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Theorizing a Third Current of Maya Politics

Through the San Jorge Land Struggle in Guatemala

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Theorizing a Third Current of Maya Politics

Through the San Jorge Land Struggle in Guatemala

by

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Report

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Dedication

to Ancestors who inspire me:

Juliana Pocop

Rosa Maria Justa Chumil

and my Lolo, Juan Aggabao,

Ibanag Survivor of the Bataan Death March,

who transitioned during this fieldwork.

Words can't express the power of your love

as you lived it, creating better worlds with your presence.

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Thank you all for helping me walk this walk.

Theorizing A Third Current of Maya Politics

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Czarina Faith Thelen, MA

The University of Texas at Austin, 2010

SUPERVISOR: Charles R. Hale

In response to the highly exclusionary Guatemalan state and the genocide of Mayas during the 1980s, the paradigmatic currents of the Maya Movement have been engaging the state in their struggle for rights. Some have been negotiating from within the Guatemalan government by occupying bureaucratic positions within less powerful state ministries. Other Maya actors press for more favorable socioeconomic policies using social movement tactics.

While most literature focuses on the above two currents as a dichotomy, I argue that a third current of Maya politics has the most political potential. One promising example emerged in the course of the land struggle of San Jorge La Laguna (1992-1999). A sector of rural Mayas (mostly poor farmers and teachers) began to look away from the state in their quest for empowerment. They became less concerned with rights granted from a distant state, and prioritized instead practices that reach towards community self-determination and ontological autonomy. This clearly represents a third current of Maya politics grounded in the social fabric of rural Maya communities and their values, social relations, and worldview. This current, which I call *Tejido Social* (social fabric), is also possibly present in other spaces in Guatemala and likely had existed in prior times but did not pronounce itself publicly until this period. I use Escobar's theorization of postliberal, postcapitalist politics of relationality to analyze the significance of this third tendency of Maya politics. This study contributes to the theorization of emerging third current / Afro-indigenous movements in the Americas through an ethnographic approach which focuses on political interventions that are lived principles embedded in socio-political practice.

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Table 1: Some facts about the municipality of Sololá

o   One of nineteen municipalities in the department (province) of Sololá.

o   Hispanicized name of the Kaqchikel *Tz'oloj Ya'*.

o   Comprised of four *aldeas* and nine *cantones* which together encompass 75 *caseríos*.[1] These administrative and territorial units are represented by 23 Auxiliary Mayors in the Maya governance system.

o   San Jorge La Laguna is officially an *aldea* of the municipality of Sololá.

o   In the year 2000, 85% of Sololá residents were "small agricultural producers" (mostly, if not all, Mayas).[2] Most Mayas of Sololá are Kaqchikel; a minority in the northwest region bordering Totonicapan are K'iche'. Ladino residents of Sololá reside almost exclusively in the *cabecera* and are fewer in number but hold more economic and political power.

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[1] Please see Glossary at the end of this document.
[2] Letter to Then-President Alfonso Portillo from COMS, August 5, 2000.

Table 2: Timeline (1975-1999)

1975	*Finca Jaibal de San Jorge* is sold to the Saravia Camacho brothers.
1980	Military repression (*La Violencia*) escalates in Sololá and nationwide: includes state violence, massacres, and massive displacements.
1981-1982	Organizing for self-defense from the military violence and for the rights of indigenous peoples begins in Sololá.
1985-1986	The Progressive Youth Group and the Potable Water Committee are founded in San Jorge.
1988	Organizing is getting stronger and more public in Sololá with the mobilization against the *guardia de hacienda*.
April 23, 1989	While performing in San Jorge's Cultural Night, Guillermo Fuentes announces that Jaibal belongs to San Jorge.
1989	Jorgeños analyze their land situation and begin strategizing.
December 2, 1990	*Army massacre of Mayas in nearby Santiago Atitlán.*
March 23, 1992	San Jorge La Laguna land occupation.
March 31, 1992	First eviction attempt. Women and children form a human chain to block the eviction.
April 4, 1992	Second eviction attempt by anti-riot police squad and over 2,000 military soldiers. Seventy-four Jorgeños are detained. All *cantones* unite to support San Jorge.
July 27, 1992	*Cabildo Abierto* (constituent assembly) pressures Official Municipality to officially support San Jorge's land struggle.
October 12, 1992	Columbus Quincentennial. Maya organizations emerge publicly in Sololá. Days later, Rigoberta Menchú is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

1993-1995	Frequent protest marches held in Guatemala City including:
	• August 3, 1993: March of the Children
	• October 1993: Occupation of Congress
1994-5	Bartolo Panjoj is elected to head the Indigenous Municipality. He leads efforts to research the Chinimitales and found the Coordinating Body of Maya Organizations of Sololá (COMS).
February 1994	Sololá campaign for the right of Maya children to not wear school uniforms.
1995	The Maya Tz'oloj Ya' Educational Center is founded.
---	Maya community decision to run candidates for office through the Civic Committee.
March 23, 1995	En route to a protest march in Guatemala City, the bus transporting Jorgeños flips over on the highway, causing injuries.
October 5, 1995	*Army massacre in Xamán, a Maya returned refugee community.*
December 1995	First elections in which the Civic Committee participates. Its candidates for mayor (Pedro Iboy) and municipal council are elected, marking the first Maya administration (1996-2000) of the Official Municipality since it was established in 1901.
December 29, 1996	*Final Peace Accords are signed by the URNG and Guatemalan Government. An official end to the internal armed conflict.*
June 18, 1997	*URNG begins legal process of becoming a political party.*
December 18, 1998	*URNG party is officially inscribed as a legal political party.*
April 26, 1999	Settlement is signed between the Civil Society of San Jorge La Laguna and the landowners of Jaibal.

I. Introduction: The Land Occupation – 1992

San Jorge La Laguna[3]'s land occupation in 1992 marks a pivotal point in the history of Maya politics in Guatemala. On the one hand, it occurs in the midst of the Peace Accords negotiations, at the dawning of a "new" Guatemalan nation.   On the other hand, 1992 marks the height of continent-wide indigenous peoples' counter-mobilizations to the Quincentennial celebrations of Columbus' arrival to the Americas planned for October 12, 1992. And on San Jorge's specific timeline, this marked a point where the violent repression of the 1980s was dissipating, but—contrary to the promises of a new Guatemalan society—living conditions in the village were deteriorating as a direct result of a ladino-dominated system of exploitation and structural violence.

The brief timeline of the land occupation is as follows: A colonial historian records the ancient village (registered as the Village of San Jorge in 1580) on the lakeside of Lake Atitlán by the side of the Kiskap River. It was a major regional market for merchants crossing the lake from the South Coast as well as arriving from Huehuetenango to the west, hence its name K'ayb'al ("market" in Kaqchikel; Hispanicized as Jaibal). In 1640, due to a severe flooding of the Kiskap River during a hurricane, most families of San Jorge relocated their homes from their lakeside location to the steep mountainside rising about Lake Atitlán. However, they continued to use the lands of Jaibal for subsistence farming. In the mid-1800s, a *ladino* (non-indigenous) lawyer of the Fuentes family deceived Maya Kaqchikel residents of San Jorge into

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[3] I refer to San Jorge La Laguna in this way (as a collective actor) because that's how interviewees refer to San Jorge: They say "San Jorge's proposal" perhaps because in Maya discourse communities often are referred to as collective actors and entities. For example, the phrase that means "I speak Kaqchikel" is literally the words "I speak *our language*" (*q'achab'al*).

signing away their land titles. In the late 1800s, "Justo Rufino Barrios legalized the land in the name of the Fuentes family"[4] (NGO document 1996: 11). As a result of losing more and more access to their farmlands, "San Jorge was the first community of Sololá whose inhabitants had to migrate to the coast in order to work" (ibid.). Guillermo Fuentes Girón, a grandson of the Fuentes lawyer, wrote, "They lacked potable water and lived off the sale of their harvests for eight months of the year, and then the rest of the year went to the coast to work as laborers on the coffee plantations and sugarcane plantations, where they were treated very badly and generally returned with malaria" (1987: 19).

In 1959, all remaining families were displaced from the shores of K'ayb'al "under the pretext of the construction of a tourist complex" (*Prensa Libre* April 6, 1992: 8). In 1975, the Fuentes family sold Jaibal to the brothers Luis and Carlos Saravia Camacho, who sealed off Jorgeños' access to Jaibal, and, thus, the lands they farmed (ibid.; NGO document 1996: 11). In the 1980s, as plans are more definitively announced for a five-star tourist complex, population pressure mounted in the village—from a population of 748 in the 1973 census, San Jorge grew to about 400 families and 1,800 residents miraculously squeezed onto a small, steep mountainside plot.

Conditions for migrant workers also were getting worse with risks posed by the many military checkpoints around Lake Atitlán at that time. In San Jorge, infrastructure for water drainage and latrines was insufficient. There were no local health services and only one school with six classrooms "which was constructed on land that previously was

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[4] All translations of Spanish-language materials, including interviews, are mine unless otherwise noted.

the community cemetery" (Coordinadora Comunal 1999: 1). Houses were compacted

and pressed against each other. In fact, the village increasingly appeared to be a

shantytown compared to housing in other rural communities of Sololá[5] which, though

poor, are built amidst the lands they farm for subsistence crops. Meanwhile, Jaibal's

lands remained unused and fallow. In the same period that the living conditions for

Jorgeños became untenable, on a national scale military repression reached a peak,

forcing Mayas to organize for self-defense.

A turning point was reached in 1992: After a long strategizing process, the

community directly and publicly confronted the ladino economic and military structures

in Sololá that were responsible for both their inhumane living conditions and the violent

repression that sustained it. At 9am on March 23, 1992, Jorgeños break the landowners'

fence (*Prensa Libre* April 6, 1992: 8), and "The Struggle for the Recovery of Jaibal

Begins" (Comunidad 1994: 13). As noted by their official proclamation:

> On the morning of **March 23, 1992, hundreds of Jorgeños walked from the
> mountainside towards their legitimate land Jaibal, occupying it again**. They
> constructed their shanties in the place where their grandparents – the Mayas
> Kaqchikeles Jorgeños -- had been born and lived. Accompanied by the image of
> the Patron [saint] of the community of San Jorge, they returned to live in their
> ancient lands: young women, children, young men, and elders (ibid.: 13-15).

The discourse and motivations surrounding Jorgeños' land occupation was not

typical of the "peasant" land occupations that had occurred in recent history in Guatemala

in affiliation with Leftist organizations. Around the time of the San Jorge land

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[5] I use "Sololá" to refer only to the municipality of Sololá, not the department. I will explicitly state when I
am referring even more specifically to the town center of Sololá (*cabecera*). San Jorge is an aldea, a
subdivision of the municipality of Sololá. Also, hereafter, the term Sololatecos will refer to Mayas of the
municipality of Sololá (inclusive of Jorgeños).

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occupation, a group of Maya organizers split from the primary organization that had been

handling peasant and migrant worker issues, the Committee of Peasant Unity or CUC.

These Maya leaders formed a new organization: The National Indigenous and Peasant

Coordinating Body (CONIC), one of the first national mass-based organizing groups with

Maya leadership and that centered Maya worldview in their political claims. Along with

the San Jorge land struggle, this signaled a break of Maya leaders away from ladino

leadership and organizations of the Left to develop their own distinctive form of

organizing and politics.

Seven months after San Jorge's land occupation, in an October 12 mobilization

surrounding the Quincentennial, dozens more Maya organizations emerged publicly in

Sololá. In the course of their seven-year struggle to gain land title or expropriation of the

Jaibal lands, Sololatecos began to organize through the Indigenous Municipality in order

to build local power in alignment with Maya community values and governance

practices. By 1996, this Maya movement had waged a local campaign to elect the first

indigenous Mayor and an indigenous municipal council to the Official Municipality of

Sololá since it was established in 1901.

San Jorge's organizing to recover their ancestral land was a generative force for

this surprising mobilization and unification of Sololatecos – that is, Mayas *throughout* the

municipality of Sololá, not just in San Jorge-- around multiple projects of cultural

revitalization, "ontological autonomy" (Gidwani 2004), and political organizing. In the

course of this organizing, Jorgeños and Sololatecos clarified distinct notions of

subjectivity, agency, and political horizons that do not fit neatly into the models of

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development (Escobar 1995), citizenship, and Western political subjectivity (Varzi 2006) being offered by the state and international NGOs in the modernizing framework of the new postwar Guatemalan nation. This clearly represented a third current of Maya politics grounded in the social fabric of rural Maya communities and their values, social relations, and worldview. This current, which I call *Tejido Social* (social fabric), is also possibly present in other spaces in Guatemala and likely had existed in prior times but did not pronounce itself publicly until this period.

What distinguishes this third current of Maya politics? What contributed to its surprising mobilization? Why is it a significant intervention in the trajectory of Maya politics in Guatemala today? By theorizing Tejido Social politics, this study will contribute to the theorization of "third current" social movements in Latin America. First, I will use Arturo Escobar's theorization of postliberalism and relationality to help me think through the significance of this third Maya political current both theoretically and in the context of the current literature on Maya politics in Guatemala. Next, I will discuss the methodology and ethnographic approaches I employ to portray political visions which are embedded in socio-political process, as is the case with third current politics. I will also discuss the challenges of theorizing such practices – the rough edges of this study.

I will then show how Tejido Social politics unfolded through the socio-political practices surrounding San Jorge La Laguna's land struggle. Following this narrative is my distillation of these lived principles through a blueprint of the Tejido Social political

vision. I will conclude with some reflections on the significance of this third way within

the current landscape of Maya politics today and particularly within Sololá.

II. Theorizing a Third Current of Maya Politics

Theoretical Framework: Escobar's Postliberalism, Postcapitalism, and Relationality

In his forthcoming article "Latin America at a Crossroads: Alternative
Modernizations, Postliberalism, or Postdevelopment?", Escobar theorizes an emerging,
third current of Latin American social movements which contest hegemonic logics of
"basic needs," development, modernization, and liberal citizenship. Escobar documents
how these movements have made significant inroads—some of their discourse is even
enshrined in the new constitutions of Ecuador and Bolivia. At the same time, Escobar
makes the case for why it is important to study these interventions in their "emerging"
state—even before they have achieved the goals, interventions, and changes that they
have set out to achieve. This crucial assertion has implications for the theorization and
assessment of the "outcomes" of such third current social movements. Escobar stresses
that the significance of social movements cannot merely be evaluated by tallying their
mobilizations and charting the direct response of the government or the policy changes
they provoke. Social movements also produce social and political imaginaries[6] which are
central to their effects on the world. In fact, these imaginaries are a key component of
what social movements do:

> [Social] movements do not exist only as empirical objects "out there" carrying out
> "protests" but in their enunciations and knowledges, as a potentiality of how
> politics and the world could be… It is in these spaces that new imaginaries and
> ideas about how to re/assemble the socio-natural world are not only hatched but
> experimented with, critiqued, elaborated upon, and so forth (ibid.: 12).

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[6] Similarly, in *Freedom Dreams* (2002), Robin Kelley writes, "Revolutionary dreams erupt out of political
engagement; collective social movements are incubators of new knowledge" (2002: 8). Kathleen Cleaver
(2001) and Álvaro Reyes (Abriendo Brecha conference at UT-Austin, 2010) make similar arguments.

Thus, Escobar presents a theory for why these third spaces are significant and deserve academic attention, even when those like Tejido Social by constitution do not aggregate.

Furthermore, because these imaginaries of third current social movements are fundamentally opposed to the current hegemonic philosophies that legitimate global forms of domination, Escobar proposes a conceptual framework that highlights their significant theoretical interventions despite the entrenched structures of power that constrain them. He uses the terms *postdevelopment* and *postliberalism* to describe the political goals of the third current. By the designation "post," Escobar is not "point[ing] at a pristine future where development would no longer exist"; rather, he:

> intuit[s] the possibility of *visualizing an era where development ceased to be the central organizing principle of social life* and which, even more, visualized such a displacement as already happening in the present (Escobar forthcoming: 11).

At the same time, I am wary of overuse of these terms. For example, we risk designating something as "post" when liberalism and capitalism are still hegemonic – a predicament that I will address more below in the section on "Challenges." The way that Escobar guards against overuse is through the criteria of "the extent to which the basic premises of the development model [or capitalism, etc.] are being challenged" (ibid.). In his analysis, third current social movements are challenging hegemonic social orders to such an extent that they merit the designation "post," on two grounds: first, in their critique of colonialism; and second, at the foundational level of ontologies.

The first indicator of third current politics' "extent of the challenge" to current regimes of power is its critique of colonialism:

> Postcapitalism and postliberalism would require first and foremost a critique of the cultural regime of the individual, its alleged autonomy and separation from

community … and consumption as cultural norms. … [A]ny relationality that does not question the binarisms of modernity and their colonial underside will be insufficient to imagining a different society (ibid.: 37).

Escobar argues that this foundational critique of colonialism provides a more comprehensive and sustained grounding for these social movements' critique of liberalism's exclusions and capitalism's exploitation.

Escobar's second indicator that third current politics are making profound challenges to the hegemonic order is their revolutionary intervention at the foundational level of ontologies and worldviews, which, after all, provide the philosophical scaffolding for social orders to be egalitarian or hierarchical, exclusionary or porous, etc. In fact, the intervention that distinguishes third current politics is what Escobar calls "relationality" or "relational ontologies": the radically egalitarian and non-exclusionary worldviews of indigenous and Afro-descendant peoples which they are now "politically activating" as central organizing principles of the more just social orders they hope to usher in:

> These relational ontologies can be differentiated from the dualist ontologies of liberal modernity in that they are not built on the divides between nature and culture, us and them, individual and community… relationality refers to *a different way of imagining life* (socio-natural worlds) (ibid.: 4).

I extend Escobar's theory to show that a politics of cultural valorization energized a third current social movement in Sololá, Guatemala. In its valorization of Maya peoples and worldviews, this politics affirms various dimensions of being Maya which historically have been subjugated.

Significance of a Third Current Intervention in Literature on Guatemala

Through the genocidal scorched earth campaign (known as *La Violencia*) that

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reached its peak in the early 1980s, the Guatemalan military and state uprooted the very

ways that people organized their social reality. One effect of crisis is that it forces a

comprehensive re-evaluation of the stakes of social struggle: What political imperatives

are key? This diagnosis informs the primary strategies to be employed. In my analysis,

many nationally-oriented Maya groups split according to what they felt to be their most

urgent political imperatives at that juncture. That is, before the crisis there was relative

fluidity among political projects that were seen as mutually reinforcing[7]; but the crisis – a

period of intense and high-stakes international scrutiny because of efforts to attract

enough international attention to stop the genocide --provoked many nationally-visible

groups to "close ranks"[8] around more unified and coherent agendas. Ironically and

tragically, this closing of ranks caused a major split in the national Maya movement

along doctrinal lines. The *culturalistas* solidified around the axis of "culture," framed as

a professional and academic project (with a focus on language, traditional dress, and

bilingual education as primary sites of Maya culture to salvage; and less emphasis on

preserving Maya rural practices in the realm of agriculture or local economies, for

example). On the other hand, the *populares* were committed to mass-based organizing

and to transforming Mayas' social conditions, since La Violencia left the majority of

Mayas with severe land shortages and in extreme poverty. To accomplish this agenda,

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[7] See Hale (2006) Chapter 3 for a discussion of how *La Violencia* functioned as a kind of "Closing of the Archive" (Richardson 2003) in the Maya Movement, sealing off some ways of doing Maya politics (publicly) and therefore contributing to the split I describe above.

[8] A military image, used by Iton (2008) in discussing the transition in U.S.-based Black movements from internationalism / the Robinsonian era to the McCarthy era. I am indebted to his line of analysis about such transitional political periods (from openness to repression) for racialized groups in national politics and U.S. efforts to "domesticate blackness" and prohibit boundary transgression. A similar dynamic seems to have occurred for Maya politics as well in the post-Violencia period.

the *populares* retained alliances with the Guatemalan Left, although newer organizations like CONIC had all-Maya leadership and were increasingly drawing upon Maya worldview and symbolism in creating their platforms.

However, although most literature focuses on this dichotomy, I argue that it is an overgeneralization. In fact, there is a field of different positions, formations, traditions, and convergences of Maya politics that have been suppressed and silenced as a result of *La Violencia.* My project is to bring these distinctive other formations to the fore because they are important politics to come to terms with.

For example, in Sololá, Mayas mobilized around a distinct, third strategy influenced by their rural social fabric and Maya socialities. For Sololatecos, the political urgency of self-defense meant a return to their immediate cultural practices and social fabric as a basis for organizing, because these provided their greatest self-defense during *La Violencia.* This left room in Sololá for a distinct political project (what I call "Tejido Social") to emerge based on Kaqchikel upbringing (ways of doing things, including how to engage the community), needs, and urgencies, such as the strategic needs of the San Jorge land struggle which played a critical role in unifying the political energies of Sololatecos. Rather than fall back on neoliberal or Leftist political models, they worked from the perspective of Kaqchikel rural understandings of Maya *cosmovisión* in order to empower their communities to shape their own sociopolitical visions and localized institutions. By cosmovision and worldview, I am referring to how a people conceptualizes: their relationship to the universe, community, and kin and the notions of responsibility that result; their subjectivity, values, notions of causality, justice, dignity,

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honor, sociality, and fulfillment in life; among other aspects of an interpretive framework of life experience which in turn affects social organization. Rooted in one such system, the social fabric of rural Sololá, these Maya groups prioritized projects of cultural revitalization that valorized Maya ontology after centuries of its subjugation.

Methodology

Much of this report is based on fieldwork that I conducted as a Fulbright grantee from November 2005 through October 2006. I went to Guatemala directly from living and working in the South Bronx as a community organizer. I relied on that skill set and knowledge to allow community collaborations to shape the direction and outcomes of my research. Also, my organizing work provided me with an analytical framework which guided my overall research goals as well as my specific interview questions. After completing this fieldwork, while researching graduate programs, I realized that my approach had been remarkably similar to principles laid out by Activist Anthropology (Gordon 2007; Hale 2001).

Specifically, my research was conducted in collaboration with the *Coordinadora Comunal* of San Jorge La Laguna. Alfredo Bocel Cuc, as administrator of the *Coordinadora Comunal*'s community office, was an invaluable source of support for this project, helping to arrange interviews and facilitating the use of the office's historical documents. I conducted 23 in-depth interviews with individuals who participated in the San Jorge La Laguna land struggle and/or Sololá movement. These included interviews with regional and national Maya leaders about their analyses of the significance of San

Jorge's land struggle in the context of regional and national movements. I also conducted 13 interviews with organized groups of San Jorge La Laguna, including youth, women's, cultural, and governance groups. I held a workshop-style focus group with an assembly of the women's group of the *Coordinadora Comunal* which focused on the significance of their interventions as women in the land struggle (for example, their collective blockade of the first eviction attempt).

I lived in San Jorge La Laguna during this fieldwork. In addition to day-to-day activities of social life, I participated in the community's more formal cultural, social, and political activities and attended meetings of organized groups. As a result, I had the opportunity to witness, participate in, and "be organized through" the forms of social organization which this study analyzes. Participant-observation of community rituals and daily life also allowed me to witness the rotation of community positions of responsibility and service and how these functioned as training for more challenging roles. At the end of my eleven months of fieldwork, I produced a manuscript of the testimonies and lived experience of San Jorge's land struggle which I presented to the Coordinadora Comunal of San Jorge.

Ethnographic Approaches to Political Visions Embedded in Socio-Political Process

I employ two "voices" in this paper. With the first, I trace the unfolding of socio-political practice in its complexity and contradiction, with keen attention to how and why a particular socio-historical juncture shaped its path. With the second, I describe the vision of Tejido Social politics that the San Jorge land struggle produced – a rough

blueprint of lived political principles, distilled from the course of struggle which shaped them. Thus, the historical narrative and the blueprint inform each other; yet, they also exist in tension.

As discussed earlier, Escobar asserts that mapping (sketching a blueprint, in whatever provisionary and processual way) third current emancipatory political imaginaries is a crucial activist-intellectual project. To articulate this blueprint, Escobar employs what Charles R. Hale describes as his "prophetic voice" (*Cultural Studies* forthcoming). The descriptive blueprint I present is based on how Tejido Social participants conceptualize their interventions, and is inflected with my own "prophetic voice" about the aspects that have the most political potential, even with the complexity of the current historical moment and the constraints from conditions of oppression.

However, the challenge in articulating this blueprint is that this vision of a third current of politics has been produced through and is closely articulated with sociopolitical practice and *lived* principles. Participants have not articulated it as a clean distillation of political principles abstracted from the process of struggle. So, in addition to the blueprint approach of political imaginaries, I also use ethnography to show how Tejido Social's assessment of their direction developed over time and emerged from very particular processes, contexts, and political convergences. By constitution, Tejido Social politics does not aggregate and presupposes an embeddedness within the social fabric of Sololá and the Maya worldview which informs it (as discussed in the next section on "Challenges"). This differentiates its trajectory from the paradigmatic *culturalista* and *popular* branches of the Maya movement.

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Challenges of Theorizing Tejido Social Politics

Tejido Social politics has its own limitations given the conditions of oppression under which it operates and its own internal contradictions. Yet, it is clearly a third way of Maya politics and has the most political potential from my analysis.

Additionally, my research has its limitations, and more broadly, there are significant challenges to theorizing third current politics like Tejido Social. This report is my attempt to articulate principles that have not been distilled into this kind of intellectual format, but are lived principles. Even using the ethnographic approach described above, I have faced several significant challenges.

1. First, I face limitations in the research I was able to do for this report. Most of the fieldwork for this study was conducted on a Fulbright grant three years prior to entering graduate school. The questions motivating my research then were significantly different than those raised in the course of writing this report. Last summer a separate research project in Guatemala with The Caribbean Central American Research Council (CCARC) deepened my understanding of Maya politics on a national scale; however, I did not do fieldwork directly for this study. While both experiences led me to this study in important ways, this Master's project has produced lines of inquiry that would benefit from additional fieldwork.

2. A second challenge is an epistemological problem. As an analyst based at a U.S. university, not having been raised in a Maya Kaqchikel household in Sololá, how do I get at socio-political practices that are not intellectualized in the same way? I am wary

of portraying a reductionist version of Maya philosophy, which is my reservation about Escobar's concept of relationality. At the same time, his approach is distinct from mine: Escobar is mostly drawing upon Aymara intellectuals such as Luis Tapia and the Mexican activist-intellectual Raquel Gutierrez. These are intellectualized versions of what I'm trying to get at through social and political practice. My interviewees are community members of Sololá who do not articulate political visions with the same generalizability as the intellectuals he draws upon – rather, they emerge in the context of practice. Thus, it is a challenge to present them in this format—perhaps necessarily, which I appreciate.

Escobar also suggests that the imaginaries and political claims produced by social movements' process can be generalized for areas beyond their particular geography of struggle. In the case of Tejido Social politics, I don't agree: this runs the risk of cooptation and de-politicized assimilation into the dominant liberal, capitalist, and colonial norms that its worldview is fundamentally opposed to. Why? First, this is unmooring Tejido Social politics from the Maya philosophy that gives it meaning. Second, given the hegemony of liberalism, "generalizing" Tejido Social politics in fact often means funneling it (assimilating it) through a liberal epistemology which devoids culture of its political claims (Brown 2006).

Unlike the Zapatistas' project of radical refusal, Tejido Social attempts to carry out its political ideals within a particular geography which still is influenced and pressured by a broader national and global "system not made for us Mayas" (Lisandro Guarcax, pers. comm., September 2006). Yet, Tejido Social politics is also coming from

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a place of profoundly appreciating the power of thinking and acting through Maya cosmovisión as the primary interpretive lens – not in the sense of a frozen container, but in a counterhegemonic sense of indigenous historicity where participants carefully consider which Western tools to "appropriate" (for example, Western feminism, Marxist critique of capital, etc.). Through this process, their worldview can infuse these Western tools. The crucial question here has to do with the relations of power. As the unfolding of the history of Tejido Social politics demonstrates, the key analytical question for political decisions and direction became: *Which is the primary epistemology that we should think through?*

Wendy Brown (2006) demonstrates how U.S. imperialism deploys an expansionary project of liberalism which bills itself as the *only* epistemology that can safely incorporate multiculturalism and mediate and contain various differences (gender, sexuality, religion, etc.) through its discourse of tolerance. In other words, liberalism has become empire's cultural ambassador by positioning itself as the dominant "*lingua franca* of epistemologies," for lack of a better term. Recognizing this dynamic, Tejido Social practitioners are proposing something different: That, in their region which is predominantly Maya Kaqchikel, Maya worldview be the lingua franca *through which* Western practices, institutions, and epistemologies be translated or appropriated. Yet, taking Brown's argument seriously, Tejido Social politics is subject to expropriation as well as to its own contradictions. In fact, despite our intentions, activist-intellectuals like myself may even be contributing to the expropriation.

3. The third challenge is that, given the conditions of oppression under which it operates, Tejido Social politics will never exist in its ideal form. Yet, Escobar's theorization lacks the empirical contradictions of how third current politics is lived on the ground. This ethnography will show the consequences of the clashes that postliberal and postcapitalist politics face when not entirely free of liberalism and capitalism. This suggests an empirical limitation in Escobar's conceptualization of "post" politics. For example, Tejido Social politics eventually faced challenges from Maya actors who could gain relative power in dominant political formations, producing a division that today weakens movements for Maya social justice. We need theorizations and descriptions of third current politics that address the major challenges of realizing their vision as a result of these conditions of oppression.

For this reason, my contribution is rooted in an ethnography of actual, lived sociopolitical practice. Over the course of struggle, Tejido Social politics developed a two-fold strategic approach to dealing with these major constraints:

(a) "community control", that is, an assessment of: How much relative power, in terms of *community self-determination*, will they have in a given sphere of sociopolitical action?

(b) They sought to create spaces with as much "ontological autonomy" (Gidwani 2004) as they can muster: expropriation of ancestral land; research into Maya forms of socio-political organization; the creation of community coordinating bodies; organizing through the Indigenous Municipality and alternatives to

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political parties; and opening spaces for the practice of Maya pedagogy and

Maya conflict resolution.

Yet, even this two-pronged prioritization of "community control" and "ontological

autonomy" is still only a partial solution, and it's always under the threat of being

undermined – from violently oppressive external forces without as well as from within.

The ethnography of San Jorge's land struggle that follows will demonstrate these

dynamics.

III. The Formation of a Distinct Current of Maya Politics

Organizing for Self-Defense (1976 –1984)

In 1976, a major earthquake hit the western highlands of Guatemala, leveling many buildings and causing widespread destruction. Relief efforts had significant consequences for the politics of the nation: on the one hand, an influx of U.S. Protestant charities and NGOs followed, many introducing development logics and conservative politics; liberation theology expanded through Catholic catechists; and ladino youth who helped with relief efforts became politicized by experiencing rural poverty for the first time. Specifically, in San Jorge La Laguna, the chapel and roof of the Colonial Church was damaged, and the presence of NGOs multiplied in this period to repair the colonial Church. More villagers became involved in processes and logics of international development through the many *capacitationes* (workshops) being offered, ranging from trainings of village health promoters to the proliferation of liberation theology-based workshops for community catechists that had begun in the 1960s. Yet, these were still based on the principle of lack and marginality: the health promoter stood in for the lack of Maya access to hospitals; and the catechist stood in for the lack of priests in marginal rural areas.

Some of these "consciousness-raising" workshops brought into clear focus the structures of Guatemalan society that were more enduring and oppressive than the physical structures that crumbled. Structural violence, anti-Maya racism (for example, the racialized division in labor and access to education, with Mayas relegated to positions of servitude), and rural Maya poverty were deeply embedded since the arrival of the

Spanish in 1524.

In the early 1980s, the Lucas García and Ríos Montt military dictatorships escalated the counterinsurgency campaigns in the Western highlands. In Sololá, Ricardo Sulugui Juracán (a leader of Tejido Social politics who was a youth at that time) notes,

> Here in the *cabecera* [town center], there were assassinations, persecutions, and military control. In the *cantones* [rural areas], there were massacres. For example, the *cantón* Pujujil suffered a major massacre. In Xajaxac and Pixabaj there were serious problems [with military violence] (pers. comm., May 9, 2006).

The military persecuted Mayas who participated in organized groups, including soccer teams, *capacitación* groups, and community improvement committees. Soldiers "went around controlling those who were leaders," says Anastasio Guarcax, another eventual leader of what would become Tejido Social politics. He even had to bury his certificates of recognition so that the military wouldn't find out that he was a member of a community committee. The military kept a tight grip on Sololá through a marked geography of surveillance and callous violence. At numerous military checkpoints on major transportation routes, hooded men would point out travelers who were listed on the army's death list, and the army would detain, torture, and later assassinate them. In the *cantones*, soldiers went house-to-house to "register" people. Furthermore:

> They had their informants in the market, in the restaurants, on the buses – there was control everywhere. They only take down some information on all that was going on. They even made those who practiced Maya spirituality go underground. This repression lasted until 1988! All these organizations had to work in secret, because you couldn't work publicly (ibid.).

Indications that one was organizing around indigenous rights had to be hidden because those activities were especially targeted by the death squads as linking one with the guerrillas. Under this logic, the army also persecuted Maya spiritual leaders, forcing the

practice of Maya spirituality underground. Sulugui notes that the concept of Maya law

existed during this time but couldn't be mentioned publicly. He comments, "In addition

to the physical war, there was a psychological war."

These military tactics sowed division among previously close-knit communities.

Guarcax notes,

> Yes, it caused a lot of division … You no longer trusted in your neighbor nor in
> your brother or sister. But right after this, there was a lot of unity, because the
> people became empowered little by little: "Well, this problem came from outside,
> it's not from here. We have to unify more and see how to protect ourselves." …
> Eventually we gained more strength, because little by little we came to understand
> the dynamic of what had been happening (pers. comm., April 2006).

That is, Mayas had to be well-organized to defend themselves, and unity was a

matter of life or death for oneself and the community. The severity of military violence

led many Maya Sololatecos to join the guerrilla movement in self-defense "because there

was no other way to defend one's life" says Sulugui (pers. comm., May 9, 2006).

Moreover, the guerrillas offered an analysis and a systematic solution to the generations

of extreme poverty and labor exploitation that Mayas had faced. Genaro Acetún Ajcalón,

a Jorgeño catechist attending *capacitaciones* before *La Violencia*, reflects,

> In San Jorge, before entering the conflict, we had to do an analysis. … [We said,]
> "No, here we have to give shelter to the guerrilla, because the guerrilla is fighting
> for the people, because the ideology of the guerrilla is very good: take power in
> order to put an end to all the discrimination and exploitation. To take power in
> order to be able to govern the indigenous people [in more just ways]. Because we
> as indigenous people were being discriminated against and exploited in so many
> jobs (Acetún, pers. comm., April 26, 2006).

Early Wartime Organizing in Sololá: Sabotaging the Conscription of Maya Youths

Most communities in the municipality of Sololá escaped the worst of the violence

due to the creativity of their self-defense strategies, derived from Maya cultural logics.

For example, the military had regular conscription sweeps where they would enter the

cabecera on market days to round up Maya youths and kidnap them for forced military

service.[9] Sulugui states that organized community members found creative excuses for

the release of kidnapped young men: They organized pregnant young women to say that

a particular captured young man was the father of her soon-to-be-born baby and had to

come home to support the birth. They recruited storeowners who would attest to long-

overdue debts that these young men owed and needed to pay off immediately by

returning to work. Sulugui adds,

> What Sololá did[10] was to organize broadly in all the *caseríos*, *cantones*, and *aldeas* of Sololá. In 1983, we sought ways to defend the people in the face of repression. We recognized a need to create organizations, to create institutions, and to create commissions that would go to the communities and denounce two types of situations [the internal armed conflict and the violations of indigenous peoples' rights] at the national level. Our parents… formed groups … that organized themselves so that they could denounce these types of violence -- the assassinations and massacres… our fathers did what they could do. But they didn't make a strong enough struggle because the army's movement was very severe…
>
> It wasn't until 1988 that we could organize a very strong struggle. …around the problem of the *guardia de hacienda* [property guard] that was kidnapping and capturing the men of the community who cut down trees for firewood. The way our communities cut down trees for family/ home use is unlike the big-time sawmills, companies that are here to sell tables, furniture, and wood for construction – they don't do anything!
>
> So all the communities organized. They no longer "made room" for the property guard to enter the community to capture people. Furthermore, *La Violencia* was still severe. So one way that residents could defend themselves before the violence was to organize in committees: of human rights, of Maya law.

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[9] See Linda Green (1995) for a detailed description of these "army sweeps."

[10] As noted in fn 1, interviewees—perhaps because of Kaqchikel grammar structures—collectivize the subject (the people of a community and place) and refer to them(selves) by their community's name.

> In each one of the *caseríos* and *cantones*, the army[11] would enter and the people
> rose up. (Sulugui, pers. comm., May 9, 2006).

Sulugui's narrative reveals the entanglement of capitalist business with military repression, as well as the antagonism between big business' "private property" claims versus Maya subsistence farmers' use of communal lands. Conflict situations like this were part of Mayas' daily reality in leading a way of life that ran counter to the logics of the dominant social structures. After all, the conflict here centered around the fact that Sololatecos had used this land ancestrally for firewood. Collectively, these types of experiences were probably where Sololatecos' political claim to their ancestral land originated: because, after all, it was a claim that not only made sense in San Jorge La Laguna, but resonated throughout Sololá. Furthermore, big business is using the tactics of the military repression: kidnappings and disappearances. The function of the company's property guard appears not very different from the state's military soldiers or paramilitaries! So Sololateco organizing for self-defense from military violence also proved useful in this case of economic elites' goon violence. This episode foreshadows contemporary struggles against neoliberal resource extraction from indigenous lands and the privatization of communal lands.

An Emerging Discourse of Maya Consciousness

Acetún notes that San Jorge's high level of organization allowed them to prevent most attempted disappearances of Jorgeños. Unfortunately, they were not able to prevent the disappearance and eventual assassination of two or three residents – including a

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[11] Notice the gloss between "the property guard" and, now, "the army." The company's repression and La Violencia were occurring in the same period, and the people were resisting both.

pioneering young woman named Juliana Pocop who "was one of the first Mayas to graduate as teacher in the whole area of Sololá" (Pocop, pers. comm., May 29, 2006). I quote at length from Rodolfo Pocop Coroxón's words for a couple reasons: first, because Pocop's very language illuminates the philosophy that informs Tejido Social politics; and second, for methodological reasons: stories of women, and Maya women moreso, are often underrepresented in traditional sources and official records. Frequently we can access knowledge of their agency and innovations only through testimonies such as this:

> Upon finishing her studies, she realized the grand injustices that all the Maya indigenous communities had been submitted to, principally those of the highlands. She began to work in the community radio station *The Voice of Nahualá*. Her program encouraged Maya women to participate in the social, political, cultural, and economic life of the country – so that women would be recognized and have a space.
> But this was never well looked upon [by the military state]. I'm speaking of the years 1979-1980. They began to persecute her. In 1981 or 1982, she had to leave civilian life. She joined up with a group of companions of different indigenous nationalities: K'iche's, Mames, Tz'utujiles, and other Kaqchikeles like herself. They threw themselves into defending collective rights and confronting the repressive governmental system.
> The military wanted to do away with the Maya movement. They captured, tortured, and assassinated her, her daughter, and her husband at the end of 1982 or the start of 1983 – the exact date is uncertain. She fought deeply for justice (Pocop, pers. comm., May 29, 2006).

Even Pocop's word choice shows the lasting influence of his sister's work-- for example, his use of the term "nationalities" to refer to Maya peoples of different language groups. Second, the claim to "collective rights" is not a Leftist demand, historically. It emerges in the context of indigenous movements. Yet, Pocop's discourse shares with the Left a critique of the "repressive governmental system." Pocop's very language is a sign of a new Maya political formation.

In fact, Rodolfo Pocop's positioning exemplifies the complexity of Maya political

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formations. He is now a national leader of CONIC (which is closer to the Maya *popular*

tendency), but he got there by following the example of his sister, which led him to

become one of the youth leaders of the San Jorge La Laguna land struggle. Here is the

continuation of his response about the effect of his sister's work on his own political

development. I quote at length because his discourse does not fit in easily with the

constructions of the *popular* and *culturalista* tendencies, but rather expresses the ideals of

a third Maya political formation:

> I was very young at the time but I realized, I was moved--and I continue to be
> moved--by my sister Juliana's conviction and whole-hearted dedication to
> transforming our reality as Mayas.
>   This transformation entails a process of constant struggle--a process of
> vindication of human rights, above all of the rights of indigenous peoples. …
>   Until now I understand why my sister Juliana was in struggle. She
> struggled because we wanted a different Guatemala. But in that moment it was
> not possible due to the military regime that was reigning as the government
> system of the country. That impelled me significantly, as well as daily reality
> itself, that there is no government policy of inclusion. There is no policy where
> the government promotes development for our [Maya] communities. All the
> resources and all the benefits that the state offers are concentrated in the
> metropolitan area of the capital city and in the departmental capitals. Above all,
> the levels of discrimination and racism are an aspect that is practiced daily. We
> have been, and continue to be, *excluded* from the official system, *excluded* from
> personal relations between indigenous and non-indigenous families, *excluded*
> from all the possibilities that the state offers for developing ourselves.
>   We can understand these dynamics using the educational system as an
> example: Throughout the whole colonial period, we as indigenous peoples had no
> access to the university. We had no access to schooling because they always saw
> us as cheap manual labor, as the ones who have to put up with all the work that
> entails *hard* labor, work where one had to sweat a lot. We are the ones have to
> toil in the worst-paid jobs, the hardest work on the plantations, in construction.
> That really did not compensate our rights.
>   So, as a result of this, a process of struggle begins. This, I believe, was
> what inspired me to fight. Concretely the struggle was focused on San Jorge…
>   What I am doing is, simply, putting into practice my sister's dream, the
> dream of justice, the dream that indigenous peoples be recognized and respected.
> Just as the Mother Earth also should be respected, as well as the natural resources
> (Pocop, pers. comm., May 29, 2006).

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Analyzing Pocop's word choice, the term "racism" was not a term deriving from the Guatemalan Left like the words "ideología," "explotación," and the vague "discriminación." The theme of "exclusion" also was not a theme of the Left; it refers to the exclusion of Mayas through racism and colonial dynamics—from schools, universities, professions, etc. Furthermore, in his discussion of "hard labor," Pocop specifically is referring to how class exploitation and apartheid-like social stratification is racialized – an analysis of intersectionality that did not originate from the Guatemalan ladino-led Left but from Mayas who had been involved in struggle. In fact, perhaps one of the first written instances in which this dynamic of racialized exclusion is critiqued is, again, Tojil's manifesto circa 1978 and Antonio Pop Caal's seminal *Réplica del indio a una disertación ladina* (presented in 1974). Thus, not only did (Left-aligned) Mayas develop an analysis of colonial / racialized exclusion from Guatemalan society through the Maya movement, but they also came to see how the Guatemalan Left also contributed to this exclusion.

In sum, the Left offered a promise of liberation from exploitation and discrimination that was very appealing to Mayas due to the overbearing exploitation and escalating military repression they had been facing. In particular, the promise of better forms of government that took Mayas into account as the most marginalized – and the idea that Mayas maybe could govern themselves in a new Leftist state--reflected some aspects of Mayas' liberation visions. Yet, though Leftist analysis and critiques of capitalism, exploitation, and "discrimination" resonated widely with Mayas, the actual practices by many ladinos of the Guatemalan Left veered from these ideals. In working

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with the Left, Mayas experienced limitations in their practices: Leftist organizations were not free of racism themselves and ended up imposing another hierarchy of power on Maya people (Panjoj, pers. comm., June 15, 2006). Furthermore, through the development of the Maya movement's analysis, they came to see that the exclusions they as Mayas experienced within the Guatemalan Left mirrored the exclusion they experienced from the Guatemalan system at large: both a colonial exclusion of racialized hierarchy and an exclusion of the epistemology / ontology through which they maneuver in the world and create fair relations with each other. They came to realize that what they sought was not for Maya worldview to exist within the Left in assimilated (tokenized) form, but rather, on its own terms (even if co-existing with Leftist allies and critiques of capital).

Lighting the Flame of the San Jorge Land Struggle (1989-1991)

Pocop's narrative recounted one major line of influence of San Jorge's land struggle. Additionally, like the rest of Sololá's history, we see that the origin of San Jorge's land struggle can be traced to a confluence of influences. Yet, Jorgeños critically shaped how these various processes became co-articulated to produce a watershed moment for Maya organizing in Sololá.

The first influence was the development of the Maya movement in which Juliana Pocop and others participated. The second influence was the expansion of liberation theology workshops in the Western highlands since the 1960s in which catechists like Genáro Acetún were participating.

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Third, migrant workers from San Jorge participated in another series of liberation theology workshops organized by Father Andres Girón with a distinct emphasis: a critical analysis of the agrarian situation which forced them to migrate in the first place. Girón showed that Guatemala's inequitable system of land ownership was due to unjust policies like post-independence Liberal regimes' expropriation or nationalization of Maya lands. Girón's workshops then taught Maya workers how to research Church records to analyze the transfer of land title over time, which could then be the basis for organizing. Through this method, Jorgeño elders like Pedro Bocel who participated in these workshops learned of the illegitimacy of Jaibal's landowners.

A major tipping point that multiplied the organizing efforts was the paternalistic attitude towards Jorgeños of a grandson of the scheming ladino lawyer who cheated Jorgeños out of their land. Guillermo Fuentes Girón appeared to have a nostalgia for San Jorge's history and folklorized "legends" as if both the land and the people were his domain – and Jorgeño youth particularly reacted to this attitude with rage and were incited to struggle. In 1989, Girón participated in the Cultural Night of San Jorge's festival. José Cupertino Bocel Cuc, now an adult coordinator of the Progressive Youth Group, was visibly moved when he recalled this eye-opening and galvanizing moment for youth: Unexpectedly and suddenly his eyes welled up and his voice trembled with anger and pain as he stated that, after "singing a song that he dedicated to San Jorge," Fuentes "said that [Jaibal] belonged to San Jorge. *That really disturbed us!*" (J.C. Bocel, pers. comm., August 12, 2006).

In the same period, the current landowners of Jaibal were complaining that San

Jorge's drainage water was running down to Jaibal. They were pressuring San Jorge to remedy the situation. Yet this was a ludicrous proposition to a poor community like San Jorge which lacked basic infrastructure to begin with and was so compressed in space that there was little option for an alternative drainage system that would not harm Jorgeños' own health. The Potable Water Committee was investigating resolutions to the matter at about the same time that the youth were having discussion groups, the elder migrant laborers were reporting back about their workshops, and that indigenous peoples across the Americas were foregrounding their critiques of colonialism and displacement from their lands on the eve of the Columbus Quincentennial.

As a result of these processes, "In 1989, the community analyzed their situation" (NGO document: 11). Together they launched a collective process of research in which the various sectors of the community contributed their unique skills: elders recalled their childhood memories and oral histories of Jaibal; youth drew upon their literacy and research skills from their access to formal schooling; and catechists contributed their access to Church records. They reached the conclusion that "Only with land can we move forward. We know how to work the land; we can plant natural medicine, plant corn, beans, and vegetables" (NGO document: 12). Given their economic vulnerability, lack of land for housing for the next generation, and the insecurity of employment and wages for Mayas, Jorgeños stressed the importance of having an option of land-based self-sufficiency.

On February 23, 1992, a two-page spread flaunting the planned five-star tourist complex appears in the Sunday edition of the newspaper *Siglo Veintiuno* (February 23,

1992: 32-33). Titled "Spectacular Tourist Project in Atitlán," it shows half-page before-and-after pictures: a picture of the present, mostly forested mountainside and the abandoned plain of Jaibal, paired with an architect's projection of a luxury, ultra-modern tourist metropolis that seems to plow over the present San Jorge village and extend even up to the *cabecera* of Sololá. The accompanying text, propaganda convincing readers of the "legitimate titles to the land registered more than 100 years ago," also attempts to dissuade Jorgeños from carrying out the protest they had been planning by offering them:

> manual labor not only during the construction, but also during its future functioning, when more specialized manual labor will be required in hospitality, recreational, and sports departments. Bricklayers, carpenters, blacksmiths, plumbers, cooks, waiters, mechanics, electricians, office workers, gardeners, etc. will be needed, and for all these professions a training center will be created.

Exactly one month after the article appeared, on March 23, 1992, Jorgeños re-occupied their ancestral Jaibal lands.

The Unification of Sololá

After Jorgeños' land occupation (as described in the Introduction), two eviction attempts swiftly followed. One week later, on March 31, the departmental governor of Sololá arrived with 200 members of anti-riot police squads in the first eviction attempt (*Prensa Libre*, April 6, 1992: 8). But Jorgeños resisted: women and children formed a human chain to block the eviction. The women of San Jorge cite this experience of non-violent resistance as a turning point in their consciousness and sense of political agency—a further step towards San Jorge's spirit of self-determination.

The second eviction attempt on April 4, 1992 was not at all peaceful. It was

conducted at an illegal hour and day for evictions--before 5am on a Saturday morning. The anti-riot police squads returned, this time reinforced by 2,000 troops from Military Base No. 14. "*Without dialogue* they began to throw tear-gas bombs and paralyzing gases, shot in the air with their firearms, and beat the inhabitants of San Jorge La Laguna. They captured 73 Maya Kaqchikel leaders of the community in addition to five representatives from the *cantones* and four children" (Memoria del Conflicto June 8, 2000: 1).

Because there was so much police and military abuse–people were beaten, arrested, and tortured in jail–San Jorge asked for help from the surrounding communities. Soon, "The people [from all nine *cantones*] joined us and the people took on the struggle as their own" (Pocop, pers. comm., May 29, 2006). They rallied as close as they could get to Jaibal, monitored the military to insure that arrested Jorgeños were brought to the local jail and not "disappeared," brought supplies and food, and maintained Jorgeños' spirits to stave off disillusionment and exhaustion. The support and unification was not just short-term; over the next seven years of struggle, the *cantones* and *caseríos* of Sololá united in support of San Jorge's struggle and sought increasingly broader ways to organize throughout the municipality of Sololá.

CONIC splits from CUC

Although the full history of the CONIC split from CUC is beyond the scope of this paper, here I'll bring in what's relevant to this narrative: what people told me about the split during my ethnographic research, and its effects on the development of Tejido Social politics. Interviewees told me that San Jorge had initially approached CUC for

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accompaniment during its strategizing process because they had experience with peasant land occupations. However, in this period, the higher-ups at CUC decided to put land occupations on hold in order to focus on issues like wages for plantation laborers. They especially weren't treating cases like San Jorge's, which was private land slated for tourist development, without workers / labor issues, and which San Jorge wanted to reclaim for subsistence farming.

Meanwhile, in 1992, CUC expelled some Maya leaders who then began to form CONIC. After the CUC-CONIC split, the same representatives from CUC who had initially received San Jorge's inquiries (principally, Pedro Esquina and Juan Tiney) began to accompany San Jorge more regularly via CONIC. Multiple interviewees expressed that CONIC and the San Jorge land struggle mutually supported one another's emergence and founding.

"We Return To Our Roots In Order To Construct Our Path" (1992-1995)[12]

Protest Mobilizations in Guatemala City

From the initial land occupation (March 23, 1992) to 1995, San Jorge organized and sustained a remarkable number, frequency, and intensity of protests in Guatemala City which attracted headlining and front-page coverage from the national media. Jorgeños continuously sought creative ways to attract attention and put pressure on

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[12] CONIC slogan from poster for 2009 National Assembly.

legislators: For example, on August 3, 1993, the children of San Jorge marched wearing *traje*, playing Maya musical instruments, and speaking about the lack of land in San Jorge for housing and subsistence for their generation.

Cabildo Abierto (July 27, 1992)

Even as they were organizing at the national level, Jorgeños were simultaneously organizing in their municipal arena. On April 8, 1992, four days after the second eviction attempt, a protest march was held in which more than 10,000 people participated from all nine *cantones*. The protestors delivered a petition to the departmental governor of Sololá which, among other things: (a) demanded that the government resolve the land conflict; and (b) denounced the attitude of the Municipal Mayor of Sololá, "from whom we don't see even an appearance of interest and support for this demand of the poor community, whom he represents" ("Memorial del Pueblo de Sololá (April 8, 1992)," in Comunidad 1994: 21). Yet these Sololá politicians continued to be averse to standing up for poor Maya peoples, despite a march of 10,000 constituents. In the weeks that followed, Sololatecos scoured the Municipal Code for legally binding mechanisms that would force the politicians' hands where political mobilization alone could not.

Finally, they found the possibility of a *Cabildo Abierto* (similar to a Constituent Assembly) where they could present the needs of the *aldea* San Jorge La Laguna, and the residents gathered could vote on municipal endorsement, thereby bypassing the vote of the mayor and municipal council. Pedro Iboy comments:

> That's why it's important that an organization, a movement have the participation of a range of people who have different knowledges and skills – skills in rural matters, urban matters, academics, lawyers, doctors. The participation of all these

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people is important because, from their experience, all can contribute to the movement. Perhaps in this particular moment we were very ignorant in these matters … but something enlightened us: "Perhaps there's something in the law or in the Municipal Code that could help us in this type of work!" And that's how we learned of this alternative / option [of the Cabildo Abierto] (Iboy, pers. comm., May 12, 2006).

Even though San Jorge La Laguna's petition spelled out the stipulations of the Municipal Code for holding a *Cabildo Abierto*, the Official Municipality didn't concede until it felt pressure from all the communities of Sololá (via a petition from the Indigenous Municipality). As a result of this pressure, the Official Municipality agreed and officially convoked the population. The Indigenous Municipality, however, did most of the organizing to insure that Sololatecos would attend *en masse*.

They were successful. Not only was this the first Cabildo Abierto in the memory of Mayas of Sololá's *cabecera* and cantones (Iboy, pers. comm., May 12, 2006; Sulugui, pers. comm., May 9, 2006), but furthermore it was not held in the municipal building as normally would be done. Rather, because of the multitude of people participating – up to 3,500 to 4,000 people from Maya communities – the Cabildo was held in the municipal soccer stadium where the people almost filled the seats. They supported San Jorge's proposals about its land struggle and needs, resulting in official municipal endorsement for the expropriation of Jaibal for Jorgeños' use.

This moment also marked a turning point in Sololá municipal politics: by packing the stadium for a *Cabildo Abierto*, the Maya peoples of the *cantones* demonstrated their voting power to the Official Municipality, which since 1901 had been controlled by *ladinos* disinterested in responding to the needs of poor rural Mayas. This effectively registered as a warning to the *ladinos* in office that they better heed the demands and

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needs of Maya communities else they could be voted out.

Quincentennial Unity (October 12, 1992) and Reclaiming the Indigenous Municipality

San Jorge's land struggle gave a focus for all the Maya communities' efforts

because, apart from self-defensive organizing that had to be hidden, Sololá as a

municipality had not in recent decades had a public movement that galvanized and

unified it in the same way as San Jorge's (Guit, pers. comm., April 29, 2006).

Furthermore, this land struggle revealed the racism that Sololatecos faced in politics as

well as various aspects of Guatemalan society. For example, in the course of the land

occupations and mobilizations of April 1992, Acetún states that:

> all the communities began to realize that the municipal mayor did not heed their
> needs. That is, [before the land occupation], only the committees [leaders of
> organized Maya groups of the rural area] went to the Official Municipality – only
> they were aware of the kind of treatment that the mayor gave them. … But with
> the [San Jorge] land conflict, *all the people* woke up to the fact that the Official
> Municipality, the governor's office, and other institutions did not support this
> struggle – they did not advocate for the community to the [national] government.
> … We had to drag the mayor to visit us in the community! This also provoked
> [us] to organize – better (Acetún, pers. comm., April 26, 2006).

San Jorge's land struggle made Sololatecos collectively more aware of the levels of

discrimination in local governance and decision-making, and they began to see ways that

they could take action–"a new process of political participation when we began to

strengthen the Indigenous Municipality" (Pocop quoted in Thelen 2006: 6)

First, in anticipation of indigenous mobilization surrounding the Columbus

Quincentennial, Maya organizations in Sololá were beginning to plan a public launching

of their work. Prior to San Jorge's land occupation, these organizations had gradually

started to establish themselves in Sololá, though they still had to work outside the public

eye. Organizations such as CONAVIGUA, Majawil Q'ij, the Movement for 500 Years,

and Usaq'il Tinamit had been in the very initial planning stages of forming a union of

organizations (Acetún, pers. comm., April 26, 2006). On a practical level, says Acetún:

> The Coordinadora Comunal [of San Jorge] sought the solidarity of these groups as
> they were organizing for the land occupation, and their support helped them
> organize better in the years 1992-1994. The groups were strong. Each struggle
> that we launched, we did it as a coordinated group and everyone supported (ibid.).

Antonia Buch adds that the Coordinadora specifically began a coordination and alliance

at the municipal level through a "Youth Committee" of the Indigenous Municipality:

> This is exactly when a permanent unification began, which still exists to this day:
> It was due to San Jorge's initiation of these types of coordination and alliances for
> collective work towards the well-being of the population of Sololá (Buch, pers.
> comm., April 29, 2006).

As a result, in the course of organizing around San Jorge's land struggle,

Sololatecos began to recognize that the Indigenous Municipality was an important terrain

of struggle, even though its importance had been siphoned off by colonial powers. In

1901, the Official Municipality was created in Sololá as part of the national ladino-

dominated government system. The traditional Maya leaders of the Sololá municipality –

the Auxiliary Mayors – were displaced and moved across the street to form what has

since been called the Indigenous Municipality. But the ladino system intended to strip

them of all governance powers, and relegate them to symbolic religious functions. That

is, the auxiliary mayors no longer were heads of both religious (cofradía) and government

functions. Pocop notes that the officials of the Indigenous Municipality essentially

became figureheads expected to rubber-stamp and serve the Official Municipal Council:

> We said that this is not the role of the Indigenous Municipality. Rather, its goal is
> to live and revive the values held by the Maya culture: above all, the values and

rights that we have as Maya people. That we be respected because we have the ability to analyze, to decide, and to propose. At that time, we struggled for the Official Municipality to respect our process, and the fact that the real power [should be] in the Indigenous Municipality and not in the other municipality. This was the impetus that we gave from the Indigenous Municipality, and this gave rise to discussions galore until finally a change was made.

Now the Indigenous Municipality is seen as a parallel power, and a positive one. If the Official Municipal Council makes a decision or plans a project for the communities and it is not approved by the Indigenous Municipality, then it is not viable. (Pocop quoted in Thelen 2006: 8, 12).

The respected elder who led the way for these changes was don Bartolo Panjoj, who was elected to lead the Indigenous Municipality in 1993 and who served from 1994-1995.

Under Panjoj's leadership, the Indigenous Municipality created a forum for the Maya organizations in Sololá to coordinate, build common ground and struggle, and collectively analyze. In other words, the idea was to create a similar body to San Jorge's *Coordinadora Comunal* which served as the central organizing body for the land struggle and a multi-sectoral node for all groups in San Jorge. As a result, the Coordinating Body of Maya Organizations of Sololá (COMS) was created.

Research on Ancestral Forms of Maya Social Organization

Panjoj played a crucial and visionary role in encouraging and opening spaces for youth to research past Maya models of governance. Antonia Buch notes that soon after she joined COMS, its "principal work was the documentation of the traditional governance system of the Kaqchikeles of Sololá" (Buch, pers. comm., April 29, 2006). Even though these may not have been perfect models (a common postcolonial predicament: for example, the most documented examples come from the colonial period), what is significant to me is the political ideal and political desires they express

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for Maya self-determination and historicity[13] – for creating Maya forms of governance with their own development and adaptation to contemporary times which can be nurtured in autonomous spaces without having (yet) to compromise with a ladino-dominated system. For example, they researched the *Chinimital* model of organizing coordinating bodies. This influenced the organization of COMS itself, as well as organization on the level of the *cantones* and *caseríos*.

Organizing around the Indigenous Municipality and the Official Municipality

Meanwhile, at the national level, congressional representatives were not responding to Jorgeños' struggle -- despite Jorgeños' many petitions, marches, and protest activities held in Guatemala City from 1992-1995, and despite the many angles and tactics Jorgeños used to pressure the legislators. Yet the expropriation of Jaibal had to be presented by either a congressional representative or the municipal mayor, "something that the current mayor did not want to support," says Pocop (pers. comm., May 29, 2006). Consequently, Jorgeños realized that they had to re-think their strategy and focus their efforts on the municipal mayor rather than long-distance pressure on Congress. They also realized that it was more strategic to focus on taking local power– meaning, to them, roles in each of the rural communities through traditional groups associated with the Indigenous Municipality or COMS – "and from there come to power in the Official Municipality" (Pocop 101):

> So we analyzed the situation … and determined the necessity of being elected to a position on the Municipal Council on the level of the departmental seat of Sololá. – In order to continue demanding that the government and the state pay more

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[13] Ananya Chatterjea (2004) has influenced my thinking on postcolonial historicity.

attention to the demands of the indigenous people and our collective rights. This was what impelled us most to create the Civic Committee and enter the realm of political participation in order to elect a Mayor … We consulted the assembly … and the people said, "Yes, it's time that the ladinos allow us some room in the Official Municipality so that we can govern" (Pocop, pers. comm., May 29, 2006).

As a result of this decision, Sololatecos founded the Civic Committee in 1995. It was organized according to ideas based on their research into past forms of Maya social organization. With very few monetary resources for campaigning, it was through those community-level bodies and "mutual support" that they organized the Maya *caserios* and *cantones* for the municipal and congressional elections.

To their surprise and elation, in November 1995, Pedro Iboy and the Civic Committee slate won the mayorship and muncipal council seats (respectively) in the Official Municipality. On January 15, 1996, Iboy was inaugurated as the first Maya municipal mayor of Sololá since the Official Municipality had been founded in 1901. Their primary goal was to serve the rural areas and most marginalized sectors which had been neglected by previous administrations.

At the same time, the election led to a moment of realization that Tejido Social politics doesn't need to engage the state. To run a candidate for congressional representative, the Civic Committee experimented with an alliance with the New Guatemala Democratic Front (FDNG).[14] Anastasio Guarcax was nominated for candidate. On election day, he won the popular vote; but due to fraud, a competing party

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[14] A new leftist political party which "was hastily formed by progressive intellectuals, human rights activists, and grassroots organizations in 1995 to run candidates in national congressional elections" and "has the most democratic internal processes of any Guatemalan party, and the highest level of participation of women and Maya representatives in leadership roles" (Reding 2000: 17, 18).

claimed victory. At that point, says Guarcax, the Civic Committee had not yet had

enough experience with elections to know the procedure of contesting the vote count.

Also, because they were elated with winning the mayorship and municipal council seats,

they decided to pick their battles, let go of their rightful claim to the congressional seat,

and focus their efforts on transforming the Official Municipality. On the one hand, this is

an amazing testament to Tejido Social's organizing ability: for a rural Maya

schoolteacher with no sedimented political party allegiances to garner a congressional

seat is a significant intervention in the dominant political system in Guatemala. On the

other hand, what is remarkable is the Civic Committee's assessment of the situation:

seeing all the resistance from the current powerholders for this national-level position,

they decided the fight wasn't worth it and it was better to focus on "community control":

that is, to make the most of transformative opportunities at the municipal level through

the Official Municipality. This moment also produced two analyses that have defined

Tejido Social politics since: (a) their interest is not with political parties; and (b) they

have not since run a candidate for Congress, focusing solely on the municipal level. The

degree of "ontological autonomy" also was considered: despite the Official Municipality

being a low-level part of the official government system, because of the Civic

Committee's community consultation mechanisms which were connected to the Maya

social fabric of the *aldeas*, *cantones*, and *caseríos*, Mayas could have more voice and

opportunity for expression of various facets of their being.

In the course of the San Jorge land struggle and the efflorescence of Tejido Social

organizations in Sololá, Sololatecos discovered that conventional forms of politics are not

sufficient to meet their aspirations. They engaged some conventional tactics, particularly

on the national front of the San Jorge land struggle, and yet still faced repression of the

full expression of their cultural integrity as Maya persons and communities. The process

of struggle revealed to Sololatecos how the laws, rules, and norms of Guatemalan society

did not match their lived reality – whether regarding ancestral right to land, schooling,

governance, or justice systems.

Although pressuring congresspeople proved fruitless, Sololatecos discovered that

concrete changes could be made at the community level which would grant them some

degree of autonomy to more fully practice their cultural ways – to need to conform *less* to

(neo)colonial norms. In this period, the Defensoría Maya and the community-run Tz'oloj

Ya' High School were founded to work for the promotion of Maya justice systems and

the training of Kaqchikel-language teachers in Maya pedagogy (respectively). The main

action of Tejido Social politics shifted to these realms of relative self-determination and

culturally-based governance. As Tejido Social politics produced more of these

(relatively) sovereign spaces, the exploration of tangible possibilities of community

control and ontological autonomy was a relief. It offered a liberating taste of self-

determination and confidence which profoundly shifted Tejido Social politics' analysis of

the appropriate terrain of struggle. It also produced a vision of a third current of Maya

politics which I describe in the blueprint that follows.

IV. *Tejido Social* Political Visions: A Blueprint / Distillation of Lived Principles

The San Jorge land struggle produced a surprising Maya mobilization in Sololá that clearly indicates a third current of Maya politics which can probably also be found in other regions of Guatemala that have undergone similar processes. One key factor contributing to this unprecedented mobilization was the political energy generated by Tejido Social's politics of cultural revitalization and valorization after centuries of subjugation by colonial power dynamics. As one example, at various stages, sectors of Tejido Social conducted research into Kaqchikel-Sololateco history and forms of social organization as a means of generating fresh models more aligned with Maya values. This was not merely an intellectual exercise: functioning local bodies were produced, such as community consultation mechanisms in official municipal government; and several levels and kinds of Coordinating Councils which have connected and supported Sololatecos working in various aspects of Maya revitalization projects. For example, these Coordinating Councils are nodes for Maya justice systems, Kaqchikel-language schools, and curriculum development. Furthermore, recognizing their historicity as Maya peoples, participants modified the older Maya models (some of which came from the colonial period) to meet their new historical conditions – their contemporary needs – through a very deliberate, sometimes long-term process of collective analysis of their "reality."

This framework of collective reflection allows for flexibility over time should conditions change. In fact, through this process, different opinions within the community are sought out in order to have a well-rounded perspective. It also complements the

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primary political ideal of Tejido Social, which is the collective good. As one example of this principle in action, Iboy notes that the Civic Committee prioritized its projects according to the needs of the most marginal residents.

Maya styles of organizing have deep roots in daily community practices. Apart from research into past history, organizing embodied Maya values, concepts of leadership, service to community, etc., as summarized below:

First, the *Coordinadoras* reflect a holistic Maya organizing style to connect apparently unrelated groups. Antonia Buch and others stated that the *Coordinadora Comunal* encouraged the independent development and trajectory of many different organizations in San Jorge. Furthermore, Tejido Social politics allows for community-level fluidity between groups, in contrast to stark divisions and competition at the national level. Jorgeños participate not only with the *Coordinadora* in San Jorge, but also with a range of cultural revitalization projects and organizations. What is generally true is that they share the same basic philosophy and commitments of Tejido Social politics, including viewing their work with these various organizations as contributing to a broader anticolonial project of valorization of Maya philosophy and ways of life in the social sphere. For example, some Tejido Social leaders may leave active participation in the Civic Committee in order to focus on community-run Kaqchikel schools. Or some Jorgeños (youth and adults) work with CONIC, which is closer to a Maya *popular* organization than Tejido Social. Yet they still contribute to Tejido Social politics and use Tejido Social notions of Maya well-being and social justice.

Second, Tejido Social politics is anti-colonial with a critique of the power

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dynamics that coerce assimilation. It is positioned against "a process of [cultural] extermination" (Pocop p113); hence its focus on valorizing the rural Maya social fabric, worldview, and spaces of relative "ontological autonomy."

Third, Tejido Social politics is concerned with ancestral land for reasons that exceed the instrumentality inherent in frameworks used both by the Left's vision of land as a factor in production and the state's view that a community can be relocated to just any piece of land. Rather, Tejido Social affirms that a relationship with land is spiritual and is a source for the rejuvenation of the many facets of Maya culture, hence the focus on *rural* Maya social fabric. As one example of how land is a basis for self-determination: Guarcax encourages students to not place all their cards on becoming teachers or other professionals, but also to learn how to work their ancestral land. He reasons that when salaried jobs are filled by an oversupply of candidates, the students will still be able to subsist on their land.

Fourth, the philosophy and practice of leadership is distinct. What Westerners would consider to be leadership positions are viewed by Mayas as service to the community, for the benefit of the collective which also supports one's own well-being. The concept of interrelatedness underlies social dynamics of mutual support and collective work.

Community members are chosen for leadership positions by the community or by spiritual factors that have to do with one's talents. The Civic Committee uses this process: The community collectively agrees on a profile of the characteristics and skills they seek in a candidate, and then nominates people who match this description. (This

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contrasts with the political party system in which candidates generally make a personal decision to run for office based on career aspirations and monetary resources.) Also, leadership is seen as not coming from one's education or "personal interest" / ambition, but from community approval and talents bestowed upon one due to one's spiritual mission (*destino*; also includes challenging responsibilities that accompany the talents). When I asked interviewees how they became leaders, most if not all attributed this to their *destino*. The philosophy of *destino* also implies that various kinds of leadership skills are recognized, valued, and needed by the community. These are contributed by a number of people, not one leader alone.

Also, a variety of leadership / service positions exist in the community, signaling two things: (1) the Maya philosophy that a number of talents and kinds of people are needed for a community to prosper; and (2) this very way of "doing politics" encourages a life-long process of the formation of skill sets (needed for service) through incremental opportunities for community members to develop their skills.

Often, a communal analysis is used for major decisions about political directions. Participants view this process of consultation as existing in stark contrast with the ladino tradition of political parties "which are vertically-oriented: they're dependent on only one person" (Iboy, pers. comm., May 12, 2006). Furthermore, this communal analysis is an integral part of a processual approach that values "being present with the past" in order to shape the present with a vision of a better future; "to improve our work on a daily basis" based on years of experience (Antonia Buch, pers. comm., April 29, 2006).

The San Jorge land struggle produced Tejido Social politics whose ideals and visions are mapped in this blueprint. Lived reality is more complex, as the next section will show. Yet, this blueprint remains an inspiration. This is how practitioners of a third current of Maya politics conceptualize how they would like their politics to ideally function and its political potential. This is the vision that inspires their daily practice.

At the same time, an ethnography of the actual negotiations of lived socio-political practice within complex political terrain is valuable for analyzing the limits of Tejido Social politics due to contexts of oppression, as well as human internal contradictions. That is the subject of the next and final section.

V. The Significance of Tejido Social Politics

Resolution of San Jorge Land Struggle

In the period 1996-1999, the San Jorge land struggle ceased to be the central site of Tejido Social politics. Practically, many Jorgeños became involved in Tejido Social projects which were proliferating throughout Sololá at that time through newly public Maya organizations or the Indigenous or Official Municipalities. Work on the "home front" was proving to be more productive and fulfilling than extending themselves to ladino-dominated centers of power in Guatemala City that were violently repressive at worst or disinterested and estranged from Maya worldview at best. The land struggle changed its strategy -- partly because Jorgeños were exhausted from the long years of intensive participation and frequent mobilization in the capital, and partly because the post-Peace Accords establishment of the National Commission to Resolve Land Conflicts (CONTIERRA) opened the possibility of recovering their ancestral land through negotiations, a process which CONIC was trying out. But as a result, San Jorge's land struggle became less like Tejido Social politics. Also, by shifting to a legal process, the campaign lost momentum as a result of having less mass participation and thus less daily investment from the community-at-large. Furthermore, as in other social movements that move from the streets to legal processes, this may have caused San Jorge to lose its leverage: without the threat of mobilizations that disrupt capital city life and make bad international publicity, the government may have lost a reason to concede to San Jorge's biggest demands and find a resolution with the landowners. As a result, San Jorge could only compromise. The settlement signed on April 26, 1999 produced minimal material

gains for the community: a portion of Jaibal's lands which was insufficient for subsistence farming and funds for income-generating "projects" for the community. Yet, considering the plans for the tourist complex advertised in *Siglo Veintiuno* on February 23, 1992, Jorgeños successfully halted the construction of a tourist complex that would have severely disrupted their way of life. This less tangible victory actually is a significant part of the overall goal of Tejido Social politics.

Soon after the settlement, a rift splintered the community. Two positions emerged: the URNG (the Left, which included Maya representatives on the municipal level – but not the same as the Maya *popular* position), and the Tejido Social position. Importantly, this division erupted at the same historical moment that the URNG (the guerrillas who by then had finalized the Peace Accords with the Guatemalan government) was founding its political party. Iboy's term would end in 1999, and the Civic Committee planned to run another candidate collectively chosen in the same way as in 1996: through a process of community assemblies according to the candidate profiles described in my "Blueprint" (Section IV). The URNG decided to run its own candidates despite this local process of Maya politics that had been creating a better environment for Maya well-being in the municipality. This provoked a major division in Sololá that is beyond the scope of this paper, but gives an idea of the tensions between efforts at Tejido Social politics and the ambition and hierarchies of national political parties, even those emerging from the Left.

What are the outcomes of the San Jorge land struggle? Social movement theorists (including Escobar) show that the outcomes of movements cannot be assessed through

positivist measures. The San Jorge land struggle's primary significance lies not with the material results of the 1999 negotiations, but rather the mobilization of a third current of Maya politics through the renewing of political imaginaries, clarification of political vision, innovation of new strategies and philosophies of organizing, and the resulting opening of fresh political horizons. Social movements produce effects that ripple beyond one single organization (in this case, the San Jorge land struggle) and shift the landscape of practices, discourses, and political agendas of Guatemalan Maya politics and social change organizations at large.

Yet, given the severe inequalities of power and epistemological differences with the models they contest, third current social movements run into major challenges when trying to implement their political visions. For example, as a low-level part of the government apparatus, the rules governing the jurisdiction of the Official Municipality may defy Tejido Social attempts at transforming it. In fact, these bureaucratic rules and practices may tend to appropriate Maya worldview, rather than the other way around.

As another example from the ethnography, the Civic Committee had its surprising and promising first stab at municipal level politics, but now that Leftist political parties are challenging it with Maya candidates and discourse, the Civic Committee is being pressured to play the same game. It must draw even more creatively on forms of Maya organization to compete with political parties' infamous corruption and clientelist practices.

But in fact, it is exactly quandaries and challenges like this that have been part of the series of community analyses which have informed the direction of Tejido Social

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politics. Tejido Social's solution, overall, has been two-fold: First, it involves an analysis of power that focuses on "community control." This is not about a "local" that is disconnected from "global" influence. Rather, it's a pragmatic assessment of the scale to which their political ideals can be realized to the fullest degree possible (without dilution or cooptation) through a kind of face-to-face politics where participants have a greater degree of agency. This can be a focus on local economies or municipal politics where an alternative to political parties can still stand a chance when dependent on community networks rather than political parties' deep coffers. Second, it centers Maya worldview, particularly those aspects that infuse the social organization and daily practices of rural Sololá. This is what I refer to as "ontological autonomy" and it includes distinctive Maya notions of leadership, service, collectivity, relationality, and mutuality in struggle. This two-fold approach informs various leaders' efforts to found a range of organizations that reflect this primary grounding in Maya worldview at the level of "community control." Rather than an effort at institutionalization, these are an expression of a political move to *re-ground* existing public social organization (which has been colonized by ladino society) in Maya worldview.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Tejido Social politics has been produced at the intersection of the valorization of ongoing Maya community practices and the worldview that informs them; and the constraints imposed by their current social realities of land displacement, militarization, exclusion, and social genocide. Through this complex process of struggle

and maneuvering to create optimal conditions in which Maya subjectivity can flourish, a nuanced critique of power was developed by Sololatecos: (a) a critique of laws imposed on them (by a colonial state) that don't match their lived reality and "ontological relationality" – whether regarding ancestral relationship with land, ways of learning, mutuality in social relations, and principles of governance and justice systems; and (b) that they can "take power" – specifically, they can achieve a degree of ontological autonomy and community self-determination -- *without* focusing their efforts on the state. The latter is a key difference from both Leftist political formations (that seek to take over state power); and the *culturalistas* (whose principal strategy is to obtain positions in state organs in order to influence language and education policy). Furthermore, it is not an expansionary project like liberalism: spreading to other areas is not a mission of Tejido Social politics.

Thus, Tejido Social politics constitutes a third current of Maya politics whose focus on community self-determination and ontological autonomy demonstrate significant political potential. These are slightly different political goals and positionings from the movements that Escobar studies, but still clearly part of the "third current" family of social movements and sharing postliberal and postcapitalist principles and projects of relationality. Tejido Social politics is not free of flaws, but its aspirations and directions break new ground towards fresh political horizons.

The theorization of Tejido Social politics also contributes to recent literature that critiques the still dominant practice of projecting the *culturalista-popular* divide back in time, despite fluidity and mutual influence between these political projects prior to *La*

Violencia. The third chapter of Hale (2006) ("Reclaiming the Future of Chimaltenango's Past: Contentious Memories of Indigenous Politics during the Revolutionary Years, 1976-1982") has discussed this theoretically in a national context and in Chimaltenango. My paper extends Hale's theory by looking closely at the development of Maya politics in the municipality of Sololá. Furthermore, theorization of Tejido Social politics as a third current contributes to a gap in the literature rendering a *current* dichotomy between *culturalistas* and *populares* without attention to other trajectories of Maya politics. In fact, de-centering the notion of dichotomy is important for Maya politics in Sololá because of the harmful consequences of the division which it perpetuates among youth. A couple Jorgeño youth leaders have stressed that it is important to tell the whole history which continues to be silenced, particularly about San Jorge's participation with the guerrillas, so that youth can better understand their history and have a more complete basis for analyzing where they are today. Furthermore, the division works to the detriment of the overall goal of Maya peoples' well-being and dignity.

My hope is that this analysis can contribute to clarifying (in the interest of healing) two divisions. First, I propose re-thinking the supposed dichotomy between *culturalistas* and *populares* in the national Maya movement. The history of the San Jorge La Laguna land struggle demonstrates that there need not be a strict divide between those Maya groups with a Leftist influence and those who care about "culture." In fact, it shows the formation of a third current that emerges from a confluence of *both* histories and influences. This process caused Jorgeños and Sololatecos at large to analyze and deeply consider their path. This point is particularly important given the efforts today to

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form a Maya political party and the organizers' desire to take stock of the Maya political landscape, and it deepens the discussion of what "Maya culture" means to each position. Some of the organizers have argued that "authentic" Maya politics cannot have an "ideology" (a comment that is particularly targeted against the *populares'* usage of Leftist analyses and strategies); this study shows that such an assertion is not true. In particular, I problematize the assumption that Leftist analysis and Maya worldview are naturally opposed by (1) discussing how each current of Maya politics engages Maya culture, but with different emphases; (2) describing a history of the Maya movement's engagement with the Left in various forms over the past century; and (3) discussing the movement's own historicity and careful consideration of whether and how to use various analytical tools and strategies. I argue that these points do not detract from the claim that Tejido Social politics *is* Maya. Rather, grounded in Maya worldview, aspects of Leftist formation were engaged, re-shaped, appropriated, and fit together to complement a *Maya* vision of *Maya* political horizons which is postliberal, anticapitalist, and contesting the modernizing and colonial aspects of both Right and Left. Furthermore, because it is grounded in Maya worldview which promotes respectful awareness of people's relations with each other and the universe, Tejido Social politics shows more political potential than current hegemonic political models. It demonstrates principles of more harmonious co-existence on the planet based on respect for each other as living beings.

Similarly, for San Jorge, this analysis can hopefully bring to light some questions that have been at the root of the division in Sololá between Tejido Social politics and the URNG. One of the public debates which fuels the divide is around who has "authentic"

ties to the Left. The Civic Committee has public demurred the question – probably for two reasons: a generalized silence in Guatemala about former involvement with the guerrillas for fear of political repression; and the Maya Movement's "oath of silence" (that is only now slowly opening; Bastos and Camus 2003) against admitting a shared past with the Left so that its Maya-ness can't be challenged. Given the history that interviewees have laid out for me, suffice it to say that those who currently make up the URNG contingent in Sololá are not the only ones with a shared history with the Left, and probably not even the main actors in the self-defense period during La Violencia. The reality is much more complex: probably most families in San Jorge La Laguna, if not Sololá municipality, had some at least indirect tie to the guerrillas. Yet, given the current context of silence, Jorgeño and Sololateco youth may not know this history, especially if the elders who can tell the full story begin to pass away.

In summary, I return to Maya leader Domingo Hernández Ixcoy's pithy and extremely useful framing of the relationship between Maya politics and the Left: "There is no contradiction between indigenous cosmovision and social demands" around the critique of capital, private property (vs. collective rights), and neoliberalism / resource extraction. Where it shows differences is around the question of colonialism and modernization theory. Escobar also shows how the third current shares important political concerns with the Left, especially in contesting liberalism's "cultural regime of the individual" that provides a worldview which fuels capitalism's exploitations and hierarchies and neoliberalism's callous resource extraction that endangers the earth's ecosystems. But its distinction with the classical Left is this third current's grounding in:

(a) Afro-indigenous worldviews that are now being "political activated" and (b) a critique of colonialism.

Extending Escobar's work, I have argued that Tejido Social's political energies were released by a politics of cultural revitalization and recovery of ancestral land. Even though structural violence like racism and economic exploitation persist, *Tejido Social*, like other postliberal politics of relationality, seeks to free Mayas from some vectors of colonialism: to be under less coercion to mold their ways, practices, and beliefs to the ladino and Western system. Although rooted in a particular history and context, Sololateco shapers of Tejido Social politics have constructed strategic "sovereign" spaces where they center the logics of Kaqchikel Sololateco community culture in creating organizations and doing sociopolitical visioning. As a result, Tejido Social's intervention as a third current of Maya politics shows the most potential for a more just society with cultural integrity, dignity, and well-being of Maya peoples.

Glossary

aldea	village – more concentrated ("urbanized") than a cantón; may be subdivided into *caseríos*
autoridades	respected community elders and leaders (does not have the punitive connotation of the English cognate "authorities," since this is a Spanish translate of a Kaqchikel system of governance)
cabecera	head town (of a municipality or department); municipal town center (as contrasted with Sololá's *cantones y caseríos*, which refers to the rural areas of Sololá outside of the town center).
campesino	peasant, small-scale subsistence farmer
cantón	canton, rural municipal district; a subdivision of a municipality that encompasses a variable number of *caseríos*
caserío	hamlet, a cluster of houses; a subdivision of a *canton*
capacitación	trainings or workshops for empowerment, usually using Freirean / popular education pedagogy
cofradía	religious association
Coordinadora Comunal	Communal Coordinating Body of residents and organized groups of San Jorge La Laguna
Jorgeño	Maya Kaqchikel residents of San Jorge La Laguna
ladino	non-indigenous Guatemalans (The most elite, white Guatemalans would refer to themselves as *blancos*, but this term was not used by my interviewees in Sololá.)
municipality	*el municipio de Sololá*: the political unit and territory of Sololá
Indigenous Municipality	*Municipalidad Indígena*: refers to both the building and the body of officials that represent the Maya governance institution at the municipal level
Official Municipality	*Municipalidad Oficial*: refers to both the building (town hall) and the body of officials that represent the municipal government which is officially recognized by the Guatemalan government system

Sololá	In the text, I use "Sololá" to refer to the municipality of Sololá (including its rural areas – *cantones* and *caseríos*), and not the department of Sololá, unless otherwise specified.
Sololateco	While there are ladino residents of Sololá (mostly in the *cabecera*), I use the term specifically to refer to Maya Kaqchikel residents of the municipality of Sololá (including its *aldeas*, *cantones*, and *caseríos*). This term is inclusive of *Jorgeños*.
reclutamiento	forced conscription of youth for the army. Prevalent during *La Violencia*. (The literal translation of "recruitment" is a euphemism.)
traje	traditional Maya clothing, usually woven
URNG	Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity: the alliance of guerrilla organizations that is co-signatory of the Peace Accords with the Guatemalan government. It became a legal political party in 1998.
La Violencia	popular terminology for the most intensely violent period of the Guatemalan state's military repression, particularly from 1980-1984: the period of the genocidal scorched earth campaign

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