indigenous are aware that fewer of their peers are speaking their Mayan languages, and they trace these signs of culture loss to the effects of transnational media and migration, among other factors. However, these students themselves demonstrate the slippery nature of the apparent contradiction between a wholly Mayan cultural identity and Ladino, or Western, cultural practices. These students are bilingual, wear *traje* if they choose, and move easily in and out of the urban and rural environments. They are susceptible, however, to what Warren describes as a fallacy of “indianness,” which

holds that ethnicity means a hegemonic worldview—some sort of traditionalism—or nothing...the construction of polar, mutually exclusive choices—Indian or Ladino—ignores overwhelming evidence that individuals and communities continually rework their identities.<sup>166</sup>

These students recognize that they, along with indigenous people of all generations, must continually define and redefine their identities through social relations. Warren writes that “From this viewpoint, there is no Maya or Ladino except as identities are constructed, contested, negotiated, imposed, imputed, resisted, and redefined in action.”<sup>167</sup> Cultural change is but one process occurring in many people simultaneous to other processes, such as cultural resistance. However, it cannot be argued that there exist simple choices between cultures, as these processes of identity formation are deeply affected by the structural and ideological inequalities prevalent in Guatemala.

Another student from Jacaltenango comments in light of the changes occurring in his community:

And also recently there has been even more violence, maybe that is because of the communication media and that the majority of those programs only deal with really conflictive issues, and in some way the young people are becoming alienated by some habits that are not from the municipality. And I am not ruling out that there are also good customs that the international communication media spread, there are many, but what happens is that we don't

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<sup>163</sup>From the 2002 Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, published by the US Office of Immigration Statistics and posted at <<http://uscis.gov/graphics/shared/aboutus/statistics/Yearbook2002.pdf>>

<sup>164</sup> According to the report “New Estimates of Undocumented Population in the United States,” published by the Migration Information Source, “Among Latin American countries, the largest sources other than Mexico are probably El Salvador, Guatemala, Peru, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic, each accounting for 100,000 to 300,000.” Posted at <<http://www.migrationinformation.org/feature/display.cfm?ID=19>>.

<sup>165</sup> The book *Maya in Exile* by Allen Burns describes Indiantown, Florida, an immigrant agricultural population made up primarily of Q'anjob'al Maya.

<sup>166</sup> Warren, Kay. *Indigenous Movements and their Critics: Pan-Maya activism in Guatemala*. 1998, p.71.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.* p. 73.

know how to choose what is best for us, we are not educated or we are not prepared to select the ideas that are best for us for our development.<sup>168</sup>

This comment describes the unequal globalized terrain that provides the framework for individual choices about culture, pointing out that the racist, inadequate national education system is but one of the pitfalls built into the hegemonic system to induce the decline of Mayan cultural practices and the increasing preference for Ladino culture. In this sense, it is understandable when many youth welcome the powerful influences of *kaxlan* media and Ladino lifestyles, whether due to slick production values or to the unceasing enticements of global advertising. In short, transnational media and migration help to continue the work of historical assimilationist projects in Guatemala, even while many indigenous are actively resisting acculturation and imagining creative, personal trajectories that seek to balance elements of traditional culture with global cultural flows.

### **3.5 How have Mayan people resisted Ladino cultural dominance? Strategic essentialism and cultural continuity**

Cultural change has occurred simultaneously with cultural resistance throughout the history of Maya-*kaxlan* interactions, moderating fears about the end of Mayan culture and revealing as absurd simplistic notions of the inevitable homogenization inherent in globalization. As pointed out by FUPEDDES director Amaya, while outside cultural influences can have an impact,

we are talking about cultures that have a history of more than 5000 years, and they haven't been destroyed, not even with the Spanish invasion or the process of colonization that are still ongoing, thus we also have to have some confidence in that it is not so easy permeate, especially when we are talking about ancestral cultures with long histories.<sup>169</sup>

Ladino historian Victor Gálvez Borrel and Mayan scholar Alberto Esquit Choy document the tradition of Maya resistance to colonial and national subjugation:

Over the years referred to in Chapter I (16<sup>th</sup> century to the present) the indigenous population practiced a variety of forms of resistance, from rebellions and uprisings of diverse scope and duration, to temporary alliances with colonizers, *criollos*, the Church, or *mestizos*, according to the circumstances.<sup>170</sup>

From the perspective of critical race theory, this shared, collective resistance constitutes a base for

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<sup>168</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES student from Jacaltenango, age 25, July 11, 2003. "*Y también ahora últimamente la violencia se está generando mucho, quizás por los medios de comunicación que casi la mayor parte de esos programas son temas muy conflictivos y eso en ciertas maneras los jóvenes están alienando por algunas costumbres que se practiquen no propios del municipio. Y tampoco descarto que también hay buenas costumbres que difunden los medios de comunicaciones internacionales, hay mucho, lo que pasa es no sabemos escoger lo que nos conviene, no estamos educadas o no estamos preparados a seleccionar los temas que nos conviene para nuestro desarrollo.*"

<sup>169</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES director Estheiman Amaya, age 40, July 24, 2003. "*pero estamos hablando de culturas que tiene mas de 5000 años, que no han sido destruidas, ni con la invasión española ni luego con los procesos de colonización que todavía permanecen vivos entonces también hay que confiar un poco en que no, digamos permear no es tan fácil, sobre todo cuando se está hablando de culturas de muchos años, culturas ancestrales.*"

<sup>170</sup> Gálvez Borrel and Esquit Choy, *The Maya Movement Today*. 1997, p. 85.

ethnic/racial mobilization and for identity construction. Cedric Robinson, in his broad study of the formation of the black radical tradition, argues that black identity developed rooted to the twin realities of a shared cultural tradition and the collective experience of slavery and racism. Robinson writes,

After all it had been as an emergent African people and not as slaves that Black men and women had opposed enslavement...the Black radical tradition had defined the terms of their destruction: the continuing development of a collective consciousness informed by the historical struggles for liberation and motivated by the shared sense of obligation to preserve the collective being, the ontological totality.<sup>171</sup>

Robinson argues for a reinterpretation of black history in the United States as a basis for this ontological totality and to contest the false, racist stereotypes deeply embedded in contemporary racial consciousness. He argues that enslaved blacks brought with them

African cultures, critical admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs, and morality. These were the actual terms of their humanity. These cargoes, then, did not consist of intellectual isolates or deculturated blacks — men, women and children separated from their previous universe. African labor brought the past with it, a past that had produced it and settled on it the first elements of their consciousness and comprehension.<sup>172</sup>

As noted, today young Maya are aware that they have been taught a false version of their own history which in turn supports the trope of Maya as pre-modern. History then becomes an important site of contestation as Maya promote a counter narrative of Guatemalan history that highlights Mayan accomplishments and resistance to *kaxlan* domination. Reinterpretation of Mayan history recenters Mayan identity on shared experiences of oppression and Mayan resistance to that oppression resulting in cultural achievements, generating a powerful narrative of cultural continuity that serves to unite the twenty-two linguistic communities around a common Pan-Mayan identity.

Raxche' Demetrio Rodríguez Guaján, a Maya-Kaqchikel businessman who founded the book publishing company *Cholsamaj* and later served as a Vice Minister of Education and director of DIGEBI (*Dirección General de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural*, General Directorate of Intercultural Bilingual Education) during the Portillo administration, articulates this history of cultural achievement and continuity in the context of oppression and resistance. He stresses past achievements, including the earliest invention of a mathematical concept of zero and the positional numeric system; the development of an exact astronomical calendar; the prediction of solar eclipses; the domestication of corn; and numerous other achievements in sculpture, carving, medicine, architecture and agriculture. He places Maya identity in the context of this historical genius:

Maya culture has been shaped by the favorable and unfavorable circumstances under which we Maya have lived throughout our history, yet it remains the same culture developed over thousands of years by our ancestors in the territory that is today Guatemala. The form of our culture has changed, but not its essence...Because of this cultural continuity we — the more than five million Guatemalans who speak a Mayan language — are Maya; we who conserve the worldview that propitiates harmonic existence with our Mother Nature are Maya; and those of us

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<sup>171</sup>Robinson, Cedric. *Black Marxism, The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*. 1983, pp. 170-171.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 121-122.

who conserve the fundamental roots of the Maya culture are Maya. The sisters and brothers who, due to adverse circumstances, have lost part or almost all of their cultural identity but who are enthusiastically working to recover their culture and identity are also Maya. Above all, we who identify ourselves, before ourselves and the world as Maya (*roj, qawinaq, qawinaqil qi'*) and fight for the revitalization of our culture are Maya.<sup>173</sup>

In this statement, Raxche' combines an essentialist reinterpretation of Mayan history and identity with a constructivist approach, by arguing that Mayan identity is determined both by who Maya are and by what Maya do: acculturated Maya can reclaim their ethnicity by working "to recover their culture and identity." As in many oppositional social movements, essentialism is used strategically to build unity across community and language barriers, emphasizing shared cultural characteristics that contribute to the consolidation of Pan-Mayan identity.

Contemporary anthropological theory challenges the use of essentialist identity due to the potential for authoritarianism contained within. Paul Gilroy, for example, while recognizing that a focus on racial sameness can lead to group solidarity, argues that it exacerbates difference between groups and becomes a "platform for the reverie of absolute and eternal division."<sup>174</sup> The notion of ethnic identity as pure thus becomes threatened with contamination and hybridity, destabilizing the movement and leading to hatred of both the other and the "half-different and partially familiar" one who fails to maintain racial or ethnic purity.<sup>175</sup>

Ladino critic Mario Roberto Morales, like Gilroy, believes that essentialism leads away from democracy and institutionalizes division. He writes, "It is worth the pain to oppose the existence of pure 'mayaness' uncontaminated by any form of miscegenation, because of the implications of exclusiveness and authoritarianism that it has."<sup>176</sup> Morales argues for a national culture based on cultural mixture rather than ethnic difference: "The position assumed in this book argues for the intercultural democratization of Guatemala through intercultural miscegenation by transculturation, hybridization and diglossia and the negotiation of culture, identity and politics."<sup>177</sup>

Morales' post-modern stance ignores the history of power relations in Guatemala, which have constituted his ideal "intercultural miscegenation" exclusively as one-way assimilation. Identity categories are not static and oppositional. They are historically grounded, as argued by Robinson and Raxche', and continually reworked in the overlapping, disjunctive and unequal flows that characterize modernity.

Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil provides a more nuanced perspective on the formation of ethnic consciousness and the role that cultural resistance plays in that formation. He argues that all Mayan people recognize their identity as Mayan – although this identity may be referred to as "*natural, indio, aborigen o indígena* (natural, Indian, aborigine or indigenous)"<sup>178</sup> – but different sectors of the population possess differing levels of cultural authenticity and degrees of the ethnic and political consciousness. The

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<sup>173</sup> Raxché. "Maya Culture and the Politics of Development." *Mayan Cultural Activism in Guatemala*. 1996, pp. 75-76.

<sup>174</sup> Gilroy, Paul. *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line*. 2000, p. 101.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.* p. 106.

<sup>176</sup> Morales, Mario Roberto. "Essencialismo 'Maya,' mestizaje ladino y nación intercultural ('Maya' essentialism, ladino mixture and an intercultural nation)." *Racismo en Guatemala? Abriendo el debate sobre un tema tabú (Racism in Guatemala? Opening the debate on a taboo subject)*. 1999, p. 225.

<sup>177</sup> Morales, Mario Roberto. *La Articulación de las diferencias o El Síndrome de Maximón (The Articulation of Differences or The Syndrome of Maximón)*. 1998, p. 70.

<sup>178</sup> Cojtí Cuxil, 1997, p. 52.

majority of the Maya, “*el campesinado Maya y analfabeto* (the illiterate Mayan peasantry),”<sup>179</sup> have a high degree of cultural authenticity, but are not organized for collective ethnic struggle. A second sector includes the “*campesinado y proletariado Maya incorporado a organizaciones populares de tendencias social (sindicatos, ligas campesinos, etc)* (the Mayan peasants and proletariat incorporated into popular organizations with a social focus (unions, peasant leagues, etc)),”<sup>180</sup> and this sector focuses collective action on class consciousness rather than ethnic consciousness. A third sector, the middle and lower educated classes, has less cultural authenticity as a result of the national education system but has developed an ethnic consciousness that motivates them to organize around cultural and political issues in order to confront the neocolonial ethnic hierarchy that relegates the Maya to inferior status.

Cojtí highlights one of the central contradictions in the Maya movement – it is led primarily by urban, educated Mayas who have “*menos práctica y autenticidad cultural* (less practice and cultural authenticity),”<sup>181</sup> but who maintain ties to their home communities by visiting periodically, continuing to speak their language, and promoting development in those areas. Carol Smith warns against the possible repercussions of this authenticity discourse:

The cultural invention of Maya nationalists...may produce a cultural repertoire that will reflect the protean experiences and practices of these new Maya. On the other hand, if they impose a rigid orthodoxy — if they no longer tap into diverse local sources of Maya culture — their own version could become incapable of representing anyone.<sup>182</sup>

This debate also speaks to the reality of multi-layered identities in Mayan Guatemala that can be rooted in a local geographic space, typically a municipality or smaller administrative unit, while also embracing broader identity affiliations with other Mayas. Maya-Mam anthropologist Ajb’ee Jiménez argues that in this process “local identities should be considered as levels or centers from which a stronger identity emerges. This is an identity that emanates from various sources to create, transform and strengthen a broader and perhaps Pan-Mayan identity.”<sup>183</sup>

The students at FUPEDS recognize and celebrate their shared culture across the diversity of their sociolinguistic origins. They hold monthly cultural nights that feature presentations by a student or students from a specific ethnic community. While these presentations highlight the specificity of cultural practices in one geographic locale, they also give an opportunity for each student to recognize the similarities that exist across Guatemala’s Mayan ethnic groups.

Cultural resistance is present throughout Mayan social, political and cultural advocacy not only through efforts to revitalize and preserve cultural practices, such as language, but in the efforts to create a common identity uniting all Maya. This identity, neither a return to the past or a fiction created to oppose Ladino culture, is based on collective struggles over time and shared cultural elements. Mayan intellectuals simultaneously advance this collective identity rooted in history while claiming that Mayan culture and the Mayan people are flexible and creative in their efforts to create new cultural practices that adapt to changing modern circumstances.

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid. p. 52.

<sup>182</sup> Smith, Carol. “Maya Nationalism.” *The Report on the Americas*. 1991, p. 33.

<sup>183</sup> Jiménez Sánchez, Ajb’ee. “Identity Politics and the Maya-Mam population.” 2000, p.8.

### 3.6 How does culture adapt? *Mestizaje*, hybridization and appropriation

The previous two sections describe the interaction between two seemingly contradictory processes: the weakening of historic indigenous cultural practices and the resistance to *kaxlan* cultural influences through reinterpretation of national history and pan-Mayan identity construction. A third simultaneous process can best be described as cultural adaptation, or the appropriation of foreign cultural elements to indigenous practices, resulting in hybrid cultural products that should not be considered inauthentic, but rather illustrate the dynamic nature of local cultural revitalization in the midst of global cultural flows.

Hybridization is not a recent phenomenon for the Mayan peoples of Guatemala. Indigenous communities historically adapted their cultural practices to colonial institutions in an effort to preserve traditional values in the midst of colonial domination. Syncretic Catholicism exemplifies this process and dominated religious life in most Mayan villages until the dramatic rise of Protestant sects in the late twentieth century.<sup>184</sup>

Mayan Catholics used the forms and doctrines of the church to institutionalize their traditional values, assuring continuity of their beliefs while maintaining nominal status as good Catholics. Mayan scholar and Presbyterian minister Vitalino Similox Salazar makes this point explicit in his dissertation for the Theology Department of the Universidad Mariano Gálvez in 1992:

In religious life today there has developed a type of mimetism, inserted into the religious brotherhoods and Catholic religious practices, without which would have been lost the central elements of the pre-Columbian religion. This has been an answer in resistance to the acculturating projects of the Western society.<sup>185</sup>

Studies of folk Catholic Maya beliefs typically divide religious expression into two separate spheres: public and private religion. The cult of the saints, expressed through the institutions of community civil-religious hierarchies, dominates public religion. The cult of the soul describes private religion and is expressed through the authority as expressed through the authority and rituals conducted by shaman-priests.<sup>186</sup>

*Costumbre*, beliefs and rituals designed to satisfy the various natural and ancestral spirits that inhabit the Maya world, transcends both these categories and manipulates forms of Catholic expression, although the substance of the rituals reflect non-Catholic origins and purposes. Again, Similox describes this process of resistance: "Even though Mayas were baptized as Christians, they were successful in transforming the ritual and the beliefs to the point where they were closer to Mayan religion than to the Catholicism that the priests were preaching."<sup>187</sup>

Of course, religious syncretism is not the only example of how Maya adapted foreign cultural

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<sup>184</sup> Garrard-Burnett, Virginia. Protestantism in Guatemala: Living in the New Jerusalem, 1998.

<sup>185</sup> Similox Salazar, Vitalino. "La expresión y metodología del pensamiento maya contemporáneo en Guatemala (The Expression and Methodology of Contemporary Maya Thought in Guatemala)." 1992, p. 74. "En la vida religiosa de hoy se ha dado un especie de mimetismo, inserto en las cofradías y prácticas religiosas católicas, sin que con ello hayan perdido los elementos centrales de la religiosidad pre-colombina. Esto como respuesta de resistencia a los proyectos aculturadores de la sociedad occidentalista."

<sup>186</sup> Watanabe, John. Maya Saints and Souls in a Changing World. 1992, p. 185.

<sup>187</sup> Similox Salazar, 1992, p. 34. "Aunque los Mayas eran bautizados como cristianos, se las arreglaron y tuvieron éxito en transformar el ritual y la creencias hasta el punto en que éstos llegaron a estar más cerca de su religión Maya que al catolicismo predicado por los sacerdotes."

elements into constructions of modern cultural practice. Considered from this perspective, Mayan use of ICTs should be understood as the extension of traditional knowledges onto modern platforms: CD-ROMs for bilingual education, web sites devoted to Mayan culture, or indigenous language radio streaming on the Internet, just to name a few examples.

An ICT entrepreneur and computer teacher in Jacaltenango argues that adaptation is central to Mayan efforts to promote development in their communities while maintaining the importance of local culture:

For us there are some things that we still conserve, but we also have to be up to date with technology. The simple fact that we are Mayas, and we speak Popti', does not mean that we are not interested in development. Thus, with respect to language, and dress, I don't think that has anything to do with the development of a municipality, the issue is that we have to open our minds, have a wide open mind to be able to accept the latest technologies into our midst...perhaps it is not that the technology or the latest style absorbs us, but it is us who have to adapt to what comes into our midst.<sup>188</sup>

Hybridization, or cultural adaptation, resembles recent theoretical innovations around the term *mestizaje*, especially as utilized by Gloria Anzaldúa, a Chicana feminist writer whose book *Borderlands/La Frontera* powerfully restates *mestizaje* as an ideology that embraces difference, rather than suppressing it. However, the *mestizaje* discourse has been used in Guatemala to control and regulate Mayan identity while fostering the ideology of progress through de-Indianization. In Guatemala biological *mestizaje*, whether as race improvement through intermarriage or as coerced sex of indigenous women, was advocated and promoted by the State for much of the colonial and national periods, and even the liberal government of Arbenz promoted a vision of cultural *mestizaje* that called for the whitening and improvement of the indigenous "race" based on "a vision of cultural assimilation, epitomized by the discourse of *mestizaje*."<sup>189</sup>

The ideology of Ladino superior culture curing and improving indigenous inferiority permeates these policies, and the contemporary view of Guatemala as a *mestizo* nation continues to function by ignoring Mayan cultural and human rights in a number of ways: (1) by denying indigenous people rights based on their now official recognition as Peoples; (2) by relegating their culture to mere folklore equally shared by all Guatemalans; and (3) by the failure of the education system to reflect the multicultural reality, and most recently illustrated by President Berger's superficial gesture to fulfill his campaign promise to include indigenous in his government by hiring a group of women from Nebaj to serve as hostesses to visitors at the National Palace.

The particular history of *mestizaje* as a discourse in Guatemala illustrates the variety of political agendas that promote *mestizaje* for radically different purposes. The modern liberal argument that pan-Mayan cultural activism undermines the Guatemalan (*mestizo*) national identity and promotes the

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<sup>188</sup> Interview with Enrique Montejo Camposeco, age 38, October, 21, 2003. "Para nosotros hay algunas cosas que todavía conservamos, pero también nosotros tenemos que estar al día con la tecnología. El simple hecho de que nosotros seamos Mayas, con habla Popti' no significa que nosotros no estamos interesados en el desarrollo. Entonces, con lo que es el habla, el traje, yo creo que no tiene nada que ver en el desarrollo del municipio, el asunto es abrir la mente, a tener la mente amplia para poder aceptar la tecnología de punta en nuestra medio... tal vez que no la tecnología o las nuevas modas nos absorba, sino que nosotros tenemos que adaptar a lo que viene a nuestro medio."

<sup>189</sup> Hale, Charle. "Does Multiculturalism Menace? Governance, Cultural Rights and the Politics of Identity in Guatemala." 2002, p. 503.

fragmentation of the nation bases itself on a notion of *mestizaje* similar to the historic ideology long dominant in Mexico, such as José Vasconcelos' idea of the *La Raza Cosmica* (A Universal Race), a blending of the best of indigenous and European cultures to create a national identity with roots in both cultures. This shifts away from the historical definition of *mestizaje* in Guatemala, which never valued cultural blending and instead focused on one-way assimilation.

Morales also utilizes the theoretical contributions of Gloria Anzaldúa to invoke a potentially more liberatory notion of *mestizaje*.<sup>190</sup> Anzaldúa argues that the struggles at the borders of identities, languages and cultures are the sources of new creativities and new powers. This transformational consciousness deliberately acknowledges all of its constituents, rather than assigning worth based on European values. Although this notion of *mestizaje* may appear emancipatory, it cannot be easily applied to modern Guatemala after centuries of elite-led *mestizaje* that resulted in ethnocide and deeply rooted social inequality based upon ethnic and cultural difference. Even if Morales' post-modern vision of *mestizaje* could supercede the historical definitions of acculturation, his understanding of contemporary race relations ignores deep-seated structural inequalities and the persistence of individual prejudices.<sup>191</sup>

For these reasons, hybridization should not be confused with *mestizaje*, and should instead refer to active processes of cultural appropriation and adaptation. The production of hybrid cultural products is not a new phenomenon, but it has been accelerated in recent decades through the increasing global flows that characterize globalization. Media theorist Straubhaar argues that

Complex hybridization seems to have accelerated in the twentieth century with post-colonial migrations, increased travel, transnational mass media and economic globalization. A number of current theorists, particularly those whose personal or family history centers on post-colonial migrations, like Bhabha (1994), focus on the post-colonial period as the critical period of hybridity. Canclini, for instance, critiques the applicability of some of Bhabha's work to Latin America because it focuses too much on post-colonial as opposed to colonial era hybridity (Canclini, 1997) ... In this sense this idea of recycling (citing Yudice 1992) is akin both to glocalization (Robertson 1995) and to our notion of hybridization, an introduction of traditional elements into modern forms of the television variety show, soap opera or music video.<sup>192</sup>

Keeping in mind that hybridization is not exclusively a post-colonial or even national-era phenomena, but has its roots in the inequitable social relations that have characterized Guatemala since the Spanish invasion, the evidence of cultural adaptation is abundant in modern Guatemalan society. A simple, but elegant, example of this is the production of the *Asociación Maya*, a Kaqchikel weaving cooperative located in Sololá. The cooperative imports and dyes chenille threads and then uses the traditional backstrap weaving technique to weave the thread into velvety, luxurious cloth which is then sewed into scarves, blankets and clothes. The cooperative capitalizes on the skills already present in their community – weaving – to produce non-traditional garments that would not look out of place on the racks of the fanciest department store in Europe or the United States.

Indigenous use of ICTs to promote their development and preserve and extend their culture generates more complex examples of this process of cultural adaptation. The next chapter examines how

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<sup>190</sup> Morales, 1999, p. 222.

<sup>191</sup> Morales writes "*Después de todo, la diferencia entre indios y ladinos es, también y sobre todo, cultural* (After all, the difference between Indians and Ladinos is, above all else, cultural)." (Ibid. p. 226) He ignores the obvious disparities in education, health, income, wealth and political power that generate a privileged position in society for Ladinos.

<sup>192</sup> Straubhaar, Joseph. *World Television: From Global to Local*. 2003, pp. 18-19.

various efforts based on the use of ICTs employ strategies that are in themselves hybrid cultural products through their combination of tools and cultural elements from modern and traditional cultural repertoires.

This discussion of culture and globalization must ultimately conclude that the simultaneous processes of change, resistance and adaptation do not preclude another possible resolution of the apparent contradiction between the modern and the primitive: that of cultural compatibility. A Maya-K'iche' worker from Cantel states, "These advances do not make us lose our roots, which is the Mayan culture. We remember that the Maya were great mathematicians, scientists, and astronomers, according to the *Popul Vuh*, we can learn a lot from our ancestors."<sup>193</sup>

Thus from the perspective of many indigenous computer users, the cultural train wreck inherent in globalization so often discussed in theoretical literature never materializes, as individuals and communities utilize their culture as a foundation for adaptation to changing global circumstances and as a resource for political organizing. A Maya-Tzutujil computer entrepreneur has resolved these contradictions in his own work arguing that,

I believe that the Internet and culture, in some ways the people see this as a collision, one as the destroyer, and the other as the destroyed, that's what people see. But I say that it isn't like that. Better put, it is to technify the culture, that's how it has to be, we cannot remain behind. We have to introduce cultural elements onto the Internet, this is what we have to take advantage of, but if we just say 'The Internet came and it will destroy us,' no. Clearly, like I have told you, if we see it as a destroyer then surely it will destroy us. Because we would be letting it. But if we make ourselves work with the Internet, if we take it and make it ours, then we will mix culture and technology. That's what it is.<sup>194</sup>

#### **Chapter 4: ICTs for future development: strategies and projects to place ICTs at the service of indigenous communities**

The opportunities presented by increasing access to ICTs in indigenous communities enables new strategies for grassroots development and the revitalization of cultural identity. The challenges discussed in previous chapters affirm that "There is no magic 'digital wand' that would overcome the scourge of poverty overnight."<sup>195</sup> These strategies must not only challenge the systemic inequalities that oppress the Mayan people, but also must avoid reproducing inequality and divisions within indigenous communities. ICT for development should recognize the unfulfilled right to access information and support participatory decision-making at the local level for all sectors of the population, including elders,

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<sup>193</sup> Interview with Florentine Ordoñez Chun, age 43, July 22, 2003. "Este avance pues, no nos haga de nosotros perder nuestras raíces, que es nuestra cultura Maya. Recordemos que los Mayas fueron grandes matemáticos, científicos, y astrólogos, según a leer de esto libro el *Popul Vuh*, encontramos muchas cosas de nuestros antepasados."

<sup>194</sup> Interview with Felipe Navichoc, age 30, November 15, 2003. "Yo considero que la Internet y la cultura, en cierta forma la gente lo mira como choque, uno como destructor, y el otro destruido, eso es lo que mira la gente. Pero digo que no es así. Es más bien es tecnificar la cultura, porque así tiene que ser, no podemos quedarnos atrás. Tenemos que introducir elementos culturales en Internet, eso es lo que hay que aprovechar, porque si solo decimos, "vino la Internet y nos va a destruir," no. Claro, como te digo también, si miramos así como destructor seguro que nos va a destruir. Porque nos vamos a dejar. Pero si nos ponemos a trabajar con Internet, nos tomamos de la mano, y mezclamos la cultura y la tecnología. Eso es, eso es."

<sup>195</sup> UN Economic and Social Council, 2000, p. 6.

women and the geographically isolated.<sup>196</sup>

#### **4.1 Strategies for individual and collective indigenous organizing**

These strategies operate on a number of different levels, often simultaneously, as individuals and organizations seek to implement ICT in the service of community-led development. The four levels – individual, community, regional and global – each require specific analysis to understand how Mayan activists envision utilizing ICTs in their development projects.

##### **4.1.1 Individual and community strategies**

At the individual level, ICTs offer tremendous potential for educational development, improved employment prospects and leadership training. Since computers and the Internet are not widely available in schools, students must first overcome financial and geographical barriers to seek out access and orientation. This improvisational process takes advantage of social networks to find out about computer training opportunities and is facilitated by proximity to urban centers. The lack of orientation places responsibility on individuals to figure out for themselves how best to use ICTs for personal development while recognizing the dangers of negative cultural influences. One of the students from Cantel stated this reality succinctly: “I think it will really depend on how I manage the technology, if I drive it, or if it drives me.”<sup>197</sup>

Of course, the improvised nature of this process can reinforce the marginalization from ICTs that many Mayan people experience. Mayan students and young adults from urban areas (or who migrate to Guatemala City or the United States) most easily realize this potential for personal development because they have enough disposable income to pay for use in Internet centers. As these young people move throughout the country and abroad, ICTs such as cell phones and email can potentially play an important role in maintaining connections to life at home. Thus the increased mobility that leads to more opportunities to take advantage of ICTs does not necessarily have to increase alienation from the home community’s culture.

As individuals acquire the training and capacity to use computers and the Internet in their academic and professional lives, one results is that they simultaneously imagine diverse collective strategies to promote development through the use of the ICTs. Focusing on community-level strategies, several students see the potential for the establishment of community computer centers that not only provide an opportunity for more people to learn to use ICTs, but also serve as a meeting space to discuss community issues and foster community unity. A community computer center can contribute to the growth of local human resources and facilitate traditional community organization to overcome community divisions as well as the chronic poverty and post-conflict psychological trauma that are prevalent in many rural indigenous communities.

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<sup>196</sup> Numerous innovative projects exist around the world that demonstrate effective ICT-based solutions for local development problems. Although the purpose of this essay is not to survey efforts which have the potential for applicability in rural Guatemala, the experiences of ICT projects in other countries should contribute to implementing better projects in Guatemala. One innovative project in Cambodia uses a mobile wireless Internet chip set mounted on motorbikes to bring education and health services to villagers in rural areas. More information is available at <<http://www.ratanakiri.com>> and in the *New York Times* Jan. 27, 2004 issue, in a article by James Brooks titled “Digital Pony Express’ Links up Cambodia.” A second innovative ICT project in India has established e-*choupals* (*choupal* means ‘gathering place’ in Hindi) to provide market information for rural farmers and improve rural productivity. Case study information is available at <[http://www.digitaldividend.org/case/case\\_echoupal.htm](http://www.digitaldividend.org/case/case_echoupal.htm)>.

<sup>197</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES student from Cantel, age 19, July 3, 2003. “*Yo creo que dependerá mucho de cómo manejo yo la tecnología, si manejo yo a ella, o si ella me maneja a mi.*”

However, violence and displacement have fostered fear and divisions within communities, as related by a student from a village near Santa Cruz del Quiché.

I grew up in the midst of a war...I was realizing that the wars have really destroyed our communities, and left them totally disoriented and the people totally confused. From there the people need something more that will help them overcome these fears and we believe that communication is the ideal media to achieve progress in these communities that are very fearful...<sup>198</sup>

Thus despite the negative impacts of war and poverty on indigenous communities, these students' belief in the importance of culturally relevant media underscores the need for accurate information about local, national and global events as a basis for community organizing. ICTs can be a catalyst for healing, building and re-building community institutions if they are used to develop the capabilities of local human resources. Strategic use of ICTs, for example through the rebroadcast of information from the Internet on community radio stations, can turn relatively inaccessible technologies into mass media.

This strategy takes advantage of ICTs to resolve community tensions that result from high rates of immigration. FUPEDDES director Estheiman Amaya states this as one of the practical goals of the Internet network Poder-Local.com: that immigrants

Should have the possibility to maintain a close contact with their community, with what is happening in their communities. This permits that the ties of belonging between the immigrant and his community would not be broken. I believe this is a significant cultural contribution.<sup>199</sup>

Decreasing communication costs and community web pages can reinforce community bonds despite the distances, providing immigrants with cultural ties to their community and potentially harnessing remittances for community projects. Maintaining these connections may also lessen the inevitable tensions resulting from the migration and return of large numbers of young men.

Municipal mayors frequently mentioned expanded possibilities for direct connections with international donor institutions to fund community projects as a community development strategy. According to the mayor of San Antonio Huista, participating in the network Poder-Local.com "brings us the benefit that around the world the needs of our town can be known...this can help us in the sense that through the Internet we can solicit from other countries support for the problems here."<sup>200</sup>

The promotion of tourism is a development strategy for rural towns through web pages featuring local customs, the annual fair, historic sacred sites and other local attractions. This is one of the objectives of the network Poder-Local.com and many local residents view tourism as a potential source of income,

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<sup>198</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES student from Santa Cruz del Quiché, age 22, July 11, 2003. *"Yo crecí en medio de una guerra...me fui dando cuenta de que también las guerras han destruido bastante a nuestras comunidades, los han totalmente desorientados, desinformados, y la gente está totalmente confundida. Desde allí es que la gente algo más que los ayude a superar a estos temores y creemos que la comunicación es el medio idóneo para lograr sacar adelante a estas comunidades que se ha quedado muy miedosa..."*

<sup>199</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES director Estheiman Amaya, age 40, July 24, 2003. *"...tenga la posibilidad de mantener un contacto cercano con su comunidad, con lo que está pasando en su comunidad. Eso permite que no se rompa el hilo de pertenencia entre la inmigrante y su comunidad, yo creo que en eso también es un aporte significativo cultural."*

<sup>200</sup> Interview with Bernardo Adalberto Jimenez, Mayor of San Antonio Huista. October 11, 2003. *"El beneficio que se trae es de que se puede conocer a nivel del mundo las necesidades de nuestro municipio...nos puede ayudar en el sentido de que podemos ya a través del Internet solicitar a otros países una ayuda para la problemática."*

but it requires decent roads, restaurants and hotels, as well as publicity to attract foreign and national visitors. Members of the Municipal Council of Santa Ana Huista see their web page hosted at Poder-Local.com as their only means of publicizing their tourist attractions, since the municipal office has no telephone or other communication technology. The municipal secretary commented that "Here we have two tourist sites that are really attractive, there is the waterfall and the Limon Cave...for this year, we wanted to build a park (at the waterfall) and by announcing that now we have a park, the tourists will visit."<sup>201</sup> Of course, despite the much needed income in rural towns that results from increased tourism, there can also be negative consequences, as tourism revenues can also reinforce existing class hierarchies, since only wealthy townspeople own the hotels and restaurants that benefit the most from increased tourism.

#### 4.1.2 Regional strategies

At the regional level, a new political institution emerged in recent years to promote development through cooperation among neighboring municipalities. These mayors' associations, called *Mancomunidades*, unite communities in the pursuit of regional initiatives that may be too expensive for any one municipality to consider undertaking. The mayors of the Huista region, consisting of eight towns in the northwestern extremity of Huehuetenango, agreed to establish *Mancomunidad* Huista in 2004 "with the goal of uniting efforts to achieve projects that benefit the (eight) municipalities."<sup>202</sup>

This strategy of regionalization takes advantage of the national emphasis on decentralization and receives funds from each of the municipalities as well as from COPRE (*Comisión Presidencial para la Reforma del Estado, la Descentralización y la Participación Ciudadana*, Presidential Commission for State Reform, Decentralization and Citizen Participation) and the Regional Development Councils.

The *Mancomunidad* has already established institutional connections with the World Bank to carry out a US\$63.7 million roads project that would improve main and secondary roads in the Huista region. This project, in the framework of the national poverty reduction strategy, focuses on the region of Guatemala considered to be "the poverty belt" which includes northwest Huehuetenango. Plans include the repair of 830 kilometers of rural roads and 270 kilometers of secondary and main roads, the construction of some eighty footbridges, and the formation of twenty small firms to carry out these works.<sup>203</sup>

During 2003 the *Mancomunidad* developed a strategic plan to prioritize projects and provide a blueprint for future *Mancomunidad* activities. The first project axis is transportation and road infrastructure; the second focuses on energy and telecommunications. The plan sets the goal that "the population should have available individual systems of communication, of quality, efficient and at a reasonable price. To support the creation of municipal or private mass communication businesses with educational and cultural goals."<sup>204</sup> According to *Mancomunidad* director Alfredo Cardenas, plans are

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<sup>201</sup> Interview with Edwin Castillo, Municipal Secretary of Santa Ana Huista, October 25, 2003. "Aquí contamos con dos lugares turísticos que son bastante atractivos, está el resumidero y la cueva de Limón...para este año, queríamos hacer un parque (en el resumidero) y ya anunciando nosotros que contamos con parque, el turismo va a llegar."

<sup>202</sup> <<http://www.mancomunidadhuista.com>>. "...con la finalidad de unir esfuerzos para lograr proyectos que beneficien a los (ocho) municipios."

<sup>203</sup> Of the US\$63.7 million approved for the project, \$46.7 million is a World Bank loan and \$17 million is funded by the Guatemalan government. The official title of the project is Guatemala-Second Rural and Main Roads Project and the Project ID P055085. More information is available at <<http://www-wds.worldbank.org>>.

<sup>204</sup> <<http://www.mancomunidadhuista.com/mhplan.htm>>. "la población disponga de sistemas de comunicación individual, de calidad, eficientes, eficaces y a buen precio. Apoyar la creación de empresas municipales o privadas de medios de comunicación de masas con fines educativos y culturales."

being developed for a satellite telephone system that would not only connect the municipalities with each other, but would also provide Internet access for the municipal offices. The plan also calls for the establishment of community telecenters to make this service available to more people.

Access to modern telecommunications not only improves municipal service, but also could make the regional association stronger and more efficient through teleconferencing and video conferencing. Although the towns are in the same region, travel between towns is difficult, time-consuming and can be impossible during the rainy season. ICTs also can improve transparency in municipal expenditures through increased public oversight of local projects, if municipalities publish budget information and minutes from public meetings on their web sites. The extent that ICTs support community organizing also contributes to oversight and increased accountability of leaders to their constituencies, as pointed out by FUPEDDES co-director Camposeco: "Organization is fundamental, the organization of civil society, of the neighbors, this seems fundamental because if there is organization of some sort they can better oversee the work that (the authorities) do, not only the local authorities but also the national authorities."<sup>205</sup>

#### 4.1.3 Global strategies

A final strategic level demonstrates that local actors see globalization and the Internet as a two-way process that generates possibilities of access to markets for agricultural products, expansion of culture and global sharing. The first global strategy takes advantage of the same aspects of globalization that multinational corporations utilize to conduct global business: decreased communication costs, immediate access to information, and web-based marketing and publicity. Access to global markets for traditional crops like coffee and non-traditional crops such as vegetables and flowers is a high-priority global strategy for many communities. The perishable nature of these commodities requires up-to-date price information supported by fast, flexible transport services. Increased reliance on global information tools can lead to increased efficiency, if small farmers receive the training to take full advantage of them.

Local producers of non-traditional export products also rely on the Internet to facilitate entry into niche markets, such as organic produce and fair trade coffee. The Guaya'b Civil Association, an indigenous cooperative based in Jacaltenango, produces fair trade coffee certified by Transfair USA and other products, such as organic honey and hibiscus tea.<sup>206</sup>

A second global strategy envisions a more equitable globalization that enables the sharing of distinct cultural identities across borders while valuing the equality inherent in each perspective. This powerful discourse is a vision of global comprehension based on communication, mutual respect and cultural self-determination. The following quotes outline this alternative globalization:

Estheiman Amaya, FUPEDDES co-director:

For me globalization is positive, and positive in the measure that one can enter into global processes as yourself, that is enter into the global world contributing something of what you are, and receiving a little bit of what everyone is. If we are going to confront the process of globalization with knowing who we are, then we are just going to make ourselves seem like the rest of the world and then we will have no contribution to the world. Thus for me, it is not only the Mayan culture but also the cultures of the world that are very important in this process of

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<sup>205</sup> Interview with FUPEDDES director Eulalia Camposeco, age 38, May 30, 2003. *"Es fundamental la organización, la organización de la sociedad civil, de los vecinos, parece que es fundamental porque si hay organización de alguna manera pueden fiscalizar mejor el trabajo que realizan, no solamente las autoridades locales sino las autoridades también nacionales."*

<sup>206</sup> More information at <<http://www.transfairusa.org/pdfs/profiles/Guayab-Guatemala.PDF>>

globalization, the Arab culture, the Latin American culture, the indigenous culture, they are fundamental, because we do not intend to create, or at least I hope the intention is not to create, one single culture. But if a culture, let's say, a global culture with specific contributions that have not been lost, then I believe that culture plays a fundamental role in this. I do not aspire believe that a global citizenship means to be Swedish or to be European, or to be American, I understand that it means to enter into the global culture being myself, open to the difference, because the global culture is the sum of many differences...I believe that the Internet has to be used by all the cultures, it should be used by all the cultures to go along creating a global conscience. The global conscience cannot be the conscience of just one culture, it is the conscience of a diverse world, because we are in different worlds, and we have to create unity of diversity.<sup>207</sup>

FUPEDES student from Jacaltenango:

Well what I would say, the idea that many people have of the Internet is that it is a way to globalize the world, globalize culture, language, everything that characterizes the human being, this is the opinion of many. But I think that it is justified that we are going to be globalized in such a way that means to share some global experiences, because we also can make us of the Internet, we also can use the telephone, we can use e-mail to communicate with our people already knowing that many of them are in different parts of the world, I can communicate with my friend who lives in the United States, I can use my own language, I can write in my own language directly with him. That I can communicate with him is one of the advantages or one of the developments that marks technology. And also technology permits me to make known my culture and the weaknesses and strengths of my community. For me globalization is positive, and positive in the measure that one can enter into global processes as yourself, that is enter into the global world contributing something of what you are, and receiving a little bit of what everyone is. If we are going to confront the process of globalization with knowing who we are, then we are just going to make ourselves seem like the rest of the world and then we will have no contribution to the world. Thus for me, it is not only the Mayan culture but also the cultures of the world that are very important in this process of globalization, the Arab culture, the Latin American culture, the indigenous culture, they are fundamental, because we do not intend to create, or at least I hope the intention is not to create, one single culture.<sup>208</sup>

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<sup>207</sup> Interview with FUPEDES director Estheiman Amaya, age 40, July 24, 2003. *“O sea para mi el proceso de globalización es positivo, y es positivo en la medida en que uno entra en el proceso global como uno mismo, o sea entra uno al mundo global aportando un poco de lo que uno es, y recibiendo un poco de que todos son. Si ese proceso de globalización lo vamos a enfrentar sin saber quienes somos, entonces vamos a querer parecernos a todo el mundo y no va a ver un aporte nuestro al mundo. Entonces para mi, no es solamente la cultura Maya sino son las culturas del mundo que son muy importantes en este proceso de globalización, la cultura árabe, la cultura latinoamericana, la cultura indígena, son fundamentales, porque no pretendemos crear, o por lo menos yo espero que no se pretenda crear una cultura única. Pero si una cultura, digamos una cultura global con aportes específicos que no se pierde, entonces yo creo que la cultura es fundamental en esa, o sea yo no aspiro a crecer un ciudadano global signifique ser sueco o ser europeo, o ser americano, yo entiendo que es entrar en una cultura global es ser yo mismo, abierto a las diferencias, porque la cultura global es la suma de muchas diferencias... Creo que el Internet tiene que ser usado por todas las culturas, debe ser utilizado por todas las culturas para ir creándose conciencia global, es que la conciencia global no puede ser la conciencia de una sola cultura, es la conciencia de que somos un mundo diverso, que somos un mundo distinto, y tenemos que crear una unidad de la diversidad.”*

<sup>208</sup> Interview with FUPEDES student from Jacaltenango, male, age 26, July 7, 2003. *“Bien, lo que digo, la idea que tienen*

Importantly, this vision demonstrates the awareness that globalization is not exclusively a homogenizing, destructive force, but instead it opens up new possibilities for self- and collective expression. This strategy does not ignore the existing inequality that characterizes the global system, but imagines equality emerging from the mutual exchange and affirmation of culture and knowledge across boundaries that have until now divided people. This vision is the essence of a constructive, transformative grassroots globalization that relies on cultural adaptability to modern circumstances and coincides with the emergence of international human rights instruments in support of indigenous rights. Global comprehension calls for the recognition of difference and the establishment of rights to affirm and support cultural distinctiveness. The most far-reaching conventions toward this end are the International Labour Organization Convention (No. 169) concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries and the Draft Declaration of the Indigenous Peoples' Rights.<sup>209</sup>

By basing its claims for global equality and unfettered access to human rights on legal instruments that are very much part of the international system of laws and treaties, this vision reaffirms the validity and jurisdiction of that system even while recognizing that it is fundamentally based on unequal access to power and exploitative capital relations. It would be naïve to believe that such an egalitarian reality could spontaneously arise out of a global system where transnational corporations, a handful of wealthy nations and multilateral institutions determine national and local policy on quotidian issues such as health, education and agriculture. These actors derive legitimacy and exercise power through their mastery of instantaneous information and communication networks (examples from corporate economics include just-in-time production, capital flight, and futures speculation). This economic and political power seemingly outweighs any power derived from grassroots utilization of transnational networks for social change. But the very same system that generates this power for transnational actors also opens spaces for collective mobilization and social change. The dramatic spread of Internet-based activism in support of oppressed peoples is only one facet of this alternative globalization; the production of Mayan language CD-Roms and computer software is another. While these imbalances of power may limit the ultimate realization of these utopian goals – just as in Guatemala, the ILO Convention 169 statements on land provisions for indigenous peoples have been ignored – they do not negate the existence of these spaces for struggle and social change.

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*muchos es que el Internet es una forma a globalizar el mundo, y globalizar la cultura, el idioma, todo lo que caracteriza el ser humano, eso que muchos opina, pero creo que eso no es una, o es una justifica que vamos a ser globalizados en cierta manera que es compartir algunas experiencias así globales puede decir, pero también podemos hacer uso del Internet, podemos hacer del teléfono, puede hacer uso de los correos electrónicos para poder comunicarnos con nuestros paisanos ya sabiendo ahora que muchos están en diferentes partes del mundo, puedo comunicarme por ejemplo con un mi paisano que vive en los Estados Unidos, puedo utilizar mi propio idioma, escribir mi propio idioma, directamente con él, me puedo comunicar con él es una de las ventajas o es uno de los desarrollos que puede marcar la tecnología. Y también la tecnología me permite a dar a conocer mi cultura las debilidades y las fortalezas de mi comunidad. Creo que si la tecnología puede servir para fomentar la cultura, no solo para aumentar la cultura extranjera, y podemos compartir como un mundo global, podemos compartir experiencias, y costumbres y todo eso para poder comprendernos mejor para que haga una comprensión global, que yo ahora ya no va a venir aquí la idea de que porque el es de tal cultura y yo soy de tal cultura, y soy totalmente diferente, que hay una desigualdad, o sea que ahora la tecnología hay que utilizar de esta manera para que nosotros comprendamos como es la situación allá, como es la situación acá... Creo que es la mejor forma de como comprendernos ya."*

<sup>209</sup> Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. <<http://www1.umn.edu/humanrts/instreet/declra.htm>> International Labour Organization. Convention (No. 169) concerning indigenous and tribal peoples in Independent Countries. <<http://www.ilo.org/public/English/region/ampro/mdtsanjose/indigenous/derecho.htm>>. Draft

## Section 4.2 Ongoing ICT interventions

Connectivity in Guatemala has increased dramatically in the last few years and a number of projects already exist that implement ICTs for development. Successful interventions not only increase access and provide orientation but also avoid repeating the pattern of marginalization within indigenous communities by taking proactive steps to facilitate access for elders, women and children, especially girls, while strengthening local control over resources and decision-making capabilities and extending indigenous languages onto new formats.

These projects can lessen community fears about the potential negative impacts of ICTs through instruction in local languages and by training community members as ICT instructors while supporting existing networks of community organization and the development of bilingual education. These projects vary in their objectives, relationships with local community projects, funding sources and use of ICTs, but they share the common imperative that indigenous communities must take advantage of ICTs to avoid repeating the historical pattern of exclusion.

This section describes each project to provide a resource for Mayan advocates working in ICTs for development, compiling a broad overview of the types of ICT projects that already exist in Guatemala.

### 4.2.1 Poder-Local.com, Red Virtual de Municipalidades de Guatemala, [www.poder-local.com](http://www.poder-local.com)

FUPEDES offers an Internet network subscription service to municipal governments, providing them with email addresses and a web page, creating "an instrument that could resolve many of the problems that they now suffer due to a lack of information."<sup>210</sup> FUPEDES launched the Poder-Local.com network in January 2003 and it currently consists of seventeen municipalities. Municipal authorities are the primary audience for the project, which offers training on how to best utilize the Internet to improve local governance and make direct connections with international donor institutions interested in supporting local development initiatives. International donors are the secondary audience and the web site includes information aimed at potential allies. Currently, community members themselves are a potential audience, as connectivity rates are still very low in most of the towns belonging to the Poder-Local.com network.

FUPEDES director Estheiman Amaya spoke to the contradiction in developing web sites for communities without Internet access:

While we are promoting the creation of Web pages, so that they will be read outside the communities, the very same communities don't have access to their own Web pages, without a doubt this does not mean that these communities which don't have access to technology, cannot benefit themselves from the use of these technologies. In that sense, I believe that the act of making known these communities, their advantages, and offers of services, in fact it is opening the possibility of the development of the community, which even if it is hard to see now represents the near future. For example, income from tourism, or other business possibilities, the commercialization of agricultural products, which before haven't been contemplated.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>210</sup> FUPEDES. "Poder-Local.com: Red Virtual de las Municipalidades de Guatemala. (Poder-Local.com: Virtual Network of the Municipalities of Guatemala.)" 2003, p.3. "un instrumento que podría resolver muchos de los problemas que sufren actualmente con la carencia de información."

<sup>211</sup> Interview with FUPEDES director Estheiman Amaya, age 40, July 24, 2003. "mientras que nosotros estamos

Poder-Local.com seeks to invert the traditional model of journalism in Guatemala, which views rural citizens as passive recipients of news and information, not newsmakers. By employing indigenous student-journalists to write the contents of each municipality's web site, the project promotes the formation of journalists who can identify with the needs and experiences of rural communities and who see journalism as a tool to promote rural development. The web sites publish news from rural communities to the rest of the world, including community members abroad, rather than functioning as a news media for the community itself.

Beyond the simple lack of access in communities, a number of challenges exist that hinder the effectiveness of Web-based development journalism. Web networks require constant updating and technical expertise, carried out by FUPEDS staff in Xela. If municipal governments had the specialized personnel and sufficient infrastructure they could exercise greater control over the contents of the sites and could quickly integrate relevant municipal information that responds to and reflects community needs. Also, people in some participating municipalities saw the web site as a space reserved for the municipal authorities that did not involve or encourage community participation.<sup>212</sup> Generating interest and increasing local input would require municipalities to publicize the web sites through the existing Internet centers.

Furthermore, the current contents of the network are inadequate to take advantage of all the possible benefits of a community web site. Future web site development could include translation of the pages into the local Mayan language, streaming community radio in indigenous languages, an interactive chat room, news about local issues and indigenous rights, comprehensive links and contact information for community organizations, municipal budgets and project timelines. Future development of the network should include information with a focus on expanding the audience of the site to include local residents as they gain access through the establishment of community Internet centers.

#### 4.2.2 Enlace Quiché and ebiguatemala.org

Enlace Quiché (EQ) is the local name for the USAID funded ICT project which began in 2000 based in Santa Cruz del Quiché. EQ supports the integration of ICTs into bilingual education – its motto is “teaching WITH computers, not ABOUT computers”<sup>213</sup> – and has created a number of interactive CD-ROMS<sup>214</sup>, opening twenty-one computer centers in schools in three different departments<sup>215</sup>, and

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*impulsando la creación de paginas Web, para que sean leídas fuera de las comunidades, es que las comunidades no tengan acceso a sus propios paginas Web, sin embargo eso no significa que esas comunidades que no tienen acceso a las tecnologías, no pueden beneficiarse del uso de estas tecnologías. En que sentido? Yo creo que el hecho de dar a conocer la comunidad las ventajas y hacer ofertas de servicios, de hecho le está abriendo la posibilidad del desarrollo de la comunidad, que si bien no es muy vista puede representar en un futuro cercano ingresos por ejemplo por turismo, u otras posibilidades de negocios, la comercialización de productos agrícolas, que antes no han sido contemplados.”*

<sup>212</sup> Informal conversations with users in computer centers in San Antonio Huista and Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Oct. 2003.

<sup>213</sup> <<http://www.enlacequiche.org.gt>>.

<sup>214</sup> During 2002 and 2003, EQ produced fifteen CDs, including the early childhood education software package Jun E, which won one of forty World Summit Awards for e-content and creativity at the 2003 WSIS in Geneva, a 4-CD set called *Tejiendo el Idioma Maya* (Weaving the Mayan Language) to teach Mayan literacy in K'iche', Sakpulteko, Tz'utujil and Uspanteko, an interactive CD called *Qanimarisaq Qano'jib'alil - Engrandezcamos Nuestro Pensamiento* (Enlarging Our Thoughts) with literacy and pronunciation games in K'iche' and Ixil, and *Uwachib'alil Qach'ab'al - Así se Ilustra mi Palabra* (Illustrations of our Words), a CD with more than 3,000 Mayan cultural images in jpeg format. All EQ materials are open source and some are available for online use or available in download. More information

developing computer-based training courses for bilingual teachers and translators.

EQ also established [ebiguatemala.org](http://ebiguatemala.org), an Internet-based portal to promote interculturality and the sharing of bilingual education resources. The site seeks to be “An educational and informational site where experiences, knowledges, ideas, resources and news can be shared about the peoples that coexist in Guatemala.”<sup>216</sup> The site features contents and resources in and about indigenous languages, downloadable software, as well as forums and discussion lists. The inter-institutional council that oversees the portal includes representatives from OKMA, DIGEBI, the *Proyecto Lingüístico Francisco Marroquin* (Francisco Marroquin Linguistic Project), ALMG, Enlace Quiché, the *Consejo Nacional de Educación Maya* (National Council of Maya Education) and the *Fondo de Desarrollo Indígena Guatemalteco* (Guatemalan Indigenous Development Fund).

Melchor Aguará, Enlace Quiché staff member, said

It is not an easy task but I like what I do because it gives me the opportunity to create and support the development of children that need so much from us. En ENLACE, we are working on a project that is developing the following activities: Identification of software on the Internet so that they can be used in technology centers which have been previously implemented. We are creating guides for the use of the software to strengthen the educational process of the children making use of computer technology. We are going to train our teachers for the use of these materials. We want to strengthen the [ebiguatemala.org](http://ebiguatemala.org) portal by uploading the same materials that can strengthen process of Bilingual Intercultural Education. I think we are very ambitious but we are learning...<sup>217</sup>

#### 4.2.3 Centros Electronicos de Negocios

The Guild Association of Non Traditional Exporters (AGEXPRONT) currently carries out the second phase of this project with financing from USAID, Banrural, Bancafé and *Genesis Empresarial* (Business Genesis). During the first stage, which was jointly administered by the Guatemalan Chamber of Commerce and AGEXPRONT, five Electronic Business Centers were established in Nebaj and Santa Cruz, of Quiché, and Chisec, San Pedro Carcha and Rabinal, of Alta Verapaz. The purpose of the project is to establish economically sustainable technology centers that provide computer-related services for local residents and small business owners.

The second phase of the project plans to establish thirty more centers<sup>218</sup> in rural areas with the

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on educational materials is available at <http://www.enlaceQuiché.org.gt/areas/areas.htm>.

<sup>215</sup> Ten of these centers operate in secondary schools, three in community centers and eight in primary schools. The communities hosting centers include Pueblo Nuevo and Cantabal, Ixcán, Nebaj, Cunén, Uspantán, Sacapulas, Joyabaj, Santa Cruz del Quiché and Santa Catarina Ixtahuacán (all in the department of Quiché), Rabinal, Baja Verapaz, Santa Lucía Utatlán and San Pedro la Laguna, Sololá. <http://www.enlaceQuiché.org.gt/areas/areas.htm>.

<sup>216</sup> <http://www.ebiguatemala.org/article/articlestatic/119>. “sitio educativo e informativo en donde se comparten experiencias, conocimientos, ideas, recursos y noticias de los pueblos que coexisten en Guatemala.”

<sup>217</sup> Personal correspondence, April 2004. “No es una tarea fácil pero me gusta lo que hago porque me dan la oportunidad de crear y aportar para el desarrollo de los niños que necesitan mucho de nosotros. En ENLACE, estamos trabajando un proyecto que desarrolla las siguientes actividades: Identificación de software en internet para que los mismos sean utilizados en los centros de tecnología que fueron implementados anteriormente. Estamos creando guías para el uso de estos software para fortalecer el proceso educativo de los niños haciendo uso de la tecnología computarizada. Vamos a capacitar a maestros para el uso de estos materiales. Queremos fortalecer el portal [ebiguatemala.org](http://ebiguatemala.org) subiendo al mismo materiales que pueden fortalecer procesos de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural. Creo que somos muy ambiciosos pero estamos aprendiendo...”

<sup>218</sup> The 30 centers are located in the following municipalities: San Pedro Carchá, Alta Verapaz, San Juan Ostuncalco, Santa Cruz Barillas, El Progreso, Jutiapa, Santa Catarina Mita, Ipala, Almolonga, San Pedro Soloma, Concepción las

general objective “To bring technological development to areas affected by the war and to provide to the businessman a useful tool to carry out commercial transactions with business people from other cities and other countries.” According to the website [centroselectronicos.com](http://www.centroselectronicos.com), among the specific objectives of the program are: “To open opportunities for business: provide instant information for prices for the products that are produced in the region, products and services that are offered at a national and international level; stimulate investment in the Peace Zone and reduce the digital information divide.”<sup>219</sup>

This project aims to support farmers and small business owners in rural areas through the reduction of costs and the acceleration of the interchange of information for investors and local organizations and businesses seeking support from outside the community or market information.

#### **4.2.4 Proyecto Bibliotecas Guatemala (PROBIGUA) Spanish School**

Located in Antigua, PROBIGUA offers Spanish classes to foreign visitors and reinvests the proceeds into establishing rural libraries. PROBIGUA began establishing libraries in 1992 and currently maintains more than thirty, including a mobile library housed in a renovated U.S. school bus. In 2000, PROBIGUA began a new project, The Technological Center for Educational Investigation, which established a computer center in the *Instituto Indígena Nuestra Señora del Socoro*, a Catholic teacher-training school for indigenous girls in Antigua Guatemala.

In 2001, PROBIGUA received a \$250,000 grant from the Gates Foundation that established ten additional computer centers with satellite Internet connections and provided one or two computers for the existing libraries. During 2004, PROBIGUA seeks funds to support an ambitious proposal to establish a total of one hundred centers in eight different departments of Guatemala.

PROBIGUA founder and director Rigoberto Zamora sees the community computer centers as fundamental for providing training for the future leaders of the country. He said,

We are working on two aspects, one, the creation not just of young leaders, and the concept of the organization of these young leaders... We want to and we should organize, this has to be the key word now for the development of Guatemala is the organization, but not just within the communities but also between the different groups where there are young leaders and they can interact together. Second, those leaders should have the necessary training to understand the reach of communication, making use of the tool of technology.<sup>220</sup>

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Minas, and Salamá (all with funding from Bancafe); Chajul, Jacaltenango, Cahabón, Fray Bartolome de las Casas, San Luis, Petén, Poptún, Cabricán, Chicaman, Playa Grande, Soloma, La Tinta, Guatemala (funding from Banrural); Raxruhá, Alta Verapaz, Sayaxché, Petén, Río Dulce, Izabal, Poptún, Petén, Tactic, Alta Verapaz, Tecpán, Chimaltenango, Cdad. Pedro de Avarado, Jutiapa, Melchor de Mencos, Petén, El Naranjo, Petén, La Libertad (funding from Génesis).

<sup>219</sup> Both quotes from the CEN website, <<http://www.centroselectronicos.com/>>. “Llevar desarrollo tecnológico a áreas afectadas por la guerra y proveer al empresario de una herramienta útil para realizar transacciones comerciales con empresarios de otras ciudades y de otros países; Abrir oportunidades de negocios; proveer información al instante de precios de los productos que se producen en la región, productos y servicios que se ofertan y demandan a nivel nacional e internacional; Estimular inversión en Zonapaz; y Reducir la brecha de información digital.”

<sup>220</sup> Interview with PROBIGUA director Rigoberto Zamora, November 20, 2003. “Estamos trabajando en dos aspectos, uno, la creación, no la creación sino la formación de líderes jóvenes, y el concepto de la organización de los líderes jóvenes... Queremos y debemos organizar, esta tiene que ser la palabra clave ahora para el desarrollo de Guatemala es la organización, pero no solamente entre las comunidades sino entre los diferentes grupos donde hay líderes jóvenes y que ellos puedan interactuar en conjunto. Segundo, estos líderes deben de tener la capacitación necesaria para entender el alcance de la comunicación, haciendo uso de la herramienta de la tecnología.”

#### **4.2.5 Other online networks and resources: Mayacom.org**

This website consists of a network for rural computer centers in the department of Sololá. The network, organized by the Mayan Council for Communication in Sololá, currently links together forty organizations through the portal hosted at mayacom.org. It supports the development of community access programs in independent computer centers and provides periodic training in computer and Internet use in the computer centers.

##### **4.2.5.1 Alcance Guatemala, www.desarrollo.org.gt**

This online National Development Portal received initial support from the World Bank's Development Gateway project, hosted at www.developmentgateway.org. This site features a searchable database of project information called AIDA, Accessible Information on Development Activities. This project seeks to build alliances among the different sectors involved in development work, including local communities, NGOs, government entities and businesses. According to the web site, the critical factors in order to achieve success include:

- 1) Achieving that all the sectors get involved and participate in work groups, what continually permit the enrichment of the contents and services of the Country Gateway; 2) To motivate all the participants who use the Internet in different initiatives such as e-business, knowledge sharing, e-government, e-training; 3) Success resides in the capacity that exists to group together all the sectors underneath one virtual community.<sup>221</sup>

##### **4.2.5.2 Servicio de Información Municipal (Municipal Information Service, SIM) inforpressca.com/municipal**

SIM is a subscription service for municipal governments that includes more than eighty municipalities around the country. SIM, a project of Inforpress, has published bilingual journalistic analysis since 1972 in the Central American Report and Inforpress *Centroamericana*. SIM began in 2000 and in addition to providing a biweekly news bulletin with relevant information for local decision-makers, Inforpress maintains a website for each town, provides a computer, an email address, and training for three people in the municipal government in using technology to search for strategic information.

#### **4.2.6 Characteristics of successful interventions**

These ICT interventions expand the scope of Mayan cultural activism by integrating Mayan cultural elements onto multimedia and Internet based platforms, taking advantage of these modern tools for historic projects to challenge inequality, strengthen indigenous languages and build networks between indigenous activists in different regions of Guatemala and the globe. Two strategies emerge from these projects: creating relevant online content and establishing community computer centers.

The most comprehensive intervention discussed above, Enlace Quiché and the ebiguatemala.org portal, best demonstrates cultural resistance and adaptation utilizing ICTs through the development of financially sustainable community computer centers which focus on children's cultural education while

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<sup>221</sup> <<http://www.desarrollo.org.gt>>. "Lograr que todos los sectores se involucren y participen en grupos de trabajo, que permita continuamente enriquecer el contenido y servicios del Country Gateway; 2) Motivar a todos los participantes a que usen el Internet en distintas iniciativas como e-business, knowledge sharing, e-government, e-training; 3) El éxito reside en la capacidad que tenga para agrupar a todos los sectores bajo una misma comunidad virtual."

encouraging the input and learning of community elders. For an intervention to avoid contributing to existing intergenerational conflicts resulting from immigration and culture change, steps must be taken to include women, returned migrants and older people in the center's activities. Connectivity should not be the final goal of the project, but utilizing ICTs to support community efforts for cultural, economic and political development, such as local language revitalization, training and organizational management, and information relevant to local needs. One Enlace Quiché project aimed at language revitalization combined the wisdom of community elders with the creativity of local children to produce a CD-Rom and series of children's books. The four book series<sup>222</sup>, entitled *Kawachin na ri kitzij kipixab' Qanan Qatat - Florezcan las Palabras de los Hombres de Maíz* (The Flowering of the Words of the People of Corn) contains local stories in the Mayan languages of Ixil and K'iche' which local students collected and transcribed from local elders. The youth also illustrated the stories producing beautiful documents that insure the access of future generations to the stories of their ancestors in a cheap, easily replicable digital format.

Achieving financial stability (even after aid for the initial purchase of computers and a satellite) requires funds to upgrade and purchase new equipment, pay software licensing fees, and high-speed Internet fees. However, the experiences of numerous rural entrepreneurs who have started independent, privately owned Internet centers demonstrate that making a profit is possible. These profits can reinforce local inequality if members of the local elite manage their community centers with an eye exclusively toward personal gain; but instead community-owned centers with a focus on social development issues can reinvest profits into expanded activities and services to broaden community participation. Again, the goal of these efforts must transcend mere connectivity and instead focus on integrating ICTs into ongoing local cultural and political projects.

Another challenge in the implementation of successful ICT projects is the need to train local residents to staff the center and solve the inevitable technical problems. As more and more activists begin to rely on ICTs for improved communications, they must be able to count on regular access to functioning equipment to sustain these networks and develop the habit of ICT-based communication. This process occurs slowly and unevenly, as unanswered emails or slow connections can frustrate new users. As confidence in ICTs grows, advocates can begin to initiate new ways to develop ICTs for specific, local needs. Enlace Quiché project director Andy Leiberman writes that this is the "first and foremost challenge of any project...to help indigenous communities to discover a real need that can be met through use of ICTs. Only then will they begin to take ownership."<sup>223</sup>

#### 4.3 Conclusions

Based on this brief survey of ongoing ICT interventions, as well as on interviews with students and advocates utilizing ICTs to promote Mayan culture and local development, this thesis seeks to explain why these initial efforts to use ICTs on behalf of local development agendas is both a necessary and problematic course of action. As increasing numbers of Mayan people gain access to ICTs they may begin to imagine how control of technology can lead to progressive, even transformative change. They can see how an inability to access technology has historically led to disenfranchisement. Just as the late twentieth century Information Revolution forever altered how multinational corporations do global business, the Internet and its decreasing communication costs have revolutionized how social movements network, pressure and organize on a global level.

Fulfilling the fundamental modern imperative to place ICTs at the service of development calls

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<sup>222</sup> Available for download at <<http://www.enlacequiche.org.gt/areas/areas.htm>>.

<sup>223</sup> Leiberman, Andrew E. "Taking ownership: Strengthening Indigenous Cultures and Languages through the Use of ICTs." p. 22. <[http://learnlink.aed.org/Publications/Concept\\_Papers/taking\\_ownership.pdf](http://learnlink.aed.org/Publications/Concept_Papers/taking_ownership.pdf)>.

for national and local policy that will guide actions to overcome the significant barriers to access, including inadequate infrastructure, poverty and the failure of the private sector to make affordable services available to poor, rural populations.<sup>224</sup> Equity in Internet development calls for proactive State policy to increase rural telephone distribution and to support the development of community-based computer centers to broaden democratic participation and provide access to valuable, up-to-the-minute information.

Overcoming barriers to access generates another series of challenges to local development and local culture as part of the most recent wave of globalization and the increase in access to international media and mobility across national borders. The substitution of global or Western behaviors and norms for traditional, local attitudes is one result of in this process. To view cultural change toward homogeneity as an inevitable outcome underestimates the power and presence of Mayan cultural resistance and the potential for Mayan cultural adaptation, which integrates traditional practices into online and multimedia community development strategies. Throughout their history, Mayan communities have adopted and transformed elements from the dominant society into their local cultural practices. Their use of ICTs provide an opportunity to make indigenous languages and cultural elements more prestigious through their successful incorporation into computer programs, CD-ROMs and Internet web sites.

Grassroots globalization takes advantage of new opportunities provided by ICTs: connections to international markets and donors, cross-border solidarity and transnational social movements, and closer contacts with migrant community members living abroad. At the same time indigenous communities can use the tools of the system to challenge the pervasive inequality that perpetuates the rigid ethnic, economic and geographic hierarchies that characterize rural indigenous life in modern Guatemala. This vision of globalization relies on mutual interchange between cultures and nations and presupposes the right to belong in a globalized world without sacrificing one's cultural or national distinctiveness. The utopian goal of this alternative to corporate globalization suggests a global society based on mutual understanding and sharing, establishing equal legitimacy for diverse cultural viewpoints.

Of course, the initial Mayan efforts to utilize ICTs in community development are merely the first step toward the goals of equitable Internet expansion and global understanding. Ongoing technology projects must take into account the structural and historic oppressions that negatively effect the quality of life for most rural indigenous, and seek to address those inequalities by promoting access and training for women, the illiterate, and those who live in geographically isolated areas. ICT-based development initiatives should increase democratic participation rather than limit it to only those with Internet access. They should aim to support the full expression of Mayan cultural diversity, rather than establishing a platform for the imposition of the views of indigenous elites on indigenous communities. These projects can support regional networks to share ICT resources and knowledge as well as to promote regional development through organizations such as the *Mancomunidad* Huista.

A growing number of young Mayan students and community members already experience the benefits and advantages resulting from the spread of ICTs into rural communities. As these youth become new leaders for their communities, they are faced with what seem like mutually exclusive choices: to adopt a "modern" lifestyle based on urban life, speaking Spanish and experiencing increased

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<sup>224</sup> "Telecommunications in general, and particularly the Internet, are growing exponentially and there is an accelerated development of the private offer of Internet services directed towards the population with spending power. It all leads to anticipating, in the best of cases, the permanence, and in the worst, the growth of already existing social and economic divides." Martinez, Juliana. "Internet and Society. Central America: National Environments for Internet Access." *Fundación Acceso*. 2002, p. 6.

participation in the global consumer society; or remain faithful to the “traditional” life in their communities, including subsistence agriculture, religious rituals and participation in local forms of community organization. Nevertheless, the perspectives of the Mayan students consulted for this research reveals that they do not believe that these choices are mutually exclusive. Nor do they believe they represent an identity crisis for young Maya with access to education and ICTs. Instead, these young people take pride in their culture while recognizing that the modern world has opportunities and challenges that their ancestors never faced. These young people see their culture as essentially compatible with modern technology and are training themselves to share the benefits of modern information and communications with their communities. They intend to revitalize local culture by extending it onto mass media and into cyberspace. These youth embody the practice of grassroots globalization and cultural adaptability. Their challenge is to utilize modern tools and strategies of the information age to overcome the deeply entrenched poverty of their communities while contributing to the evolution of Guatemala as a country that values and encourages ethnic equality and interculturality.

### Appendix: Interviews

Name	Position	Age	Sex	Date	Community	Ethnicity
<b>Students</b>						
(Withheld)	Student, FUPEDES	22	M	July 11, 2003	Santa Cruz del Quiché, Quiché	K'ichee'
(Withheld)	Student, FUPEDES	25	M	July 11, 2003	Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango	Popti'
(Withheld)	Student, FUPEDES	23	M	July 7, 2003	San Mateo Ixtatán, Huehuetenango	Chuj
(Withheld)	Student, FUPEDES	24	M	July 7, 2003	Cantel, Quetzaltenango	K'ichee'
(Withheld)	Student, FUPEDES	19	M	July 3, 2003	Cantel, Quetzaltenango	K'ichee'
(Withheld)	Student, FUPEDES	26	M	July 7, 2003	Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango	Popti'
(Withheld)	Student, FUPEDES	19	F	July 3, 2003	Totonicapán, Totonicapán	K'ichee'
(Withheld)	Student, USAC	26	F	October 17, 2003	Santa Lucía Utatlán, Sololá	K'ichee'
(Withheld)	Student, Cantel	27	M	July 25, 2003	Cantel, Quetzaltenango	K'ichee'
(Withheld)	Student, Cantel	20	M	July 25, 2003	Cantel, Quetzaltenango	K'ichee'
(Withheld)	Student, Cantel	25	M	July 25, 2003	Cantel, Quetzaltenango	K'ichee'
(Withheld)	Student, Cantel	19	M	July 25, 2003	Cantel, Quetzaltenango	K'ichee'
(Withheld)	Student, Cantel	43	M	July 25, 2003	Cantel, Quetzaltenango	K'ichee'
(Withheld)	Student, Cantel	19	M	July 25, 2003	Cantel, Quetzaltenango	K'ichee'
<b>ICT Promoters</b>						
Estheiman Amaya	Director, FUPEDES	40	M	July 24, 2003	Columbia	Columbia
Anabela el Rosario López	Administrator, FUPEDES	30	F	July 25, 2003	Quetzaltenango, Quetzaltenango	Ladino
Eulalia Camposeco	Director, FUPEDES	38	F	May 30, 2003	Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango	Popti'
Odilia Guadalupe Poz de Ajsac	Committee member, Presbyterian	34	F	July 22, 2003	Cantel, Quetzaltenango	K'ichee'

	Church					
Florentin Ordoñez Chun	Committee member, Presbyterian Church	43	M	July 22, 2003	Cantel, Quetzaltenango	K'ichee'
Juan Alfonso Ruíz Estrada	Committee member, Presbyterian Church	39	M	July 25, 2003	Cantel, Quetzaltenango	K'ichee'
Enrique Montejo Camposeco	Owner, Computer center	38	M	October 21, 2003	Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango	Popti'
Rosendo Pablo Ramírez	Owner, Internet Center	29	M	October 16, 2003	Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Huehuetenango	Mam
Donny Maldonado	Director, <i>Intervida</i> computer center	25?	M	November 5, 2003	La Democracia, Huehuetenango	Ladino
Felipe Tuy Navichoc	Owner, AJTUUN computer business	30	M	November 15, 2003	San Pedro La Laguna, Sololá	Tz'utujil
Rigoberto Zamora Charuc	Director, PROBIGUA	50?	M	November 20, 2003	San Pedro Yepocapa, Chimaltenango	Kaqchikel
<b>Municipal Employees</b>						
Andrés Miguel Francis Andrés	Mayor	48	M	October 14, 2003	San Miguel Acatán, Huehuetenango	Akateko
Miguel Andrés	Municipal Councilmember	27	M	October 14, 2003	San Miguel Acatán, Huehuetenango	Akateko
Bernardo Adalberto Jiménez	Mayor	45?	M	October 24, 2003	San Antonio Huista, Huehuetenango	Ladino
Gaspar Jiménez Ramírez	Mayor	41	M	October 22, 2003	Concepción Huista, Huehuetenango	Ladino
Baltazar Mateo Cruz	Municipal Councilmember	40?	M	October 22, 2003	Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango	Popti'
Alfredo Alonzo Cárdenas Silvestre	Manager, Mancomunidad Huista	50	M	October 24, 2003	Jacaltenango, Huehuetenango	Popti'
Julián Mendoza Bautista	Mayor	44	M	October 15, 2003	Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Huehuetenango	Mam
Felix Pérez Mendoza	Mayoral Candidate	35?	M	October 15, 2003	Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Huehuetenango	Mam

Manuel de Jesús Lemus López	Municipal Secretary	52	M	October 16, 2003	Todos Santos Cuchumatán, Huehuetenango	Ladino
Edwin Castillo	Municipal Councilmember	40?	M	October 24, 2003	Santa Ana Huista, Huehuetenango	Ladino
Mayra Merida	Assistant Municipal Secretary	25?	F	November 5, 2003	La Democracia, Huehuetenango	Ladino

Note: A question mark (?) indicates approximate age.

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## Vita

Greg Elliott Norman was born in Arlington, Texas on September 17, 1975, the son of Judy Turner Norman and Frank Elliott Norman. After completing work at Temple High School, Temple, Texas in 1994, he entered Rice University in Houston, Texas. During the spring of 1996, he studied journalism at American University in Washington D.C. He received the degree of Bachelor of Arts from Rice University in May 1998. During the following years he has lived and worked in California, Japan, Texas and Guatemala. In 1999, he began working with the Cooperative Association UPAVIM (*Unidas Para Vivir Mejor* – United to Live Better) in Guatemala City, work that he continues through the establishment in 2004 of the UPAVIM Community Development Foundation, a U.S.-based 501(c)3 non-profit corporation. In September 2001, he entered the Lozano Long Institute of Latin American Studies at the Graduate School at the University of Texas at Austin.

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