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The Praxis of Cultural Sustainability: A Q'eqchi' Maya Case of Cultural Autonomy and Resistance against the Monsanto Law in Guatemala

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This paper explores the cultural ideology of the Mayas in regards to cultural sustenance from multiple perspectives. Rural consciousness and agricultural related rituals are described and analyzed to illustrate the ideological continuity concerning the cultural sustenance of the contemporary rural Q'eqchi' people. The embedded cultural symbols and agricultural ritual are examined to shed light on indigenous identity and to account for the cultural agency as the foundation of the praxis of cultural sustenance. The Q'eqchi' Maya consciousness in relation to their praxis of cultural sustainability will be discussed in five dimensions: 1). Indigenous rural consciousness and historical resistance, 2). The subsistence based economy model of milpa system, 3). A landscape of signs and symbols of Maya cosmology, 4). The ritual model of Maya cosmogony and the agricultural rituals for sowing and healing, 5). The indigenous peasant organizing for resistance and defeating the Monsanto Law. *[Article copies available for a fee from The Transformative Studies Institute. E-mail address: journal@transformativestudies.org Website: http://www.transformativestudies.org ©2018 by The Transformative Studies Institute. All rights reserved.]*

KEYWORDS: Praxis of Cultural Sustenance, Q'eqchi' Mayas, Maya Animism, The Monsanto Law, San Agustin Lanquin, Guatemala.

INTRODUCTION

Multiple disciplines have observed cultural conservation in Maya communities from the 1980s to 2010, and from 2010 to 2015. Sapper observed that "the [Q'eqchi'] were very concerned, at least in the

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countryside, about maintaining their purity, and therefore kept their race uncontaminated. . . [T]he strict customs of yesteryear have had considerable influence on the capacity of the [Q'eqchi'] tribe" in the regard of cultural preservation (Sapper, 1985, p. 43). Archaeologists and anthropologists such as Permanto (2015), Schele et al. (1993, 1998), Tedlock (1985), Wilson (1995), have likewise observed cultural continuity in the joint relationship of the agricultural related customs/rituals and the subsistence based economy of maize cultivation in the contemporary Mayas; for example, when considering tropical forestry (Coronado Vargas, 2006) and the *milpa* subsistence system (Carter, 1969; Maass, 2010).

Several theories can help explain the dynamics of indigenous cultural sustenance across times. Wolf postulates a model of the closed corporate community, which is common in traditional Latin American societies (Wolf, 2001). An intimate link exists between the means and ends of production in relation to the social organizing structure. Orchestrated efforts coordinate organized labor for agricultural activities in the subsistence-based economic model. Departing from the religious-sociopolitical binary structure in the Maya pyramid inscriptions (Wolf, 1970; Schele and Mathews, 1998), maize cultivation and the related rituals are religious obligations for the Mayas for whose creation of the world and appearance of humanity are indebted to their gods. Expanding on the "cultural survival model" (Farriss, 1984), Wilk suggests a maintenance model of community of which survival is predicated upon a balance between the "external pressures" and "internal responses to them" through the case of the Q'eqch' settlement in Toledo, Belize. To meet temporal needs and safeguard against extreme changes, the Q'eqchi' settlers drew from the cultural reservoir and opted for strategies between "dependence or flight," "subsistence and trade," and "nucleation and dispersion" (Wilk, 1991, p. 71-73).

Popol Vuh, The Book of Council, commonly know as the Bible of Mayas, delineates Maya customs and rituals since the mythological time of the Maya world's creation and during the Maya ancestors' sojourns in the total darkness (Tedlock,1985). *Popl Vuh* describe a theology of life and transformation over death and defeat. It tells how the protagonists, a pair of hero twins named Hunahpú and Xbalanqué, defeat the lords of Xibalbas, the rulers of the underworld kingdom; hence, inevitable death is overcome. The twins resurrect their sacrificed father who later emerges as the god of maize. The hero twins transform into the sun and moon, who alternate in appearing in the two different worlds of the living and the dead.

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Popol Vuh also narrates the birth of the Maya nation. More than a mythology of world creation, the *Popol Vuh* is thought of a "mythistory." The episodes of the *Popol Vuh* are depicted in public architecture as symbols of power edification from the divine (Schele & Mathews, 1995). *Popl Vuh* inscribes a cultural narrative that transmits a view of history as a trajectory in dialectics with their material-spatial situationality. The first Mayas were created by a midwife's hands with maize dough as the main ingredient, in addition to water and oil from her hands. The *Popol Vuh* recounts that the Mayas "began to abound even before the birth of the sun and the light" (Tedlock, 1985, p. 149). Having no homes, they wandered in the "blackness" and "traveled the mountains" and waited for the sunrise (Tedlock, 1985, p. 149). The first tribes sent themselves into exile until they came to the dawning place where together they witnessed the first dawn in the world. Upon the world's dawning, the ancestors burned *copal pom*, which they brought from their place of origin, to offer to their deities. At the dawning place, the Maya ancestors carried out "their sowing and there was also the showing of the sun, moon and stars" (Tedlock 1985, p. 160). The dawning of the Maya consciousness is intertwined with their major staple, maize, which is also the means of subsistence to perpetuate the Maya race. By carrying out religious duties, the Maya commemorate their gods through rituals.

Popol Vuh also records worships and ritual performances. Copal is regarded as a sacred substance since "there is a blood constituency associated with [it]… [And the] Q'eqchi' refer to [copal] as the sweet-smelling sap or blood of the copal tree" (Permanto, 2015, p. 175). In the *Popol Vuh*, in lieu of a maiden's heart, the sap of the croton [copal] tree is offered to the gods of death (Tedlock, 1996, p. 101). The Mayas continue to offer *copal pom* in rituals as a communication medium and tokens of payment to their gods. The *Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel* narrates the rituals performed by the first Mayas who walked on the Earth. Four incense holders containing copal were arranged in a "cuadrifolio framework" (Freidel, Schele, & Parker, 1995) and the copal incense was directed to the four world quarters (Roys, 2008, p. 20).

This study contends that the joint relationship of the recurrent transformative theme with the schematic cuadrifolio ritual model articulates a Mayan ontology informed by Maya creation theory. From this principle, the Maya cultural narrative of transformation as the theological underpinning in the Maya cosmology, a structure of Maya animistic materialism is conceived; from this principle the Maya cosmic vision perceives a universe to be permeated with life giving forces.

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Maya animism, from which the Q'eqchi' rituals developed, shapes Maya consciousness. Kahn (2006, p. 7) suggests that "Q'eqchi', since Pre-Columbian times, have been stuck in a cycle of debt towards *tzuultaq'a*, who are the legitimate owners and keepers of the Earth." In the name sake of the Q'eqchi' agricultural gods, *tzuul-taq'as*, encapsulate the concept of the whole universe. A compound word, *tzuul* and *taq'a* stand for 'mountain' and 'valley' respectively. *Tzuultaq'a*, as a significant cultural code/codification, intersects with the people's consciousness of being and their geo-history. In that the deities of tzuulta'qas mark the foot prints of community settlements and changes; its name references a geographical location, and signifies people's fear/reverence to the boundary where the supernatural being dominates. Hence, the belief of *tzuultaq'a* is central to Q'eqchi' cultural identity as many researchers have found. Wilson points out "*tzuultaq'a* are local mountain spirit[s]; they represent the ongoing portrait of the [Q'eqchi'] community" (Wilson, 1995, p. 53). For Durkheim, *tzuultaq'a* embodies "a collective representation, a social fact of cognitive life of the village" (as cited in Wilson, 1995, p. 53). According to Permanto's fieldwork on Q'eqchi' Maya animism in the village of Chisec in the Department of Alta Verapaz, he found despite cultural assimilation by Catholic and evangelical missionaries, "the beliefs and ritual practices concerning the *tzuultaq'a* were never completely eradicated" (Permanto, 2015, p. 76).

The Q'eqchi' animism which scaffolds the relationship between the bio-physical landscape and sociocultural structure posits a salient lens for the analysis of the underlying ideology that drives indigenous political resistance. The author contends that praxis of cultural sustenance is embedded in the continuity of agriculture related rituals and worships conjoint to their cultural economy of maize cultivation wherein locates the avatar of the cultural reservoir. This is congruent with Cabarrus' analysis that "the agricultural divinity of *tzuultaq'a* [articulates Q'eqchi'] peasant values and consciousness" and "of which political-religious and social effects the peasants' struggle for their rights and [motivation for] cultural resistance is derived" (Cabarrus, 1979, 16).

In line with the above rationale, its relation to indigenous political activism in Guatemala in 2014 will be discussed through the case of the biotech crop of the Monsanto maize seeds as a protected plant variety in the Monsanto Law. Fischer views "cultural logic" as a society's cultural essence, which endures throughout history and is resistant to reciprocal social-material conditions (Fischer, 1999). The deep structure, according to Chomsky, denotes both the structural informational processing needed to interpret meaning in line with a particular cultural logic. Its

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counterpart, the surface structure (Chomsky, 1959), constitutes creative manifestations of codes and symbols in a conventional order pertinent to a given linguistic or socio-cultural environment. The underlying cultural logic (i.e. deep structure) is ascertained to comprehend the political motivations and power transformation in the mass mobilization of indigenous resistance. Based on a discussion of the deep structure that underpins historical Mayan consciousness, and the analyses of ritual functions and symbols in the ritual model and customs, a praxis of cultural sustenance is construed. The analysis of praxis as in the reflexive cycle of theory – reflection – action for power transformation (Freire, 1970) is intended to explain the intersection of Mayan cultural agency embedded in the ceremonial and quotidian dimensions and political motivation of resistance against oppression and cultural invasion. To this end, I will discuss recent events of the Mayan resistance that began in 2014 against Guatemala's "Law for the Protection of New Plant Varieties," informally referred to as the "Monsanto Law" (*Ley Monsanto* in Spanish). The reports of the events and the discourse for political mobilization are described in reference to the deep cultural structure from which political activism is supposedly derived.

METHODOLOGY

This research is based on fieldwork carried out over eight months in the municipality of San Agustin Lanquin, Guatemala. A mixed-method approach was utilized to collect data. Historical documents from the available institutional archives on educational planning, economic development, and statistics were examined. Participant observations occurred through daily interactions with the villagers, household visits (by invitation) in different villages, and by shadowing planting and sowing activities. Video was recorded and photographs taken after receiving permission. Field notes were taken on the communities' daily routine, and recurring or significant events. Interviews took place with community members and were audio-recorded; field notes were also taken during the interviews. Interviews with informants and villagers were arranged based on word-of-mouth.

The data collection on the events related to the Monsanto Law accrued from internet searches of reports from multiple news outlets in Guatemala and international independent media agencies, including NGOs.

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INDIGENOUS RURAL CONSCIOUSNESS AND HISTORICAL RESISTANCE

Guatemala's demographic information portrays a "dualistic society" (Montejo, 2005), a country divided by "two bloods" (Konefal, 2010): Ladino and Maya (indigenous), which can be seen in the further division between the political elite, who are of European descent, and rural indigenous peasants. The gulf of racism in contemporary Guatemala derives from the colonial era, persisted after independence from Spain, and exists today. Classism is further divided along national racial lines. Among the indigenous majority, 60% of 15.47 million of total population (International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs, or IWGIA, 2014; World Bank, 2013), 73% are classified as poor and 26% are extremely poor (IWGIA on human development, 2008). Class disparities can also be seen based on geography. The Guatemala National Institute of Statistics shows that Guatemala's impoverished majority (71.4%) is concentrated in rural areas, while 28.6% of the people live in urban centers (Instituto Nacional de Estadistica, 2011). The Department of Alta Verapaz, where Mayas comprise the majority of the population, had the highest rural poverty rate at 89.58%, compared to the national average of 71.35% (Instituto Nacional de Estadistica, 2011). Despite rural poverty, Mayas harvested 61.7% of the production output in the overall national economy (IWGIA, 2014). However, life expectancy among the Mayas is shorter by 13 years compared to Ladinos, and only 5% of university students are indigenous (IWGIA, 2014).

According to Sapper (1985), "[the] resistance of the Indians was not always typified by [retreat] and avoidance" (p. 94). The Maya resistance continued following the Spanish conquest in 1524, as documented by Bricker (1981); it persisted throughout the colonial period and in the early years of Guatemalan independence in 1921, according to King (1974), and Sapper (1985), among many others. The Maya theological model of liberation fueled the ideological motivation for the following uprisings: the struggle against the monopoly over religious codes; the fight against economic pressure from stringent taxes demanded by the Catholic Church during the Caste War of Yucatan (which is a representative case of the Maya resistance) from 1847 to 1901; the Q'eqchi' revolt in San Pedro Carcha against exploitation in the case of the Guerra de Montana (War of Montana) in 1864 (Sapper 1901, p. 115); and the nativist movement near San Juan Chamelco in Alta Verapaz (Sapper, 1985, p. 34). The impoverished rural native citizens thus built a popular base for the struggle for indigenous rights.

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In the times of internal conflicts from the 1960s to 1996, a Mayan rebel soldier reminisced: “It was in those early days that the Maya villagers confirmed our beliefs that it would be the rural poor who would play a key role in our revolution, and that equal rights for the Maya must be a basic tenet of any political platform” (Harbury, 1995, p. 83). The Committee for Peasant Unity (CUC) played a central role in indigenous revolutionary activities. Later, other organizations joined forces with the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) and the Revolutionary Organization of People in Arms (ORPA). The revolutionary groups for Maya indigenous justice confirm that the Mayas have acted as fundamental forces for social change, both in the past and today in global history. The Zapatista uprising in 1994 in the Mexican state of Chiapas, led by indigenous Mayas, was hailed as the first post-modern revolution. During his visit to Zapatista territory in the mountains of south-eastern Mexico, Pope Francis declared his solidarity with the Mayas for historical justice and to defend nature against human destruction (Fernandez de Castro, 2016).

Rubin (2004) posited that mobilizing efforts are contextually specific, culturally meaningful, and historically inspired. Maya identity and indigenous visibility has led a counter-hegemonic current in indigenous politics against Guatemala’s Ladino-centric climate. Hence, instead of being a historical accident, Maya cultural sustenance is, as explained by the Guatemalan Jesuit anthropologist Carlos Rafael Cabarrus, “a result of struggles by groups of concienticized peasants” (Cabarrus, 1979, p. 16). As a part of the continuum of cultural sustenance, Wolf argues that “to effectively transcend social strata and division, ideas [must] become concentrated into ideologies” (Portis-Winner, 2006, p. 341) that represent the values of an institution. Hence, consciousness, which is the target of this study, is “the medium and method in the historical process whereby people act upon the reality of limits; they use situations as an opportunity to transform” (Pinto, as cited in Freire, 2009, p. 69, 102).

I will now discuss the subsistence patterns upon which the rural consciousness is socialized and interpretation of experiences are constructed. Wolf noted that “the persistence of any survival over a period of 300 years [can be seen in the] persistence of ‘Indian’ cultural content [which] seems to have depended primarily on maintaining this [subsistence based structure of economy]” (Wolf 2001, 199). Within this structure, the *milpa* system is interlocking with the sovereignty of the local landscape; and family compounds and orchards are arranged among scattered patterns of dwellings and settlements.

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MILPA: THE SUBSISTENCE-BASED ECONOMY IN LANQUIN

According to Wolf, the scattered pattern was formed as “families live in dispersal [because a] family may occupy land for as long as required and abandon it with decreasing yields. Such circulation through the landscape would require large amounts of land and unrestricted operation…” (Wolf, 2001, p. 214). The rural scattered pattern is “typical of [rural areas] and has persisted from pre-Colombian times to the present day, despite Europeans’ centuries-long efforts to change it” (King, 1974, p. 22). As a social cultural construct, the land encapsulates Maya identity of the multiplicities of the sociocultural axiology, epistemology, and ontological materialism. Historically, to avoid paying church taxes or centralized political control for exploitation, Mayas left the urban living and moved deeper into mountains or jungles. The rural scattered pattern of dwelling is maintained besides for the subsistence sufficiency and for existential autonomy as well. A related spatial and social living pattern is implicated in the subsistence-based economy of *milpa* cultivation and swidden practice as shown at the research site, the municipality of Lanquin.

Of the 27,921 residents in Lanquin (which is 80 square km), 3,000 live in the urban center; the rest are spread throughout the valley and its slopes. In rural Lanquin, the residential pattern is such that clusters of relatives (up to approximately 15 or more members of multiple generations) share common living quarters and an orchard. The space normally houses domesticated animals including chicken, wild turkeys, wild pigs, and many family dogs and cats. These rural residents walk to and from their milpas, where they grow maize and pick *frijoles* (beans) and gather firewood. The milpas are several kilometers away from their huts. Maize, a main crop of the milpa system, as well as chili peppers, beans, squash, and herbs from intercropping. In addition, in family orchards, the Q’eqchi’ grow fruit trees, herbs, and raise wild turkeys and chicken.

The subsistence staple of the Q’eqchi’ Mayas continues to consist of what is commonly called “the trinity of the American Indians” (Wolf, 1970, p. 63). According to Wolf, from this combination of maize, beans, and squash the Mayas obtain nutritional balance. Protein comes from beans and eggs. Seeds from squash provide essential oil intake. A typical breakfast in Lanquin consists of tortillas, chili, and salt which are the essential elements in the Q’eqchi’ kitchen my informant confirmed. Wolf explains, “chili pepper is a valuable source of vitamins and serves as an aid in the digestion of foodstuffs high in cellulose; salt, [although not

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available in the orchard], can be obtained from saline lakes by evaporation, or transported from other parts" of the country (Wolf, 1970, p. 65-66). In addition to maintaining subsistence sufficiency through milpa, the rural Q'eqchi' participate in the global cash crop market. They earn supplemental incomes from cultivating commercial crops such as annatto, cardamom, cacao, and coffee using a small portion of the milpa. They also work on nearby large estates picking coffee beans, or picking cotton as migrant laborers and other cultivation of cash crops of corporate investments. This largely subsistence-based economy in rural Lanquin revolving around milpa can be attributed to the few specializations of profession in the communities. Another informant commented that "most of the residents farm their own milpas [in rural Lanquin]…only a handful of residents work as professionals such as teachers [who mainly reside in urban Lanquin], *albañiles* [construction workers], and *guias* [tour guides for the renowned natural monument Semuc Champey]."

Milpa, Q'eqchi' peasants, and the local landscape construct an interdependent relationship between humans and nature from which an intimate link between the ends and means of production is organized. The role of the Q'eqchi' as land cultivators and caretakers to nature is also articulated. As subsistence farmers and families, the Q'eqchi' differ from commercial farmers; land and organized labor are regarded as common wealth if collective survival is guaranteed. According to the interviewees, family land is passed down evenly among siblings, regardless of gender; household heads pass on land cultivation rights to those who are able to care for the land and those in need. Each family cluster (from ten to fifteen or more members) in a common compound shares cultivating land, as well as the results of the harvest; relatives and community members reciprocate labor during planting seasons. The informants said that the harvests of maize do not go to the market or middle men as commodities for cash; instead, families are fed first. My informants claimed that "none of the people sell their small maize harvest here because if they do, they will have to pay a higher market price when the reserve of *mazorcas* (corn stalks) runs out."

A LANDSCAPE OF SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

According to Schele and Mathews (1998, p. 212), the Maya patterns of earthly living quarters, activities and rituals mirror their mythic reading of constellations. Akkerren interprets the earthly and celestial reflections as constructed landscapes of signs and symbols (2012). The metaphorical

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union are multi-folds. The sowing of maize complements the "dawning" of the Maya consciousness in the symbols of the sun, moon, and stars. Same is the union of the Maya humanity and its ontological materialism in the folkloric identity, *hombres de maiz* (literally "men of maize"). Congruent with the creation theory in the Maya Book of Council, the *Popl Vuh*, the coinage of *hombres de maiz* stands for the epitome in the social construction of the Maya humanity in which the Maya animism undergirds. Historian Arden King interprets the animistic and subsistence integration as the moral economy; in that "through [the multi-folds of] metaphorical union, the supernatural world becomes part of the natural world wherein [one] finds [his/her] proper place through cultivating the *milpa*" (King, 1974, p. 9).

The Q'eqchi' Maya ideation of metaphysics and materialism can be observed in agricultural rituals which scaffolds the spatial schemes in accordance to the Maya cosmology; within the local geographical topography are also embedded codes of ethics which the social life of the community abides by. Vogt interprets Maya field rituals as a small-scale model of a quincuncial cosmogony (Vogt, 1976, p. 58). The schematic framework of a quincunx appears in common rituals during the maize sowing season (from the end of May through the first week of June) in Lanquín, as well as in the cave ritual. Milpa farmers in Lanquin also refer to the quincunx as the "four corners of life." Q'eqchi' men go on a group pilgrimage and arrive at dispersed caves to perform cave ceremonies and pray to the local agricultural deities, *tzuultaq'a* for blessings and peace. The same framework of a quincunx is also observed in the ritual for healing in Lanquin. Mimicking the field ritual with burned copal in the center point, the four quarters of a quincunx are instead represented by four lit candles, enclosed by a circle of pleading family members and a Maya priest holding candles in their hands.

The quincunx ritual model has another variant - a pecked cross – which was uncovered in the floor of the Candelaria Cave system in Alta Verapaz. Woodfill speculates that it is likely an early classic feature (Woodfill, 2014, p. 107). According to Woodfill, "[p]ecked crosses, a variant of a common pre-Hispanic American symbol often referred to as a ''quartered'' or ''quadripartite'' circle, are commonly found in central and northern Mexico during the florescence of Teotihuacan (ca. A.D. 100–650) and often interpreted as astronomical devices" (Woodfill, 2014, p. 18). The pecked cross is a synthetic that conflates the trajectory of "the sun as a flower" (Tedlock, 2010, p. 18) with the directive sign in the form of a cross or "quadrifoil cartuche shape" (Freidel, Schele and Parker, 1995, p. 352). They are represented in the glyphs of K'in and

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K'an, respectively, in the Maya calendar (Akkerren, 2012, p. 176-177). Woodfill (2014) suggests that the pecked cross represents the celestial observations of "emergence and submergence of the sun" (Woodfill, 2014, p. 103-120), which, as it crosses the underworld path, the sun's counterpart, the moon, appears in substitution (Akkerren, 2012). The glyph K'an, a five-point directive sign, corresponds to red, black, white, and yellow paths, with green in the center (Tedlock, 1985, p. 94, 116). The twin protagonists encounter it in the labyrinth of the karstic river caves of the underworld kingdom of Xibalbá in the *Popol Vuh*. The twin protagonists (representing the older and younger generations) come to the crossroads where they must pass a series of tests; they fail and are sacrificed by the Xibalbá, the lords of fear and death (Akkerren, 2012).

The glyph K'an, as a directive sign, is a geo-matrix-spatial reference to the four directions toward a middle point; the latter marks the location of the life source in semantics. Freidel, Schele and Parker (1995) confirmed "[t]he K'an-cross is a kind of 'X marks the spot' symbol of rebirth and Creation" (p. 94). For Lacadena, the K'an sign "was attributed to the entrance to the fabled cave in the creation myth, and also represents a portal of communication with the other world, [that is,] contact with an interior space in the sacred geography or supernatural realms [in the form of] the Cosmic Turtle" (Lacadena, 2006, p. 77). The center realm represents a cleft in the shell of the Cosmic Turtle, from which the twins' father emerges as the Maize God after he is resurrected by them after they defeat the Xibalba.

Signs and symbols of Maya cosmology abound in local topography, which tells their myth and history, and where their ancestral beings journeyed. The mythic journey in *Popol Vuh* to the underworld corresponds to contemporary locations. The town of San Pedro Carcha is the starting point of the twin protagonists. Carcha signifies "fishes in ash" as in the name sake of the *Great Hollow of Fishes in Ash*, where the ball court located and where the twins played ball. Outside the town, the Cahabón River runs forty kilometers underground eastward carving through the limestone topography of Alta Verapaz. The twins' journey came to "the mouth where the canyons change" (Tedlock, 1985, p. 94), where the Cahabón River reappears above ground at Semuc Champey in Lanquin. It is interesting to note that several meters outside Semuc Champey, the name of the K'anba cave system (referring to *k'an* in the directive sign of the k'an glyph), bears a semantic and morphemic resemblance to the entrance to the fabled cave in the creation myth.

Amid the clustered households scattered throughout the river valley, to and from the family milpa under the animistic landscape, for Maya

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descendants, rituals are deemed ontological material obligations; they are indebted to the divine creation of their race (Wolf, 1969, p. 277-278). Maass views rituals as forms of "remembering" (Maass, 2010). For Cabarrus, the ritual model of quincunx represents a re-enactment of the world's creation (Cabarrus, 1979, p. 75). In the same vein, rituals modeled after a quincunx framework connote the ideological continuity of dual endowments from the Maya religiosity and the corporeal/material realism surrounding the milpa system. Next, I will discuss the rituals of sowing and healing in which the quincuncial ritual model is performed. The following will also discuss the ritual procession in relation to the organizing structure of labor.

THE RITUAL MODEL OF MAYA COSMOGONY, AND RITUALS FOR SOWING AND HEALING

Having realized the animal's inability in speech to pray, and followed by unsuccessful attempts to create humans with wood and mud, in the last attempt, the Maya gods form the ideal human with maize dough and water via a midwife's hands mixed with her hands' oil. The ideal human model is meant to commemorate the gods by practicing rituals in which "[the gods] are called upon and recognized: [and their] recompense is in words" for the gods (Tedlock, 1985, p. 69). Hence, the creation of humanity is both the means of self-perpetuation and an end for the ideological sustenance as decreed in the Maya creation myth. As the story told in the *Popol Vuh*, the gods designed the human to be a "provider, nurturer, whose creation is 'the dawning of [gods'] invocation, [their] sustenance, [and their] recognition" (Tedlock, 1985, p. 69). Maya spirituality and the means of subsistence are interwoven in a contractual relationship of interdependency between their gods and the sustainability of the Maya race. This binary of ideological and material motivations is observed in agricultural rituals, subsistence production, and the social organizing relationship.

In Lanquin, the annual planting cycle starts at the end of May and lasts until the first week of June, when the dry season comes to an end and precipitation increases. The villagers engage in a series of rituals and observe taboos over a period of seven to eight days. Family members are vigilant about taboos. Husbands (the heads of the household) and wives sleep separately. Family members avoid mushy foods such as bread, opened tortillas are never left unfinished, and corn cobs are stored under the altar table. Maize grains are meticulously selected from the reserve of the previous harvest. Seed selectors wear loosened sashes, symbolizing

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the maize's robust growth. The head of the household makes pilgrimages to churches to pray for blessings for the upcoming sowing season. On the night before sowing, the head of the household performs rituals to ask for permission from the land's supernatural owners – the *tzuultaq'a*, the local deities – to use it. Common ritual objects such as copal incense, tortillas, and candles are offered to "pay" the deities. The prayers should invoke each name of the local *tzuultaq'a*, asking them to watch over the maize and protect it from animals, insects, or plagues.

In Lanquín, the villagers raise necessary funds to prepare for the ritual. As an essential part of the ritual for production, families recruit and reciprocate labor. Only males and young adults carry out the sowing task. Each household of three generations comprises approximately fifteen - twenty members (adults and children). To complete the sowing in half a day, a crew of twelve-fifteen male members, usually kin or neighbors, are recruited.

At dawn on the day of sowing, the head of the household starts his journey to his milpa with a seed bag across his shoulder containing matches, copal, and maize seeds. He carries a machete in his hand. Either barefoot or wearing plastic boots, he should arrive alone at his plot. The farmer, who represents masculinity in contrast to the feminine earth, then performs the ritual to initiate the sowing. The man burns the copal incense in the field (and buries a chicken as done in other villages) as an offering to the *tzuultaq'a*. He prays to them, asking them to bless and protect his crop. Afterwards, he plunges his planting stick into the soil four times and takes maize seeds from the bag, then lets them slide from his palm into each shaft. For the last act, he plunges the planting stick into the center of the field, where it remains. The man waits for his crew to arrive to join him to finish the task. The plot is sowed completely before noon.

The ritual procession culminates in an elaborate and generous celebration for which families raise substantial funds and recruit female helpers. The male crew returns from sowing to join the feast of the host family. Before the festivities, the head of the household pays homage at the altar to the family's patron saints and the *tzuultaq'a* with offerings of lit candles, ground cacao, tortillas, and red-spicy turkey/chicken stew, *Ka'q'ik*, smoked in copal incense. When all the guest planters are seated and the food is in order, the household head says the prayers in a sublime mood in the presence of the guest planters and deities. The celebration commences after prayers. Women and men remain apart, with women in the kitchen and men in the main quarters. Women and children prepare food in the kitchen, while guest planters eat in the main quarters. The

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male family members help serve the guests, generously refilling their bowls with stew, bringing more tortillas from the kitchen, and pouring cacao drinks into their cups. The ritual procession lasts throughout the celebration and ends gradually. By custom, each guest saves a portion of the feast to take home; the hosts provide the guests with extra meat and tortillas, which are wrapped up in banana leaves and tied up with palm leaves. One by one, each man picks up his seed bag and planting stick, which lie under and against the altar. The male crew slowly streams into the yard. The ritual procession that took care of taboo observance, gender segregation, and children as spectators becomes dissolved in the end.

Vogt views the quincunx framework of the ritual as a "small-scale of a quincuncial cosmogony" (Vogt, 1976, p. 58), which represents the Maya's metaphysical structure. The field ritual functions symbolically as "a replica of world creation" (Cabarrus, 1979, p. 75). This spatial schematic plan of the ritual corresponds to the Maya world's creation in the alignments of "fourfold siding, fourfold cornering, measuring, fourfold staking, halving the cord, stretching the cord in the sky, on the earth the four sides, the four corners...whatever there is: sky-earth, lake-sea" (Tedlock, 1985, p. 63-64). The term *tzuultaq'a* is a compound word of "mountain," and "valley," or "sky," and "earth." As an ideogram, *tzuultaq'a* signify the multiple union of the elements of dualism.

Community vitality and consolidating social relations culminate during the annual sowing season and the sowing initiation rituals. The ritual procession is observed to display a "character of conservationism" (Cabarrus, 1969, p. 75) in respect to resources which are regarded as common wealth; hence, a strategy for corporeal material sustenance is mobilized through ritualized consolidation. The ritualized practices bine each household and their members in the systemic structure of regulation from production, conservation and consumption by which collective participation as a ritualized obligation solidifies. The systemic value strengthens when community members reciprocate and participate in mutual subsistence production. Throughout the year, a series of daily and episodic customs occurs in cycles from the time of the maize harvest to preservation and conservation, seed selection, and sowing. The ritual has a built-in mechanism to regulate patterns of consumption to avoid potential scarcity, unrestrained consumption is thus curtailed (Wolf, 2001, p. 193-212). The cultural sustenance of the rural Q'eqchi' in Lanquin premises on the common abundance to which the social and the material dimensions multiply. The agricultural rituals explicate that the Q'eqchi' praxis of sustainability encapsulates orchestrated efforts/ritualized practices toward maintaining subsistence sufficiency

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which is reflexive to the perpetuation and preservation of the indigenous peasant consciousness. The sum of labor, reciprocation, land fertility, and harvest cycles attributes to the total conservation of the cultural endowments of the Mayas.

THE NEOLIBERAL POLITICAL WILL AND THE MONSANTO LAW

Since the Spanish conquered the Maya in 1524, over the past 500 years, the vast humanity and biodiversity of indigenous inheritance have endured the colonial siege, weighed down by the yoke of global production chains that extract raw materials and excavate mines and transport energy to sustain foreign economic dominance and the lifestyles of transnational colonizers. Through political intervention and economic trade deals, the United States has engaged similarly "by way of imbalanced neoliberal trade agreements such as the Central and North American Free Trade Agreements (CAFTA, NAFTA)" (Haas, 2008, p. 27). Guatemala is in a state of incessant mining operations, hydraulic dam constructions, massive agro-cultivation of cash crops under the monopoly of Ladino ownerships of large estates and international corporate investments. Furthermore, "economic re-structuring plans have paved the way for foreigners to continue invading their territory [and] intending to manage the country through agriculture..." (Chiquin, 2014). Signing governments are bound to use state power to divest wealth from and oppress indigenous peoples.

The so-called Monsanto Law was born out of the 2005 *Tratado de Libre Comercio* (Free Trade Agreement), or TLC, also called the Dominican Republic-Central America Free Trade Agreement, or DR-CAFTA (Periodismo Internacional Alternativo, Aug. 8, 2014) as part of CAFTA, which was "initiated under the Bush Administration in January 2002 and completed in December 2003 between the U.S. and El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and Honduras" (The Stop CAFTA Coalition, 2008, p. 1). In CAFTA, "Chapter XV demands that parties implementing the agreement ratify ten international intellectual property agreements" (Hoyt, 2008, p. 8). Following, "in 2006 Guatemala ratified the Convention of the International Union for the Protection of New Plant Varieties (UPOV)" (periodismo-alternativo.com, August 8, 2014) under the clause of "the Budapest Treaty [on the International Recognition of the Deposit of Microorganisms for the Purposes of Patent Procedure]" (Hoyt, 2008, p. 8). In Article 15.5, Chapter XV, the law guarantees the existence of a system to protect the rights of the obtainers (authors) of plant varieties as intellectual property rights, as ratified by

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Guatemala's Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería y Alimentación, or MAGA (in English, the Ministry of Agriculture, Stockbreeding and Food) (Diario de Centro America, June 26, 2014).

"Monsanto" refers to the transnational firm Monsanto, which develops and genetically modifies new plants. The "[Monsanto Law] identifies the first fifteen seeds for privatization including native seeds of maize, *frijoles* [beans], and *ayote* [squash], among other basic types" (Patzan, Centro de Medios Independientes, August 26, 2014). The granted patent right extends to "genetic cross-overs or altered plants…for twenty-five years for trees and twenty years for agricultural plants" (Diariolibre, August 26, 2014). This law spells grave concern over the potential privatization of biodiversity and food crops. In the long term, hybrid plants and seeds linked to Monsanto will be protected plant varieties with exclusive intellectual rights in the biotech crop industry.

On June 10, 2014, the Guatemalan Congress passed the law, with 81 votes in favor, one vote more than the opposing ones (Diariolibre, August 26, 2014). The law was called "Decreto #19-2014, Ley para la protección de obtenciones vegetales" (Decree #19-2014, Law for the Protection of Vegetable Extractions) and published officially on June 26 in *Diario de Centro America* (2014). However, its passing violated a convention of the International Labour Organization (ILO) called the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of 1989 (also known as ILO-convention 169, or C169), thus ignoring the consulting rights of the indigenous groups or tribes recognized by the ILO. C169 states that in General Policy, Article 6, governments will:

> (a) consult the peoples concerned, through appropriate procedures and in particular through their representative institutions, whenever consideration is being given to legislative or administrative measures which may affect them directly;
> (b) establish means by which these peoples can freely participate, to at least the same extent as other sectors of the population, at all levels of decision-making in elective institutions and administrative and other bodies responsible for policies and programmes which concern them…

The legislation of the Monsanto Law was passed while the indigenous communities were not consulted, nor did members of Congress debate the issue. Popular attention was drowned out by the fervor surrounding the 2014 World Cup in Brazil (Villagrán, August 25, 2014). "[Until] August 7, 2014, the text [regarding the law] began circulating in social

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networks and [began to] generate much debate in diverse sectors" (Periodismo Internacional Alternativo, August 8, 2014). The public woke up to the law's potential perilous impact. Widespread reactions spread at the local, regional, and national levels.

On August 8, an open letter was published, addressed to leftist Congress members from the parties Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca or the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and Winaq, demanding an explanation for the Congress' shameful act, as well as compromise (Sandoval, August 8, 2014). The letter denounced the law as a direct "contradiction, if not betrayal, to revolutionary principles...and philosophies pertaining to their political affiliations" (Sandoval, August 8, 2014). It is an apparent postcolonial takeover of people's lives and an attempt to monopolize the notion of common abundance through technology and privatizing the essential means of subsistence. Aniseto Herculano Lopez, a peasant leader, decried the country's "bad government" (Morir Vida Sembrando, 2015). The fact is that a minority of Guatemala's population – the elite – control over 80% of the land today. From the Spanish conquest, the dominant class continues to loot the country, treating the indigenous natural heritage as a private business (Morir Vida Sembrando, 2015).

With the Monsanto Law to take effect on September 26, 2014 as designated with guaranteed rights to genetically modified maize seeds, farmers and subsistence peasants must invest annually to purchase them. However, their income is not ensured. According to Mario Itzep, coordinator of the Observatory of Indigenous Nations (2014), hence the implication that the law actually "promotes 'development poverty' which is an act of [colonial] pillage of Guatemalan [citizens] who depend on agricultural production" to survive. It threatens to destroy small and mid-sized farms, and is predicted to cause a crisis of destabilized subsistence production that will probably undermine global food security (P.I.A., August 8, 2014). The law posits to rob the subsistence farmers of productive autonomy embedded in the traditions of subsistence production and conservation. In consequence, the impoverished indigenous peasants are further marginalized. The indigenous sovereignty over the local natural reservoir is supplanted under the Monsanto Law by a handful of industries and businesses. It is an eminent threat for all Guatemalans, elite or not, who share the common staple crop of maize (Morir Sembrando Vida, 2015).

The exclusive right of seed technology contradicts the planetary conservatory scheme. Guatemala, "as the cradle of biological diversity and maize, is one of the nineteen countries with megadiversity on the

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planet, which sustains 70% of the world's biological diversity" (noticiacomunicarte, August 11, 2014). Considering this fact, the exclusive patent right granted by the law hands over native seeds to transnational firms as private property for commercial purposes; these seeds potentially include the native species born from natural plant crossovers. The protected breeder's right extends to "'varieties essentially derived from the protected variety.' In this sense, a hybrid produced from a protected variety crossed with an unprotected variety would automatically belong to the breeder of the patented variety" (Servindi, August 20, 2014). It is speculated that "in ten years, the law...will apply to all types and species of plants" (Publinews, August 22, 2014). Hence, it is anticipated the intellectual rights of the genetically modified organism, or GMO would "truncate the natural life cycle and plant reproduction of native grown seeds" (noticiacomunicarte, August 11, 2014). The Monsanto Law symbolizes a postcolonial "pillage of the common wealth of biodiversity…[under] the dogma of economic growth. It renders future commodities to be bought from seed companies" (periodismo-alternativo, August 8, 2014), who own capital, in addition to controlling technology and political means.

The sweeping takeover from the agricultural production level from trade deals points to politicians' disconnection to the national level. Journalist activist, Sandoval, called out the ineffective representation by the political left. The passing of the law in the congress contradicts leftist, patriotic, and nationalist revolutionary principles (Sandoval, Prensacomunitaria, August 8, 2014). The Alliance for the Protection of Biodiversity condemned that it is "a direct attack on ancestral epistemology, on biodiversity and life, culture, the peasant economy, the Maya cosmovision, [and] the subsistence sovereignty" of all that represents Maya religious and ideological values (Periodismo Internacional Alternativo, August 8, 2014). Unlike the Monsanto Law, "the initiative for Integral Rural Development is not [being enacted], leaving rural farmers' economy unprotected, including their crops and ancestral practices" (noticiacomunicate, August 11, 2014). In synthesis, Carlos Lopez Sanchez theorizes (Morir Sembrando Vida, 2015) that the inherent structural conflicts of the two paradigms pre-suppose an interruption of cultural sustainability. That is to say, "[a]lthough the [Monsanto] seed is improved for more productivity, integration [would be] possible, provided there is not structural cultural conflict, as a result, there is a cultural amalgam. But the problem is that if there is a contradiction, be it a chemical one or a conflict in the eyes of the users, all we're doing is making [cultural] identity disappear" (Morir

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Sembrando Vida, 2015). This theory is confirmed by the massive mobilization of the Maya indigenous in the name for the defense of the cultural heritage which has lasted for millenniums. In that "[t]he conservation of native and creole seeds are the basic principles of organic agriculture and subsistent sovereignty in the ancestral practice before the arrival of the Spanish" (2014, Periodismo Internacional Alternativo, pp. 3-8).

Not only does the law subvert traditional practices for conserving seeds and the involved production and social relations; it will undermine the autonomy of subsistence production (as based on the *milpa* system) and subject farmers to dependency on commercialized seeds. The law's passage "[creates] irreversible damage…it threatens peasant farmers' planting rights and surrenders Congress' authority to services for transnational or national big businesses" (Servindi, August 20, 2014). Moreover, the law threatens to incriminate innocent farmers in lawsuits on crossover species due to airborne pollen outside technical control. Assessing the social ramifications, Leocadio Juracan, coordinator of the Highland Peasant Farmer Committee (Comité Campesino del Altiplano) warned that "[the passage of the law] will [d]efinitely set off a new wave of conflict in Guatemala. The control of seeds and the [structural] dependence [causing the poor to rely on the capitalists] will mostly create poverty and malnutrition. It will ignite waves of conflicts in indigenous territories" (Álvarez and Gramajo, August 22, 2014).

ORGANIZING FOR RESISTANCE AND DEFEATING MONSANTO

After the law was passed on June 20, 2014, the Alliance for the Protection of Biodiversity formed the National Network for the Defense of Food Sovereignty. "On August 7, the first press conference was held declaring the passing of the law unconstitutional" (Buletin, 2014, p. 4-5). A multitude of regional coalitions and demonstrations swept across the country, from local church gatherings in remote hamlets to the streets in the nation's capital. News media dynamically reported on the chains of events. Protesters – including rural peasants, elders, and indigenous women with children – engaged in long marches by coordinating across regions and provinces. The massive manifestations effectively halted the domestic economic flow of business. Many times, major highways were cut off for an entire day for the wide spread protests on a national scale. Shipments of produce, commercial products, and international/domestic travelers were stranded on highways for more than eight hours, planned

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schedules were derailed. Even tourists rushed to get out or were left helpless in remote locations. Business owners suffered.

Besides road blockades on highways, communities were mobilized to carry out various forms of obstruction, such as urban street demonstrations in the capital city, and protestors stationing outside the Congress and Constitutional Court, testifying before the Constitutional Court (Tezucun, September 24, 2014, p. 4-5). On "August 26…Twenty other organizations [including] the Observatorio de Pueblos Indígenas, Alianza por la Vida [Observatory of Indigenous Nations], [MSICG], and university students organized a massive protest and threw tomatoes at the senators who intended to enter in front of Congress" (Tezucun, 2014). On August 27, "on the highway near Cubil Witz, thirty-seven kilometers between Chisec and Cobán in Alta Verapaz, a major road blockade was organized by a community coalition comprised of Mam, Q'anjobal, and Q'eqchí Maya in Uspantán, Ixcán, and Cobán; in the peaceful protest, [they demanded the government] repeal the Monsanto Law" (Prerez, January 6, 2015). "On the 28th, La Unidad Defensora del Pueblo (UDEP) [the People's Defense Unit] occupied the entrance to Congress [and blocked Congress members from entering [the building]" so as to obstruct the subsequent order of hearing (Tezucun, 2014). "The Movimiento Sindical de Indígenas y Campesinos Guatemaltecos [the Labor, Indigenous, and Peasant Movement for Guatemala] (MSICG) testified before the Constitutional Court on August 25, this led to the suspension on August 29 of Articles 46 and 55 of the Law" (Tezucun, 2014).

"On September 1, more than 500 protesters demonstrated in the Department of Totonicapán with representatives from all the municipalities and councils of the Western Maya nations" (Tezucun, 2014). "On September 2, the indigenous mayors of Sololá convened a massive demonstration with approximately 120,000 people, according to the organizers, from eighty-two communities [who engaged] in road blockades, paralyzing traffic for eight hours" again (Julajuj and Gramajo, September 2, 2014). Meanwhile, "indigenous authorities from forty communities of Totonicapán, including 150 indigenous mayors, also joined the demonstration" (Tezucun, 2014).

Across the Q'eqchi' rural territories, hundreds of communities responded in an organized manner. It was reported "[the] authorities and representatives from the Community Councils of Development (COCODE) of the Q'eqchi' nation, along with those of Cobán [the capital of] Alta Verapaz, issued a memo on [September 3] demanding that the law be repealed as the only option" (Bolaños and y Gómez,

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2014; Chiquin, September 5, 2014). Furthermore, "the communities from Cobán and Chisec, and others in Alta Verapaz again carried out sustained road blockades on the Interamerican Highway and other major traffic communication networks" (Bolaños and y Gómez, 2014; Tezucun, 2014).

My informant related her familial participation in the effort. The members and elders of the hamlet Chizubil in Lanquín convened for an authorizing ceremony in the church of Chizubil starting in the evening and lasting until midnight. The participants drafted a letter under the Council of Ancestral Authority, and signed a collective rejection of the Monsanto Law. The letter was given to a messenger who travelled over night to the capital and delivered it to Congress and President Otto Perez Molina.

The nation witnessed unprecedented numbers of protests and increased levels of popular coalitions. On September 4, the national climate of popular dissent reached its threshold. "[In] Sololá, between 30,000 and 40,000 people responded to the call for action from indigenous authorities. In Alta Verapaz, the Q'eqchi' were mobilized [to an unprecedented extent]" and expressed overwhelming discontent (Sandoval, September 9, 2014). "On the evening of September 5, after a long deliberation in Congress, the law, meant to go into effect on September 26, 2014, was abolished with…117 votes in favor [and three against. [As aresult,] the law was completely revoked]" (Chiquin, September 5, 2014; Buletin, 2014, p. 3).

CONCLUSION: THE INDIGENOUS PRAXIS OF CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY

The intersection of indigenous cultural sustainability, geopolitics, and development signifies an urgent need to uproot the legacy of colonialism, which is enmeshed in neoliberalism. In light of the Maya's victory, the effect and process of popular mobilization reflects the role of the community - based organizing structure in conjunction with the pronounced ancestral epistemology as the central ideology in the pursuit of the historical trajectory for governance autonomy and subsistence sovereignty which intersects in the material and ontological dimensions of rights. The political persuasion that mobilized a cultural discourse from which inclusive and generative interpretation are generated to account for the material-natural-animistic experiences of indigenous Mayas. The Maya's common ancestral origins and the ritualized pattern of production and social relationship were recurrent in the articulation of

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the cultural narrative correspondent to the transcendental creative theme revolved in maize as the iconic cultural symbolism. Maya cultural identity emerged to the foreground in the global and local portraiture in the call for a collective resistance. The nation of Q'anjob'al de Llom Konob rallied local municipal and community assemblies to rise up to safeguard a common historical destiny:

> [T]he [Monsanto] law…contradicts subsistence sovereignty; it denies the free determination of the nations, it [threatens the lives], health, and food security of all Guatemalans; it contradicts the plant biodiversity and native grown seeds; it goes against the nation's bio-cultural patrimony, particularly maize, which is the sacred nourishment of the Mayas by which our cosmogony is guided, and [which determines] our calendar of rites" (Baltazar, September 1, 2014).

Wolf theorized the path to power and mobilization for resistance in the process that "ideas [must] become concentrated into ideologies" (Portis-Winner, 2006, p. 341) that speak to the "specific and quality experiences" of a cultural being or community (Winnicott, 1971) amid dynamic interactions among social, cultural, and personal factors. Likewise, Rubin confirmed that the idea is to be "essentialized" to be sufficiently "generative" and "abstract" for inclusive interpretation of a cultural identity (Rubin, 2004). The goal of this ideation is to "enchant" the mass into a mobilized cultural agency.

Responses to calls to unify and act were reported in independent media and instigated popular resistance to the dominant political discourse. Departing from the Maya ideology and the moral economy of the milpa system, the social fabric has evolved to maintain abundance through ritual practices of conservationism, diversification, production, and reciprocation. A grower from Tacaná in the department of San Marcos affirmed that "[t]he native and hybrid seeds are important links to the heritage from our grandparents; they passed down the seeds [to us], which we conserve and produce in our plots" (Buletin, 2014, p. 3). Furthermore, "Maya women [harvest] and conserve the seeds but with the [Monsanto] law, their efforts will [be interrupted and] disappear, including ancestral [sources] of knowledge" (Buletin, 2014, p. 7). Antonio Gonzalez, from the National Network for the Defense of Food Sovereignty, articulated the Maya's historicity and cultural agency are mobilized by the moral economy of *milpa* and the accompanying rituals and organizing social relations. He said, "[*milpa* as] the basis of food

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sovereignty [is] associated with intercropping maize, *frijoles*, *ayote*, and other herbs. [For] more than a thousand years, the *milpa* system [has allowed us] to bring diversity to the [dinner] table for daily consumption...” (August 7, Buletin, 2014, p. 6).

The defeat of Monsanto in relation to neoliberal policies is emblematic if we examine the distribution of adopting biotech crops from a geographical angle. Guatemala’s indigenous victory is a regional and international exception. As of 2015, 28 countries have adopted biotech crops, according to *Executive Summary: Global Status of Commercialized Biotech/GM Crops* (James, 2015). Eight are industrial countries including the USA, Canada, Australia, Spain, Portugal, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Romania. The International Service for the Acquisition of Agri-biotech Applications (ISAAA) (James, 2015) summarizes the growing adoption of GMO agriculture. “In 2015, Latin American, Asian, and African farmers collectively grew 97.1 million hectares or 54% of the global 179.7 million biotech hectares (versus 53% in 2014), compared with industrial countries [which produced] 82.6 million hectares or 46% (versus 47% in 2014), equivalent to a gap of 14.5 million hectares in favor of developing countries” (p. 5). The adopting developing countries in North and Central America include Mexico (soybeans, cotton), Honduras (maize), Costa Rica (cotton, soybeans). In South America, the participating nations include Brazil (soybeans, maize, cotton), Argentina (soybeans, maize, cotton), Paraguay (soybeans, maize, cotton), Uruguay (soybeans, maize), Bolivia (soybeans), Colombia (soybeans, maize), and Chile (maize) (James, 2015, p. 2). To rally political support, the biotech crop industry exploits the discourse of narrowing the economic gap between industrial and developing countries and extols biotech crops as a solution to food shortages or continental famines. However, the case of indigenous Guatemalans’ joint efforts to subvert state power and repeal the Monsanto Law points to other structural considerations for development that are more fundamental than those of economics.

The mobilization to resist the Monsanto Law – more than protecting small farmers’ economic interests – is driven by the Maya’s particular cultural ethics. The event of the defeat of Monsanto underscores the indigenous praxis of cultural sustenance in interlocking relations with the efforts in preservation and conservation of the ancestral heritage as the common wealth. The above analysis underscores the essence of cultural sustainability which is in the constant reflexive cycle of theoretical reflection and practice through action. People’s historicity is located in multiple dimensions of a cultural community in the mundane, the

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ceremonial, in the rural geography, and in the political activism on the global stage, etc. Its capacity of cultural sustenance draws from the reservoir of the ritual practices and customs in which the social and productive relations are organized as seen in the case of the Q'eqchi' Mayas in Lanquin and the collective resistance of the Mayas against the Monsanto Law. The Maya resistance against cultural obliteration, assimilation, and political economic oppressions is ever perpetual across multiple times against cultural hegemony since the early times of conquest, through the eras of colonialism, post colonialism and postmodernism to the neoliberalism of the present. In the final analysis, the agricultural rituals are as much historical obligations/motivation as they are the cultural reservoir in the role of community organizing toward the struggle for cultural sustenance of the Maya humanity.

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