The Mayanist

VOLUME 3, NUMBER 2 SPRING 2022

ISSN 2644-2140 (print)
ISSN 2644-2159 (online)

THE Mayanist

Volume 3, Number 2
April 2022

a biannual journal published by

American Foreign Academic Research (AFAR)

edited by

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American Foreign Academic Research, Inc.
AFAR is based in Davidson, North Carolina and operates as a 501(c)3 organization
20718 Waters Edge Court Cornelius, NC, 28031

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Chichicastenango
San Martín Jilotepeque
Chwa Nima Ab'aj
Santiago Atitlán
Chimaltenango

The Editorial

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This new *The Mayanist* differs from our previous five issues, as it is entirely populated by articles devoted to the anthropology of contemporary Maya Peoples. This issue stems from the 15th Annual Maya at the Playa Conference, primarily organized by Harri Kettunen (University of Helsinki), and which revolved around the broad and exciting topic of Mesoamerican foodways. The four papers in this issue explore the foodways of the contemporary Guatemalan Highlands and Belizean Lowlands from diverse perspectives. Half of the papers are authored by emerging Indigenous scholars from Guatemala—Dora Maritza García Patzán and Miguel Cuj. Their unique perspectives on Kaqchikel and K'iche' culinary and commensal traditions make this issue invaluable. The other two excellent papers—by Mark Wright and Kerry Hull and Allen J. Christenson—address the symbolic and medicinal value of both domesticated and wild plants among the K'iche' and Mopan. Together, this research report and three articles—primarily anchored in cultural anthropology, ethnobotany, and linguistics—draw a multifaceted portrait of the foodways of three distinct Maya ethnolinguistic groups. Additionally, C. Mathews Samson wrote an insightful review for the recent and important *Mayalogue* monograph by Jakaltek author Victor Montejo.

The timely production of this issue would have been impossible without our devoted guest editors, Shawn Morton and Meaghan Peuramaki-Brown. They further introduce the issue's four contributions below. We are incredibly fortunate, once more, to feature the original artwork of the singularly talented *ajtz'ib* Walter Paz Joj. Our layout maestro, Joel Skidmore, has once again done swift and irreproachable work in producing our beautiful journal. Finally, we must also thank Jack Barry for his attentive work as copy editor and all of our timely and efficient peer reviewers.

Beyond the current issue, we are glad to report that we have launched the next step of our

translation effort. Our enduring collaborator, Jocelyne Ponce (Tulane University), has agreed to step in as editor of the Spanish Language version of the journal. Two exceptionally qualified and generous linguists—Abril Jimenez (Davidson College) and Julio César López Otero (University of Houston)—have been hard at work for months translating articles previously only available in English. Abril, Julio, and Jocelyne are almost done translating the journal's first issue. The newly available Spanish language papers (Kidder et al. 2019; Parker et al. 2019; Selligson 2019) are freely downloadable on our website. Thanks to Joel Skidmore, these translations have the same length as their English counterparts—thus facilitating their citation (see the bibliography below for the simplest way to cite them). A few short weeks after posting these translations, we are happy to report that they've been downloaded over 450 times—over half of which occurred in Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Belize. The objective is to continue this process until all our papers become available in both languages. As stated in the previous issue's Editorial (Lamoureux-St-Hilaire et al. 2021), this effort aims to elevate our journal's accessibility in a way that transcends linguistic and political borders. Indeed, paywall-protected academic literature can be challenging to access for our colleagues based in Latin America.

From our Guest Editors

When we heard that the topic chosen for the 15th Annual Maya at the Playa Conference was food, we were eager to attend and excited to participate. Food is the perfect subject for anthropological research, not only for its inherent universality but also for the breadth of studies to which we can subject it. We might seek to understand the creation and consumption of food as a social activity, an economic and technological process, an expression of creativity or conformity, piety or blaspheme, or a political statement (the apocryphal but catchy "Let them eat cake!" comes to mind). Food speaks to health and wellbeing. Immediately, we appreciate it for its sensory qualities. One step removed, it is also the subject of artistic representation and literary description through which we can explore a whole other world of meaning and history.

Food is something in which many of us are inherently interested. We think about it. We talk about it. We remember it. And we plan for it, often, during the act of eating it. Food is one of the most photographed subjects on Instagram. Heck, some restaurants these days, in recognition that we taste first with our social media popularity, make their food, plating, and lighting—first-and-foremost—"Instagramable". There is no mystery to this phenomenon; we are interested in food because there are few things more human than the creation and consumption of food. Our closing presentation at the conference was somewhat tongue-in-cheek, reporting on a preliminary examination of Maya archaeologists' field-food preferences in Belize. However, our ultimate conclusion remains relevant to this issue: not only is it true that "you are what you eat," but you also "eat what you are." We've successfully turned a biological necessity into the ultimate expression of human culture.

As noted above, each of the contributions presented in this issue deal with food as culturally specific and value-laden from the perspective of contemporary peoples. Mark Wright and Kerry Hull open the issue by considering plants or forest botanicals—many of which are foods—and their effects on the quality or nature of blood and its relationship to overall wellbeing among Mopan Mayas. Specifically, they focus on such understandings in the Mopan village of San José in the Toledo District of southern Belize. They delve into how the Mopan use their specific knowledges and methods to strengthen or build blood, both metaphorically and scientifically. Wright and Hull also explore how broader Mopan concepts of wellness and disease relate to these understandings regarding equilibrium within blood. They conclude that forest botanicals continue to play a significant role in the daily lives of the Mopan of San José, despite increasing accessibility to Western pharmaceuticals and medical practices

Dora Maritza García Patzán then addresses the complex and nuanced themes of tradition and authenticity in food from the compelling perspective of her own life experience, family, and hometown. Following a brief account of the pre-colonial and colonial histories of San Martín Jilotepeque, she presents recipes for two traditional foods: the Pul'ik and Sub'anïk. She relates when they are made and consumed, which ingredients and methods have pre-colonial origins, and which are introductions from the colonial era. García Patzán reinforces the dual concepts that 1) food cultures change through internal and external processes, and 2) food is one of the principal ways that people connect with their cultures and pasts.

Allen Christenson carries the conversation into a discussion of the role of Maya ceremonial feasting in the creation and maintenance of beings (humans) who act as mediators between this world and the ancestral and sacred realms. In particular, he highlights the critical and historically specific relationships between maize, humans, ancestors, deities, and associated ceremonial foodways among the highland Maya. Christenson builds the resulting narrative around translations of various historical documents, such as the Popol Vuh, alongside ethnographic studies from the 1970s. Among his many observations, he highlights the vital role of ceremonial feasting in creating and maintaining humans as sustainers and providers for the world. Recognition of this role guides the fundamental principle—respect—in the relationship between highland Maya Peoples and their traditional foods, especially maize.

Finally, Miguel Cuj sets an ambitious agenda for his contribution by examining how Mayan languages—specifically K'iche'—imbue food with a persistent legacy of meaning. Cuj relies on extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Totonicapán to explore interconnected dimensions of K'iche' foodways. Invoking sociolinguistic theory supported by a wealth of archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence, Cuj delves deeply into the broader cultural context of these meanings as (re)constructed from the past in the present.

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“Building Blood”: An Ethnographic Look at Plants in Medicine and Myth among the Mopan Maya of San José, Belize

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Abstract. *In this study, we discuss how the Mopan Maya of Belize attribute certain diseases to an indigenous understanding of human blood properties. We further describe how specific plants are said to affect the quality or nature of blood and the native ethnobotanical methods used to moderately “strengthen” or “build” blood. Furthermore, we investigate emic Mopan concepts of wellness and disease embedded in their understanding of blood and the necessity to maintain an equilibrium within their blood by using forest botanicals. In addition, we detail the use of various medicinal plants by the Mopan in treating specific categories of physical and ethnopsychiatric disorders.*

Keywords. *ethnobotany, medicine, Mopan Maya, Belize, plant use*

Traditional exploitation of botanical resources by Mopan Maya of San José, Belize, provides a significant portion of their food, medicine, and raw materials for daily life. In this study based primarily on fieldwork data, we detail the use of forest botanicals by the Mopan Maya for ritual and medicinal purposes. The Mopan attribute certain diseases to an indigenous understanding of human blood properties. For example, they believe specific plants affect the quality or nature of blood (i.e., it being too "sweet," "strong," "weak"). They have local concepts of ways to moderately "strengthen" or "build" blood through plant use. As we describe below, these emic Mopan Maya concepts of wellness and disease are intimately related to maintaining a perceived equilibrium in blood.

Background

Mopan Maya communities are dispersed across parts of the southern Petén in Guatemala and various locales in southern Belize such as San Antonio, Blue Creek, Pueblo Viejo, and San José (Figure 1) (The Maya People of Southern Belize, The Toledo Maya Cultural Council and The Toledo Alcaldes Association 1997). Mopan Mayan is part of the Yukatekan branch of Mayan languages and is partially or mutually intelligible with Itzaj, Lakandon, and Yukatek. According to the 2010 census by the Belizean government, there are 10,649 Mopan speakers (Statistical Institute of Belize 2010); however, Grimes (2000) places the number of Mopan speakers at between 6,000 and 8,000. The Mopan Maya of Belize occupy regions of the Maya Mountains characterized by montane and submontane broadleaf forests and pine savannas (Figure 2). Belize boasts over 700 species of native trees (Mallan 1993) and over 3,400 species of vascular flora, a stunning diversity for a country of fewer than 23,000 km^2. The Mopan rely upon many botanical resources for both consumption and commercial resale (see Table 1).

The Mopan identify two plant community types: "high forest" and "low forest." Rather than being elevation markers, "low forest" is applied to plant communities growing on land degraded by housing or repeated swidden-fallow use and where mature regrowth is often never reached. On the other hand, "high forest" refers to plants that grow in virgin or old-growth tropical forests that have not been cut for farming and houses. Much of the land near the village of San José, where we did most of our fieldwork (Figure 3), has been logged, farmed, or cut for housing or *milpas* (cornfields) in recent years. In this case, "high forest" usually refers to land several kilometers from the center of town, specifically the Columbia River Forest Reserve.

Study Location

San José is located in the Toledo District (Figure 1), a section of Belize covered with pine savannas, swamps and rivers, and open plains. The Maya Mountains, which rise to over 1,000 m, runs through this region as the mountain range crosses over into Guatemala. San José (16°15′58″ North, 89°5′42″ West) straddles the Columbia River Forest Reserve, which contains 39,616 hectares of old-growth broadleaf forest, pine savanna, and montane forest that represents one of the largest protected bio-reserves in Central America. Hunters in San José frequent the Columbia River Forest Reserve for animals only found in mature forests, such as the white-lipped peccary (*Tayassu*

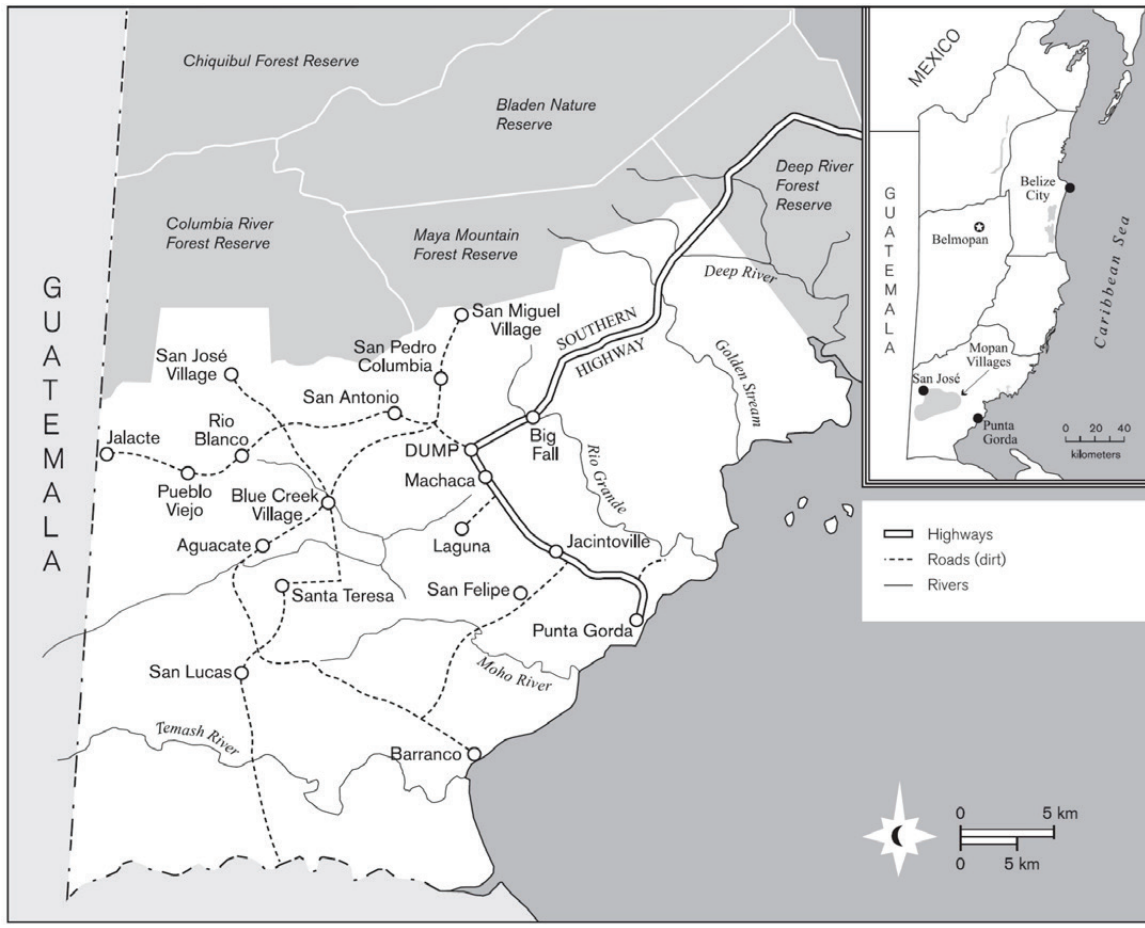

Figure 1. Map of southern Belize and Mopan-speaking communities.

pecari), red brocket deer (*Mazama americana*), crested guan (*Penelope purpurascens*), and great curassow (*Crax rubra*) (Steinberg 1997:134).

There are distinct plant species in the "high forest" according to the Mopan, such as the *(aj)-mänaax* "mountain (wild) cherry," the *xilil* (*Ardicia paschalis*) "marlberry," the *poxte'* (*Annona Scleroderma*) "hard-shell custard apple," or *k'änaab'* (*Lonchocarpus castilloi*) "cabbage bark tree." The Mopan use plants from both low and high forests in traditional methods of healing, but many plants important to healers are found only in the old-growth high forests.

Previous Research

Early studies on the ethnobotany of Belize such as Standley (1936) and Thompson (1930) led to more detailed research in beginning in the 1980s, principally among the Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya populations (Arnason et al. 1980; Arvigo et al. 1994; Balick et al. 1996; Bourbonnas-Spear et

al. 2005; Blanco and Thiagarajan 2017; Fernandez 1990; Walsh 2003), including economic value of ethnobotanical medicines in Belize (Balick and Mendelsohn 1992). A significant amount of ethnobotanical research has been done among the Q'eqchi' Maya (Amiguet et al. 2006; Bourbonnais-Spear 1993; Michel et al. 2007; Theil and Quinlan 2020; Waldram et al. 2009; Walsh et al. 2019; Zargar 2002). One of the fuller treatments of ethnobotanical medicines used across Belize is Arvigo and Balick (1993). Larger projects (Bridgewater 2012; Jolly and McRae 1998) have described the stunning biodiversity and natural history of Belize. Several studies have looked beyond the Maya to the medicinal use of plants among Garifuna populations (Santos n.d.; Arzu and McRae 2016), data that often show overlap in use with the two main Maya populations in Belize, the Mopan and the Q'eqchi'. While some studies have focused on particular Maya villages in Belize, such as San Jose Succotz (Arnason et al. 1980), our study is distinguished by being centered in the village of San José and for concentrating on indigenous notions of 'blood-building' in relation to plants used as food, drink, and medicines.

Methods

Methods of Data Collection on Medicinal Uses of Plants

We used consensus methodology, whereby we interviewed a large number of individuals to ascertain broad consensus on plant identification and use (cf. Trotter and Logan 1986), to conduct an ethnobotanical study for ten days in and around the Mopan Maya village of San José, Belize, in 2014, supplemented by data collected by Kerry Hull among the Mopan in 2002, 2005, and 2009. In

Figure 2. The Maya Mountains of Belize (photo by Mark Wright).

Mopan Name	Scientific Name	Vernacular Name
(aj)-säk ch'ib' / ch'ib'	*Chamaedora pinnatifrons*	pacaya
'ab'äl	*Spondias purpurea*	summer plum, red mombin
'ib'	*Phaseolus* spp.	bean
'ik	*Capsicum* spp.	chili
'on	*Persea americana*	avocado
'oop	*Annona reticulata*	wild custard apple, annona
'oox	*Brosimum alicastrum*	breadfruit, breadnut, ramon
b'u'ul	Fabaceae	bean
cha'yu'uk'	*Amaranthus dubius*	amaranth
chäkäl ja'as	*Pouteria sapota*	mamey
chi'	*Byrsonima crassifolia*	nance
ixi'im	*Zeas mays*	corn
k'uum	*cucurbita moschata*	squash
käkäw	*Theobroma cacao*	cacao
käla'	*Carludovica palmate*, *Sabal mexicana*	jippi jappa
masapan	*Artocarpus altilis*	breadfruit
päjpäjchína	*Citrus aurantium*	bitter orange
pätaj	*Psidium guajava*	guava
päyak'	*Dioscorea batatas*	yam
put	*Carica papaya*	papaya
tutz	*Orbigyna cohune*	cohune palm
tz'iin	*Manihot esculenta*	casava
tzäpäy / tzäpuy	*Thevetia ahouai*	dog testicles tree
wanaabe	*Annona muricata*	soursop

Table 1. Examples of plant and fruits consumed by the Mopan Maya in Belize.

2014, we conducted semi-structured, individual interviews with native Mopan consultants during excursions to farmlands in low and high forest areas. We interviewed eight native Mopan speakers, all of whom were males between 50 and 75. In 2002 and 2009, Kerry Hull conducted interviews in San José and neighboring villages; he interviewed more than 25 Mopan speakers, both male and female, between 21 and 88, four of whom were traditional healers. Over 90% of our consultants were native to the general region in which we interviewed them, and all of our San José consultants were born in that village.

We collected no voucher specimens (pressed plant samples). Instead, we used methods appropriate for this ethnographically and linguistically driven study. There have already been excellent botanical studies involving voucher specimens in Belize (Arvigo and Balick 1993; Bourbonnas-Spear et al. 2005; Nations 2006). In some recently published ethnobotanical studies, however, some factors limited or prevented the collection of voucher specimens (Díaz-Reviriego et al. 2016; de Rus Jacquet et al. 2017). This study aimed to supplement previously gathered botanical data with robust ethnographic and ethnolinguistic data. We, therefore, employed a series of *in situ* and

Figure 3. Mopan-speaking village of San José in the Toledo District of Belize (photo by Kerry Hull).

ex situ measures to ensure accuracy in plant identifications. We conducted *in situ* field interviews in the mornings using the walk-in-the-woods technique to each consultant's farmland to make it easier for the consultants to find and identify the species with which they were most familiar. These interviews involved five components. First, we asked the consultants to list the common names of plants we encountered in all possible relevant languages with which they were familiar (English, Mopan, Q'eqchi', and Spanish). We then took high-resolution photographs of each plant from multiple angles with an identifying placard. We cross-checked the plant's vernacular name(s) with scientific names in previously published ethnobotanical sources and then cross-checked associated photos and illustrations from ethnobotanical field guides. Finally, the consultants explained each plant's medicinal uses and preparation techniques, which we recorded.

We then conducted *ex situ* interviews with each consultant (or group of consultants) in the afternoons. We used plant photographs from previously published field guides and photos from online botanical databases, in addition to the high-resolution digital photographs we had taken during the *in situ* interviews. Whitecloud and colleagues (2014:382) demonstrated the effectiveness of using high-resolution digital photographs rather than voucher specimens for identification. They found that their consultants "recognized 92–96% of photographs of plants that they had indicated and named during prior walk-in-the-woods collection trips," whereas with voucher specimens alone, "the recognition rate was significantly lower and ranged from 68–86%."

We then asked about all indigenous usages and plant names a second time to confirm *in situ* identifications (cf. de Medeiros et al. 2014:93). Using a consensus methodology, we further

confirmed plant identifications by triangulating vernacular of plants in English, Mopan, Q'eqchi', and Spanish by comparing them to names given in published ethnobotanical field guides in one or more of these languages. Knowledge of English, Mopan and often Q'eqchi' and Spanish creates a unique linguistic environment for the Mopan of San José. This linguistic diversity allowed for greater confidence in correlating the vernacular names of each plant with their proper scientific designations since previously published botanical and ethnobotanical field guides have the names of each plant in multiple languages (e.g., Arvigo and Balick 1993; Nations 2006). Finally, we confirmed and compared all data with multiple native-speaker consultants to ensure consistency.

For this study, we limit our discussion of species to the following examples:

1 There was consensus in the responses of at least three of our consultants concerning the vernacular names of each plant in at least two languages (in most cases, it was a clear majority of all consultants);

2. We could correlate both of those names with the same scientific name in published reference materials.

3. We could cross-check the scientific names and our field photographs with online databases for visual identification.

Results

We collected information about ethnobotanical uses and linguistic data on 259 plants, 139 of which we identified as having medicinal uses among the Mopan. We identified that the most common uses were for dermatological issues, general pain issues, and blood-related issues (Figure 4). The following discussion focuses specifically on our data related to plant use in healing and well-being among the Mopan.

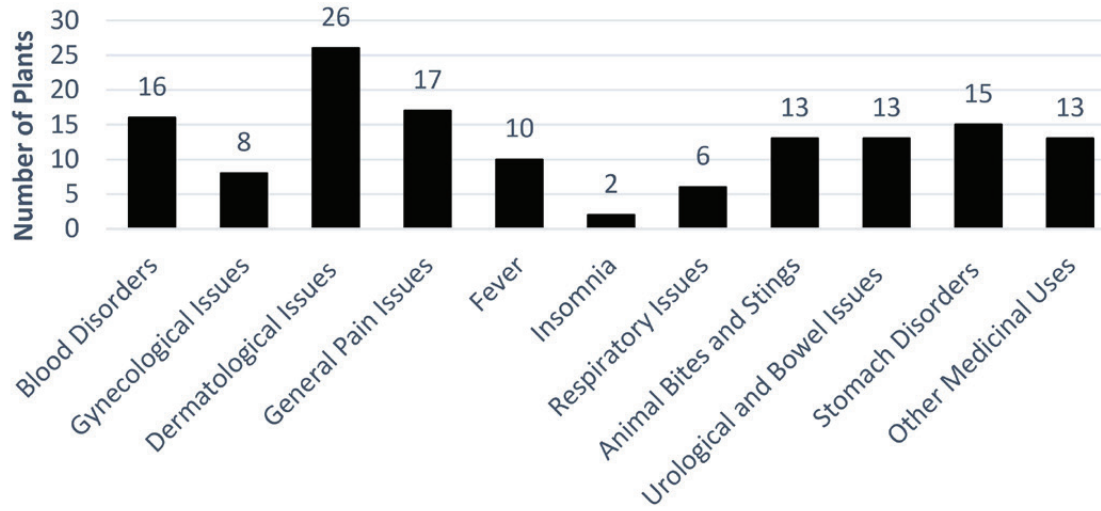

Figure 4. Quantitative data on medicinal use of 139 of plants by the Mopan Maya.

Plants, Healing, and Health in Mopan Culture: Native Notions of Wellness

Traditional use of various plants for medicinal purposes is still widespread among the Mopan Maya. However, the Mopan of Belize increasingly prefer Western pharmaceuticals. This shift in preference accompanies changes to a more market-based economy in the last half-century and more contact with other cities due to improved roads. Additionally, a more widespread influence of Christianity (see Steinberg 1997) and more easily accessible Western medicine are likely reasons. Concomitantly, traditional healers are valued less, and specific botanical remedies viewed positively in the past are often only used when pharmaceuticals become too expensive or are unavailable. For example, the white sap of a Horse balls tree (*Stemmadenia donnell-smithii*) is used for toothaches when products with benzocaine (such as Orajel) are inaccessible. Our older consultants were fully aware of this shift in attitude that has taken place over roughly the last 50 years. Despite the influence of Western medicines, in Mopan culture, many plants are recognized as affecting strength and well-being—often due to the nutritive qualities of the plants, but sometimes due to mythological or cultural conceptions.

For the Mopan, regulating the quality of blood is considered essential for health. For our purposes, we observe specific plants that are said to be "hot," which the Mopan state are plants that "build blood"—a native concept we hope to illuminate in this study. It seems likely that the notion of "strengthening blood" or "building blood" is at least in part related to boosting red blood cell counts. Tiredness and weakness are both immediate symptoms of anemia, and many "hot" foods happen to be high in iron, but not all. In Mopan traditional thought, "hot" foods combat "weak" (i.e., "cold") blood. In Belize as a whole, many of the indigenous remedies for increasing the "heat" of the blood include using medicinal plants in the form of "blood tonics."

A short discussion of the concept of blood in Mopan thought is necessary to unpack the notion of well-being for the Mopan. The Mopan view blood (*k'ik'*) as a conveyer of energy and stamina, yet capable of being altered and influenced in foreign ways to Western understanding. Blood is conceived as being "hot" or "cold", neither of which refers to thermic qualities but rather to conceptions of "strength" or "weakness" in most cases (Lipp 2010:109–110; Lopez Austin 1975; Vogt 1976:88). This "hot"/"cold" dichotomy is pervasive throughout Mesoamerica (Chevalier et al. 2003; Kunow 2003:63–64; Metz 2006:139). Food and drink are likewise imbued with notions of "heat" or "cold" related to their ability to fortify and strengthen. Among the Mopan, proper health is maintained through conscious regulation of "hot" and "cold" consumption. For example, menstruating women avoid "cold" foods since they are already cold from blood loss.

According to Fink (1987:403), "blood" among the Mopan "is the mediator of heat and cold and properly speaking it is the blood which is 'hot' or 'cold' and not the individual. A person may feel hot but be diagnosed as having a 'cold' blood illness or vice versa, i.e., feel cold but have a 'hot' blood condition." These treatments for "weak blood" derive in part from cosmological precedents in Mopan mythology. For the Mopan, "it is therefore consistent that the properties of hotness and coldness when applied to food do indicate to the Maya a measure of nutritional value. 'Hot' foods are said to 'make the blood strong,' 'cold' foods 'fill the belly' but leave a person weak" (Fink 1987:404). Thus, "building blood" consists of properly aligning one's consumption with cultural conceptions through the careful observance of the specific "hot" and "cold" characteristics of each

substance ingested.

Determining the health of an individual relative to their proper modulation of hot and cold often requires the expertise of a traditional healer, known as *aj-ilmaj* in Mopan from the verb *ilmaj* "to cure." The root *–il* means "to see" or "to perceive." Mopan healers are aptly named since they are said to *perceive* imbalances in a patient's blood through specific acts of divination. Similarly, among the Tzotzil Maya of Chiapas, Mexico, healers are also called *j' ilol*, literally "the one who sees," because they are "the only people to whom clever souls are attributed" (Groark 2010:104).

According to Fink (1987:405), healers know how to "diagnose illness by 'reading the blood' and how to cure by prescribing the correct herbal remedies to their patients." A hot/cold imbalance affecting a person could also be diagnosed as originating from sorcery. Healers, or "bush doctors" as they are most commonly referred to in Belizean English, are, in many cases, sorcerers themselves (also called *pulya'aj*). They can detect the presence of a curse on the patient and prescribe the appropriate type of plant, food, or drink to counteract the curse based on the "readings" they take from the patient's blood.

Discussion

The Mopan typically view psychiatric disorders as cold imbalances (cf. Wilson 1999:135) and are treated through natural botanical remedies. The Mopan talk about several neurological and mental disorders: madness, epilepsy, depression, anxiety, stress, and *susto* (a kind of "fright" that weakens a person's ability to fight illness; cf. Bourbonnas-Spear et al. [2005:328] for similar disorders among the Q'eqchi' Maya).

The Mopan use *(aj)-paay pokche',* or skunk root (*Chiococca alba* [L.] Hitchc.), to treat mental anxiety or headaches. The leaves of this foul-smelling shrub are boiled, and the patient drinks the resulting tonic. This plant is also used for cramps and rheumatism by heating the leaves on a griddle and applying them to the skin.

When people have *wax upol*, i.e., high blood pressure, they are said to become idle and lethargic while simultaneously having a "crazy" look in their eyes. A plant, known as *(aj)-so'sol pim*, is said to cure "craziness" (e.g., if someone goes around madly telling wild stories, or walks around naked). The afflicted person is bathed in a mixture of leaves and water three times a day for two days.

The *(ix)-k'än-te'*, gliricidia or madre cacao (*Gliricidia sepium*), is used to treat depression and sadness. Madre cacao is also used medicinally to bring down fevers by bathing the patient in water with its leaves.

Women who suffer from a fright (*susto*) when they are pregnant or during menstruation make a tonic from the leaves of the *xaab' mama'*, a scientifically unidentified plant. A *susto* refers to being frightened to the point where one's spirit becomes "weakened" and highly susceptible to illness. In the village of Chan Kom in Yucatan, Mexico, Redfield and Villa Rojas (1934:161–162) note that the people say "any weakness, anemia, loss of appetite or low physical condition, especially in a woman," is attributable to *pasmo*, which, according to Kunow (2003:65), is "the result of a fright or shock." Similarly, among the Q'eqchi' Maya, a *susto* or a hot/cold imbalance results in an "irregular, erratic pulse" (Gezelle 2014:20).

Pasmo, a Spanish term used to describe an imbalance in one's "heat" or "cold" (though usually an overabundance of "cold"; cf. Wilson 1999:134), is treated with the leaves of the *(ya'ax)-k'omo'che'*. The Mopan say that if you feel weak, you should take the leaves of the *(ya'ax)-k'omo'che'*, boil them,

and drink the mixture after it cools. They say this will "give you energy" and "build your blood."

The Mopan also rely on the amaranth (*Amaranthus*) to "strengthen the blood." In Mopan, it is commonly known as *ix-kalalu*, which derives from the Kriol name *Callaloo*, with the feminine prefix *ix-*. Its proper Mopan name is *ch'ayu'uk'*. Medicinally, they say that amaranth not only strengthens the blood but also makes one "feel strength in the bones." Among the Garifuna population of Belize, amaranth is used also used to "build up blood" (Santos n.d.:17).

The balsam pear or bitter melon (*Momordica charantia*) (*[ix]-jamoor/yamor/yamol* in Mopan) is renowned throughout Belize and is valued for its various medicinal qualities. When using it to "build the blood" of an individual, the Mopan boil its leaves to produce an ingested tonic. Grover and Yadav (2004) note that the medicinal qualities of *Momordica charantia* have been repeatedly demonstrated through scientific methods in recent years. Studies have shown that the plant aids in treating diabetes, various types of cancer, and fevers and can be used as an antibacterial, anthelmintic, abortifacient, and antiviral agent. The Mopan, however, most value its ability to "build the blood" and purify blood when drunk daily as a tonic. Arvigo and Balick (1993:195–196) have also noted Belizean usages of the bitter melon as a "fine blood and organ cleanser." Baines (2012:228) also notes, "I heard the use of *yamor* discussed as a sort of cleaning ritual, it forming a kind of tonic that the 'old people' used to drink every so often to clean the blood." Arnason et al. (1980:353) list a number of plants (e.g., *Parthenium hysteropohus* L, *Croton Schiedeanus* Schlect, *Capraria biflora* L., *Cassia grandis* L.) that are said "to build blood," one of which is the *Momordica charantia*.

The Mopan also value several trees for their ability to "build blood." The semi-deciduous large legume *b'uk'ut* tree, or stinking toe (*Cassia grandis*), is favored to strengthen the body. The long, wood-like capsules grow to 20–40 cm long and contain upwards of 40 seeds per pod. Mopan men and children suck on the seeds to "build blood" or give them "more blood," i.e., increase their strength and stamina. Atran (1993:655) reports the Itzaj Maya, linguistic relatives of the Mopan, also eat Stinking toe (*b'ukut'*) in order to "strengthen the blood" (*muk' uk'ik'el*). Similarly, among the Garifuna of Belize stinking toe is said be a "blood builder" (Arzu and Thiagarajan 2016:17). Stinking toe seeds are known to be high in iron (Earle and Sánchez Vindas 2001:67), which would help to explain its use against anemia and its strength-building qualities since it would increase red blood cell counts. Harmon (2004:107) likewise notes the medicinal properties of *Cassia grandis* "to help fight anemia by adding iron to the blood." High iron content is one of the reasons why the commercially sold drink *Carao*, derived from stinking toe, is becoming popular as an iron supplement today.

Endemic to Central America and northern South America, the provision tree, or *wakuut* in Mopan (*Pachira aquatica*), is also noted for its ability to "build blood." The Mopan peel the bark of the provision tree and boil it to produce a tonic that is drunk two to three times a day for several weeks. They say this "gives you blood" and strength. The Q'eqchi' Maya of Belize, who have precisely the same tradition, say that a tea from the provision bark tree should be drunk by pregnant women so that they will "have enough blood" (Gezelle 2014:50).

The *(aj)-päjpäjchína*, or bitter orange (*Citrus aurantium*), is said to be a cure for "sweet blood," by which the Mopan mean a type of diabetes or low blood sugar. They associate diabetes with a general weakening of the blood and, therefore, weakening the body. Drinking the juice of

the bitter orange is said to make one's blood "stronger." The Yukatek Maya have a similar tradition. *Bilis*, meaning a condition brought about by strong emotions like anger, is treated by Yukatek Maya healers with this orange juice since anger is a "hot" emotion (Kunow 2003:64).

Another cure for "sweet blood" is the *k'uche'* (literally "god tree") or cedar (*Cedrela odorata*), a tree whose name enjoys a wide distribution among Mayan languages today and is even attested in the Maya hieroglyphic script on Lintel 10 at Yaxchilán. It can be boiled as a tonic to combat "sweet blood," i.e., a tired or weak feeling. The notion of "sweet" relating to the "hot"/"cold" dichotomy has also been noted in other Mesoamerican cultures (Aparicio Mena and Di Ludovico 2013:30). The Mopan Maya also use the bark of the cedar medicinally for kidney stones by boiling the bark with half a cup of sweet oil and drinking it as a tonic. It can also be mixed with the *ya'ax-che'* plant to fight kidney stones.

Conclusion

Forest botanicals play a significant role in the daily lives of the Mopan Maya of San José, Belize. Nearly all households participate in farmland agriculture and gardening. Additionally, the forest provides a wealth of medicines that the Maya have likely used for millennia. For example, epigraphic evidence from the Classic Period together with ethnographic data from the Q'eqchi' Maya suggest the possible medicinal use of *T. guatemalelsis* (Ferrier et al. 2020). The Mopan view various food and botanical resources as having inherent "hot" or "cold" qualities that accompany similar beliefs about the human body's blood. In Mopan traditional healing, knowledge of "hot" and "cold" properties allows one to respond to numerous illnesses by counteracting perceived imbalances by "building" one's blood through certain plants and consumables. The proper regulation of one's blood in this "hot"/"cold" dichotomy ensures good health, and "building" one's blood addresses poor health. We have shown in this study the continuing presence of this tradition even within a changing economy and social structure. Despite a growing tendency to rely on Western pharmaceuticals, the Mopan still look to the forest for medicine and traditional means of healing.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Terry Ball, M. D. Turner, Meaghan Peuramaki-Brown, and several anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments and critiques of earlier versions of this study. All remaining errors are our own. We would like to thank Reitaku University and Brigham Young University for generously funding the field research that provided the data used in this study. We are especially grateful to our friends in Belize, consultants who worked closely with us over the years in the collection and analysis of the data presented here, especially the community in San José, Belize. Additionally, we note here that following Informed Consent and Research Participation (IRB) guidelines, we asked all consultants to fill out an IRB consent form prior to involvement in our project.

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Manjares tradicionales de San Martín Jilotepeque, Guatemala

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La comida es un elemento muy importante para conocer a las sociedades, en cualquier parte del mundo, reflejo de su producción, costumbres y tradiciones alimentarias. No podemos negar que al viajar a cualquier lugar nos interesamos en conocer los platos tradicionales, su forma de preparación, elementos culturales y por supuesto, su sabor. En el caso de Mesoamérica, existen ingredientes comunes y característicos, como el maíz, cuya domesticación se remonta alrededor de 9000 años a.C., que se plasmó en varios elementos de las culturas antiguas y que continúa hasta la actualidad. Es así, como nos ubicaremos en el Altiplano central de Guatemala, en un pueblo maya kaqchikel ubicado entre las montañas, llamado San Martín Jilotepeque, que significa "cerro de maíz tierno" en náhuatl, donde precisamente la base de la alimentación es el maíz. Dentro de los principales platillos de Jilotepeque, se pueden mencionar el subanik y el pulique, este último plato el más arraigado en mi familia destinado a las principales fiestas y celebraciones. Entorno a la preparación de estos platos, se mantiene una línea de tradiciones que se han transmitido y transformado generacionalmente. No es solo la preparación de comida, es todo un acontecimiento profundo que une a la familia, especialmente a las mujeres que son las encargadas de cocinar con sus utensilios y vasijas específicos. Cada elemento tiene un significado especial y los momentos para cada procedimiento, desde que se buscan los ingredientes, hasta el momento en el que se sirve y se come en diferentes contextos. Esta es una aproximación etnográfica, de los conocimientos propios familiares de la preparación de dos platillos importantes dentro de la comunidad, especialmente del pul'ik.

Palabras clave: Kaqchikel, pul'ik, sub'anïk, tradición, alimentación.

Existen muchos platillos entre los mayas actuales del Altiplano Central de Guatemala que han sido preparados y enseñados por sus ancestros, adquiriendo un valor también sentimental y espiritual que trasciende la necesidad básica de alimentación. Desde el cultivo, cosecha hasta el momento de su preparación, están cargados de vivencias, recuerdos y hechos trascendentales de la vida. En este sentido, la comida adquiere un carácter cultural, económico, social y religioso. El cultivo de la milpa, el frijol y otros productos, se realiza dentro del núcleo familiar, una labor que realizan principalmente los hombres. Otro aspecto importante de estos policultivos es su aporte a la ecología, ya que se evita el impacto de los grandes monocultivos que erosionan y desgastan la tierra.

El objetivo de este artículo es presentar dos platos importantes desde una perspectiva familiar y personal dentro de la comunidad maya kaqchikel. Existen elementos importantes que han trascendido todo este contexto y son una forma de resistencia desde la colonización. Algunos elementos se han mantenido y otros se han integrado a la preparación de estos alimentos.

Las Tradiciones Culinarias Mayas

En una ocasión me preguntaron: "¿Qué es lo que más extrañas de Guatemala, fuera de la familia y amigos?"; sin dudar un minuto, respondí: "¡la comida!". Este tipo de contexto, que sin darnos cuenta se reproduce alrededor del mundo, afirma la importancia de las tradiciones alimentarias para el ser humano. Los alimentos con los que un individuo crece son verdaderos manjares tanto al nivel familiar como al colectivo. A lo largo de la historia y por el estudio de las culturas del mundo, algunos alimentos llegaron a considerarse la comida de los dioses mismos, parte de su mitología y una referencia de la identidad popular muy importante. Un ejemplo importante para nuestra área de estudio es el conocido Popol Vuh, que inicia con la narración de la creación del ser humano utilizando el maíz, un ingrediente importante y emblemático para Mesoamérica (Terán y Rasmussen 2009; Vela 2011:72-77; Villar 2013). Hasta hoy, la tortilla de maíz queda como base alimentaria importante.

> Y moliendo entonces las mazorcas amarillas y las mazorcas blancas, hizo Ixmucané nueve bebidas, y de este alimento provinieron la fuerza y la gordura y con él crearon los músculos y el vigor del hombre. Esto hicieron los Progenitores, Tepeu y Gucumatz, así llamados.
>
> A continuación entraron en pláticas acerca de la creación y la formación de nuestra primera madre y padre. De maíz amarillo y de maíz blanco se hizo carne; de masa de maíz se hicieron los brazos y las piernas del hombre. Únicamente masa de maíz entró en la carne de nuestros padres, los cuatro hombres que fueron creados (Recinos 1993:104).

En este mismo escrito, aparecen varias escenas, por ejemplo: cuando la abuela les llevó el almuerzo a sus nietos a la milpa donde trabajaban, una costumbre que se mantiene; cuando en la mítica Tulán reciben el "cuenco de la comida" (Christenson 2012:377). Además, se mencionan otros alimentos como las pepitas de chilacayote, chile, frijol, pataxte y cacao (Colop 1999; Vela 2010:14-90). Precisamente, las referencias de estos ingredientes nativos precolombinos se han transmitido de generación en generación y representan una tradición muy profunda.

En antropología, existen muchas definiciones por *tradición*. La más sencilla la describe como un conjunto de elementos culturales que se conserva en el tiempo, en situaciones de cambio, que se transmite, se piensa y se protege con la intención de que no se pierda (Graburn 2001:6). También puede ser una construcción analítica o un esfuerzo vivo y activo con el objetivo de preservar los elementos culturales, como muestra Eugenia Shanklin (1981), estos puntos de vista no siempre son complementarios. En el caso concreto de las tradiciones culinarias de Guatemala, se han agregado ciertos ingredientes después de la colonia. Justo en este punto Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966:233-234), habló de dos tipos de sociedad—la "caliente", que es consciente del cambio y su papel irreversible en la historia y la "fría", que busca regenerar cíclicamente el pasado. Este tema es bastante amplio y son términos importantes para abordar la continuidad de la tradición en San Martín Jilotepeque, y también los cambios que ha sufrido a través del tiempo, que responden a un contexto histórico, político y social. Para este tema, es importante mencionar teorías que se relacionan con la naturaleza social de las preferencias y gustos alimentarios (Mintz 1985) y con el "sentido social del gusto" (Bourdieu 1984), donde la estratificación social también se relaciona con el consumo de alimentos, de lo que se considera "delicioso y alta cocina" y lo que no. Debido a la ausencia de más estudios acerca de la comida de San Martin Jilotepeque, opté por llenar este vacío con un enfoque menos teórico y hasta cierto punto personal.

La marginación de la comida maya se da desde la época colonial, donde "la comida de los indios" se mantuvo al margen de la sociedad (Villar 2013), sin embargo, en la historia reciente algunas recetas fueron retomadas. Incluso ahora se pueden encontrar en ciertos restaurantes de lujo especializados, hecho que también refleja la ideología de patriotismo instaurado por la política del siglo XIX, desde la independencia criolla de Guatemala (Martínez 2015).

Si nos adentramos al área maya, en cortas distancias, podríamos identificar elementos comunes, pero también costumbres alimentarias que cambian, de acuerdo a dos aspectos importantes: el medio ambiente (condiciones climáticas, etc.), y los recursos con los que se cuentan en cada zona (Villar 2013: 209-230). Por tanto, al probar un platillo característico de un lugar, observamos los rasgos ecológicos, históricos, culturales y de identidad de un grupo.

El maíz es un elemento común en la gastronomía de Mesoamérica, y está presente en diferentes fuentes de estudio: textos indígenas, iconografía, en evidencias arqueológicas e históricas. Está presente como base de la alimentación e ingrediente principal de muchos platos ancestrales. En las crónicas coloniales, aparecen diversas menciones sobre esta base alimentaria, Diego de Landa (1993:43) menciona que el maíz es su comida principal y lo usan como comida y también como bebida.

La investigación arqueológica también ha presentado evidencias de la dieta ancestral basada en el maíz, frijol, chile y calabazas (García y Castillo 2015:815; Gutiérrez 1989; Götz 2014: 167; Rodríguez 2019: 871-883; Stuart 2016; Stuart et al. 2005; Tedlock 1992; Venegas 2018), esta base alimenticia no cambió mucho después de la invasión. Dentro de los Mayas kaqchikeles del siglo XVII y XVIII, los recados (un tipo de salsa espesa) a base de tomate mezclado con varios tipos de chiles, era parte de su comida principal, mezcla que sobrevivió a través del tiempo (Hill 2001:82), y que se presentará en las recetas del *pul' ik* y el *sub'anïk*. Hoy en día, en la plaza central del pueblo de San Martín, precisamente se venden tortillas con frijol, acompañadas con alguna salsa y chile,

Figura 1. Vista actual del pueblo de San Martín Jilotepeque (foto: Dora García).

además de los deliciosos chuchitos (un tipo de tamal pequeño envuelto en tusa con la hoja del maíz ya seco). Dentro de mis recuerdos, no puedo olvidar que en la casa de mis abuelos o tíos, estos elementos siempre eran parte importante de la alimentación. Especialmente cuando llegas de visita, de trabajar o de algún viaje y tienes mucha hambre, nada es mejor y más reconfortante que unas deliciosas tortillas recién hechas en el comal acompañadas con una salsa de tomate y chile (la mezcla favorita de mi abuelo). Además, los frijoles cocidos en olla de barro, cuyo sabor es muy especial y único. Esto es una evidencia de las tradiciones culinarias que se transmiten dentro de los núcleos familiares, pero que no son inmutables, ya que están sujetos a influencias exteriores.

La cocina, según Villar Anleu (2013:209), "es el complejo cultural que aglutina saberes populares, artes culinarias, recursos materiales necesarios a la preparación de la comida, elaboraciones culinarias, los comportamientos colectivos que giran alrededor del hecho alimentario y los simbolismos de que se provee a los comestibles, a comidas y bebidas".

Siguiendo estos conceptos, nos adentraremos a la cocina de San Martín Jilotepeque y sus manjares tradicionales, que son poco conocidos pero importantes para la historia del pueblo maya kaqchikel. En particular, nos enfocaremos sobre dos platos cuyo nombre, debido a la colonización se castellanizaron. Estos platos son el *pul'ik*, que es llamado pulique y el *sub'anïk*, llamado subanik; el segundo más conocido que el primero, ya que se puede encontrar en algunos restaurantes que ofrecen comida tradicional guatemalteca. La pérdida del conocimiento sobre la comida de los pueblos originarios tiene raíces coloniales: "con los descendientes de los criollos de aquella época y la permanencia de los procesos de ladinización, esa negación ha desembocado en descaradas formas de exclusión llegando a calificarla de "comida de indios", y en el mejor de los casos de

"comida típica", eufemismo que no borra el otro peyorativo sentido" (Villar 2013:215). Sin embargo, para los pueblos originarios el maíz, la base y acompañante principal de varios de estos platos, es el sustento principal que da la vida y la fuerza según la enseñanza de los abuelos, algo de lo que no hemos sido despojados del todo.

San Martín Jilotepeque

El pueblo de San Martín Jilotepeque está ubicado en las Tierras Altas Centrales de Guatemala, ubicado entre las montañas del departamento de Chimaltenango, a 75 km de la ciudad capital y a 18 km de la cabecera departamental. El pueblo está conformado por 12 aldeas principales. Anteriormente a la colonia, San Martín Jilotepeque fue parte del área oriental del territorio kaqchikel; pertenecía a una de las cuatro parcialidades de este pueblo, la denominada *akajal*, emparentada con los Chajomá (Cabezas 2008:158; Esquit 2018), que al parecer permanecieron autónomos en su propio territorio antes de la colonización (Cojti Ren 2020:26). Según Hill (1998:230), el actual municipio de San Martín solo representa una parte occidental del territorio Chajomá.

Antes de la conquista, los habitantes de San Martín Jilotepeque vivieron en una gran ciudad en el periodo Posclásico Tardío, nombrado como Mixco Viejo e identificado como de origen pocomam, un error de Fuentes y Guzmán (Fuentes y Guzmán 1882; Carmack 1979). Sin embargo, después se corrigió el error, diciendo que perteneció originalmente a los Chajomá (un grupo dentro de los kaqchikeles), que se trasladaron, según el título, a Chwa pec queca cabol Nimá Abaj (Cabezas 2008), donde se encontraban al llegar los españoles y antes de la reducción de indios en el pueblo actual al que llamaron San Martín Jilotepeque (Figura 1).

Chwa Nima Ab'äj, nombre corregido por Guillermo Paz Cárcamo (2004), es un sitio

Figura 2. Sitio arqueológico *Chwa Nima Ab'äj* (foto: Dora García).

Figura 3. Iglesia de San Martín de Tours (foto: Dora García).

estratégicamente ubicado en una meseta rodeada de grandes montañas y barrancos, y los ríos Motagua y Pixcayá, que les permitió el control de varios recursos naturales, por ello las tierras son muy fértiles para cualquier cultivo (Figura 2). Robinson (1998) piensa que el río Pixcayá era una frontera que dividía al grupo asentado en San Martín Jilotepeque en el lado oeste y con los del este. Este río tiene dos brazos, uno de ellos es el Pixcayá, que pasa justo por el sitio mencionado por Ximénez (1999:185), una de las últimas ciudades en caer durante la invasión española (Paz 2004). En 1898 Karl Sapper publica el primer plano del sitio y posteriormente Henri Lehmann realiza las primeras excavaciones en 1954 (Lehmann 1968).

San Martín Jilotepeque también es famoso por su fuente de obsidiana de "Pachay", que significa lugar de chayes, nombre con el que se identifica este material hasta hoy (obsidiana=chay). Un lugar con vestigios arqueológicos que han sido reportados en varios estudios de la región (Braswell 1996; Braswell and Robinson 1992; Braswell and Briggs Braswell 1993).

Luego de la colonización, las tierras comunales fueron expropiadas y otorgadas a nuevos propietarios que sembraron caña de azúcar para hacer panela y alcohol (Cabezas 2008:156). A partir de la nueva distribución de la tierra, surgieron algunos problemas territoriales, por ejemplo, en Santo Domingo Xenacoj en 1689. Ante esta situación se escribieron varios títulos de tierras, uno de ellos conocido como "Título de Xilotepeque", escrito en 1555 en kaqchikel y traducido al español con la ayuda de los frailes dominicos (Cabezas 2008:158; Hill 1998, 2001). Este documento en realidad respondía a las ordenanzas de las autoridades coloniales, que habían definido la tenencia y límites de las tierras, de acuerdo a la conformación de los "pueblos de indios".

La orden dominica fue la encargada de la reducción de los indios en este pueblo, nombrando como santo patrón a "San Martín de Tours" (Figura 3). Los dominicos adoptaron el nombre

Jilotepeque del náhuatl Xilotepeque, con *xilotl*, cuyo significando es "mazorca de maíz tierno o elote" y *tepetl* que significa "cerro"; traduciéndose como "cerro de maíz tierno o cerro de elotes". Finalmente el nombre quedó como San Martín Jilotepeque, que responde al nombre del título de Xilotepeque, escrito ya en la colonia. Sin embargo, según Carmak (1979:139), la palabra equivalente en kaqchikel era *och'al* "elote", *och*' significa "jilote" una forma de elote que empieza a dar sus primeros granos (Patal 2013:295). También en el Título de Jilotepeque se menciona la palabra *chioch'al* (derivada de *och'al*), que significa "lugar de elotes", nombre que según Carmak (1979:139) se preserva en un lugar llamado Panochal ubicado al oeste de San Martín.

Las tierras de climas más templados fueron seleccionadas por los Dominicos, quienes acompañaban a los colonizadores en la cristianización de los conquistados. La historia señala 1543 como la fecha de fundación del municipio (Gall 1979:420), aunque existe otra referencia que fue en el año 1545 (Solórzano 2013:96).

En toda la historia del municipio, la agricultura, especialmente del maíz, ha sido parte importante del sostenimiento de las familias. También se cultivan otros productos como el frijol y la calabaza, que en conjunto con el maíz, son tres productos importantes que conforman la base de la economía maya. Representa la continuidad de las prácticas del trabajo la atierra y su manejo sostenible, incluso desde la colonia (Hill 2001). Después de la colonia se introdujeron los cultivos de café y caña de azúcar, negocio que fue controlado por los ladinos en su mayoría, aunque en la actualidad se produce mucho más. La mayoría de las familias, en los siglos XIX y XX, tenían que viajar en la temporada de cosecha del café a las fincas de los ladinos, ya que eran la mano de obra barata (García y Armira 2011; Solórzano 2013). Otra actividad productiva introducida fue la crianza del ganado, para proveer de carne a la región (Solórzano 2012:89); este hecho cambió las costumbres alimentarias, ya que en la actualidad en los platillos originarios se incluye también la carne de vaca. Después, durante la Reforma Agraria de 1950, se expropiaron varias fincas a través del comité Agrario Departamental, con cambios que beneficiaron a los pobladores en la propiedad de la tierra; sin embargo, esta iniciativa quedó truncada con la contrarrevolución (Solórzano 2013:107-134).

San Martín Jilotepeque alcanzó su nivel de municipio de Chimaltenango en el año 1825. Su historia más reciente, la que vivió mi propio abuelo, Ramón Patzán, estuvo marcada por el genocidio indígena en la guerra interna a partir de 1979 (principalmente por los gobiernos de Romeo Lucas García y de Efraín Ríos Montt; García y Armira 2011), donde muchos se desplazaron a otras zonas para salvar sus vidas. San Martín sufrió una gran campaña de "desarrollo", donde el racismo fue un arma clave, para continuar con el proceso de colonización, para que la población perdiera su propia identidad como pueblo kaqchikel, empezando por el idioma (Solórzano 2013). Bajo la palabra "desarrollo" se inducía, según el pensamiento criollo, a abandonar todo aquello que se consideró "no civilizado". Este mismo pensamiento colonial ha perdurado a través de los años, afectando procesos como la pérdida del idioma kaqchikel.

San Martín Jilotepeque a diferencia de otros pueblos, no cuenta con el típico parque reticulado y rodeado de diferentes monumentos gubernamentales, sino más bien una gran plaza, un espacio grande y libre en el cual se desarrollaron hasta hoy en día actividades comerciales y actos oficiales importantes, donde la iglesia es el edificio central más importante. Este concepto colonial tenía como objetivo tener un espacio específico, donde se pudiera congregar a toda la población, tanto en las actividades eclesiales y sociales; en ella también se ubican la iglesia, el edificio municipal y,

Figura 4. Presentación final del *pul'ik* con tamalitos de masa (foto: Dora García).

en su centro, una fuente decorativa. Por el terremoto de 1976, lamentablemente se derrumbaron todas las construcciones coloniales, volviéndose a construir, aunque con un estilo y uso diferente (Solórzano 2012).

Estos hechos importantes de la historia de San Martín Jilotepeque son fundamentales para entender el contexto social y cultural en el que se desarrolló la población del lugar luego de la conquista. Las campañas de "ladinización", es decir la sustitución de formas culturales propias de un pueblo por otras; la apropiación de la tierra y el sistema racista que se ha establecido en el país, han tenido repercusiones en la forma de vida y cambio en las tradiciones y costumbres, incluyendo la alimentación. Por ello, es necesario continuar con la divulgación de la comida de San Martín, para evitar la pérdida de las recetas y sus elementos originarios, que se han transmitido generacionalmente.

El *Pul' ik* y el *Sub'anïk*

Los platillos *pul' ik* y *sub'anïk* conforman parte importante de las tradiciones alimentarias San Martín Jilotepeque, elaboradas en eventos importantes. Como el resto de los platos más conocidos en los pueblos mayas actuales del Altiplano de Guatemala, su base principal son los recados y salsas, elaborados con una variedad de chiles en combinación con tomate y otros ingredientes. Los tamales de maíz no pueden faltar en la comida de cada pueblo, cada quien imprime sus propios rasgos y costumbres para prepararlos. A continuación, se presentan varios aspectos de esto dos platos importantes del municipio: el *pul' ik* - único por su base de masa de maíz y característico de este pueblo y el *sub'anïk* (un tipo de recado) – "el platillo de los reyes".

El Pul' ik o Pulique

Aunque el *sub'anïk* es considerado el plato más conocido de San Martín Jilotepeque, publicado en las notas turísticas sobre el municipio e incluso en programas de cocina en la televisión, el *pul'ik* es, dentro de varias familias el más importante y el que se elabora en los eventos claves de la vida familiar y comunitaria, como bodas, cofradías, rezados y funerales. Aunque es poco conocido, es el único platillo que tiene como base el maíz, no solo el tomate y los chiles, por lo que su consistencia es bastante espesa, casi como un atol (Figura 4). Además del maíz, otros ingredientes de *pul'ik* son cultivos importantes del municipio: el ayote o calabaza (*k'um*) y el frijol (*kinäq'*), cultivados por mi abuelo Ramón Patzán durante toda su vida, quién, como todos los agricultores de la zona, va a la plaza principal del pueblo para vender sus productos.

Ingredientes y Elaboración. El ingrediente principal es el maíz (elote=*äj*); la cantidad depende del número de personas. Aquí daremos un ejemplo para aproximadamente 10 personas, un núcleo familiar grande. Además del maíz se necesitan cuatro libras de carne. Para este plato se puede elegir un tipo de carne o hasta tres, esto es opcional según las posibilidades y gustos de la familia o grupo que lo elabore. La carne puede ser de chompipe, también llamado guajolote o pavo (*pipi'y*), un animal domesticado en México hace 5000 años aproximadamente que se utilizó en platillos para días festivos y ritos (Valadez et al. 2001:62). El pavo que comemos hoy en día, *Meleagris gallopavo,* es diferente a la especie silvestre del Área Maya conocido como pavo ocelado *Meleagris ocellata*. Al igual que el maíz, huesos de este animal fueron encontrados en el Valle de Tehuacán con una antigüedad de 7000 años, posteriormente domesticado y mencionado en la colonia por Fray Bernardino de Sahagún como alimento y también como ofrenda al sol (Heyden y Velasco 2018:238-240). Además del chompipe, la gallina y el pollo formaron también parte de la alimentación basada en las aves, hasta la actualidad: gallina (*äk'*), pollo (*xtux*; de Landa 1993:145). El cerdo (*aq*) y la res (waks) ya son carnes que fueron introducidos a la dieta de Mesoamérica por los invasores españoles.

Los otros ingredientes son: dos libras de tomate (*ixkoya'*), tres chiles pimientos (*kilaj raxik*), una bolita de achiote (*k'uxu'*). Una cebolla grande (*xnakät*), un ajo pequeño (*anx*) que son de introducción colonial; estos ingredientes forman parte importante de las hortalizas que tuvieron gran impacto en el Nuevo Mundo, con su origen en Asia central (Long 2018). Por último una rama de cilantro (*chïp*), el utilizado actualmente es de la especie *coriandrum sativum*, sin embargo, existe otro tipo – de la especie *Eryngium foetidum* – nativo, cuyo uso se ha perdido y cuyo nombre es culantro cimarrón (*tunay, chichip*).

Pasos para la preparación,

- Poner a pre cocer las carnes. Primero se pone la gallina y el chompipe (la carne más dura) y luego el cerdo. Se coloca en un apaste y se cubre con agua de tal forma que la cubra por completo.
- En la piedra de moler se tritura el tomate, el chile pimiento, la cebolla y el ajo. Se deja descansar en un cuenco aparte.
- Se prepara un poco de masa de maíz, aproximadamente 2 tazas. Esta masa se deshace con un poco de agua fría.
- Se retiran las carnes del agua y se colocan en un cuenco, luego se agrega la masa al caldo que salió, resultado de la cocción de las carnes.

Figura 5. El pul'ik, un recado con masa, tomate, chiles y el achiote que le da el tono de color naranja (foto: Dora García).

- Luego se agrega la mezcla de tomate, chile, ce bolla y ajo.
- El achiote se deshace con un poco del mismo caldo y se agrega a toda la mezcla y se revuelve constantemente en el fuego.
- Se agregan las carnes nuevamente al apaste donde está el recado.
- De último, sazonar con sal y cuando el recado está hirviendo y las carnes están cocidas, se pica el cilantro y se deja caer a la olla.
- El recado no debe ser ni tan espeso, ni tan ralo, debe tener un punto medio.

Del proceso de elaboración, debemos mencionar la introducción de nuevos utensilios de cocina modernos. Anteriormente se utilizaban solo ollas y apastes de barro. Actualmente, con la pérdida de la producción de vasijas de barro y la introducción del peltre y el aluminio, se usan ollas de estos materiales (García Patzán 2020:9-32). Además, los chiles y el tomate para el recado se procesaban en una piedra de moler, actualmente la licuadora eléctrica a reemplazado progresivamente el uso de este instrumento de raíces prehispánicas (Figura 5). Este plato se sirve en cuencos de barro, acompañados únicamente por tamalitos de masa (*sub'an*), envueltos en tuza (*jo'q*) (hoja seca de las mazorcas de maíz (Figura 6).

El Sub'anïk o Subanik, el "Platillo de los Reyes"

El *sub'anïk* es uno de los platillos característicos del pueblo y se recuerda ya desde la colonia, referido por los pobladores que emigraron al lugar luego del terremoto de San Marta en 1776 (Villar 2014). Este plato fue preparado en grandes fiestas y se dice que era elaborado entre las familias económicamente más pudientes: sin embargo, con el tiempo se elaboró no solo en estos círculos, sino también dentro de las familias de cualquier clase social. En la actualidad se come en grandes celebraciones y festividades como bodas o fiestas patronales. Conocido como "el platillo de los reyes", por su sabor y el uso de tres tipos de carne que deben estar presentes: pollo, chompipe y

cerdo, que denota su importancia y el nivel socioeconómico de la familia. Como mencionamos en el *pul'ik* las tres carnes es opcional (Figura 7).

Sub'anïk viene de la palabra *sub´an* que significa tamalito e *ik* que se traduce como chile; y la palabra completa *sub'anïk* que se refiere a la acción de hacer tamal (Patal 2013: 175, 428-429). Esto hace referencia al platillo que se coloca en hojas de maxen (definidas más abajo) y se envuelve como un tamal para su cocción y al recado que tiene varios chiles como ingredientes principales.

Ingredientes y Elaboración. Ingredientes importantes para la elaboración del *sub'anïk* son las hojas de *maxen* o *maxán* (*Calathea crotalifera* S. Watson), ya que dentro de ellas se coloca el recado con las carnes para su cocción (esto depende del número de personas, si se trata de 10, serían unas 5 lbs de carne). Estas hojas son las que comúnmente se usan para hacer tamales. A continuación, presentaremos los ingredientes necesarios para un aproximado de 10 personas. Los otros ingredientes son: un chile guaque/huaque o guajillo (en náhuatl *huaxin* o *huaje* y en kaqchikel *nima'ik*), un chile pasa/pasilla negro o prieto (*tukux ik*), un chile cobanero verde (*tukuru'*), un chile pimiento (*kilaj raxik*), un chile chocolate (*rixk'äq b'ay*), dos libras de tomate (*ixkoya'*), y una libra de miltomate, tomate de cáscara o tomate verde (*ch'äm ixkoya*).

El nombre del chile cobanero debe su nombre al pueblo de Cobán, Alta Verapaz, lugar donde se cultiva. Todos los chiles son originarios y son del género *Capsicum*. Las carnes utilizadas también pueden variar y se usan los tres tipos ya descritos: el chompipe, la gallina o pollo, el cerdo o la res (la cantidad depende del número de personas).

Pasos para la preparación.

- Los chiles se limpian, de acuerdo al gusto se limpian las semillas para que no sea tan picoso, o bien se dejan las semillas para que sea más picante.
- Preparados los chiles se ponen a cocer con el tomate y el miltomate en un apaste con poca agua, ya que en el fuego sueltan su propio jugo, en el cual se cocinan al vapor y sueltan su sabor.
- Originalmente los chiles y tomates ya cocidos se procesaban en la piedra de moler, pero como ya mencionamos, actualmente se usa una licuadora eléctrica, hasta obtener una salsa de consistencia espesa.
- Un elemento importante son las hojas de maxen. Se buscan las mejores completas que no estén rotas, luego se limpian muy bien.

Figura 6. Elaboración de tamalitos de masa (foto: Dora García).

- Sobre las hojas de maxen, dentro del apaste, se colocan las carnes seleccionadas, previamente cocidas a término medio. Luego se coloca la salsa del tomate con los chiles y sazonar con sal.
- En el interior de un apaste se colocan las hojas de maxen, haciendo un tipo de cama donde se colocarán los demás ingredientes. Antes de las hojas se ponen pitas de *sib'aq*' entrecruzadas debajo de las hojas de maxen que servirán para amarrar las hojas al final del procedimiento. El *sib'aq'* son unas pitas de fibra que se obtienen de la planta de tule, que también se usa para hacer petates.
- Finalmente, con el contenido adentro se amarran las hojas con el *sib'aq'*, se cubre totalmente la olla y se pone a cocer a vapor, como un tipo de tamal grande.
- Cuando la carne está totalmente cocida y se ha mezclado con el sabor de la salsa, se abre y se sirve en una escudilla o tipo tazón de barro. También se acompaña de tamalitos de masa.

Tradicionalmente, este plato, al igual que el *pul'ik*, se servía únicamente con tamalitos blancos de masa como acompañante, pero actualmente también se acompaña con otros productos no locales como el arroz. Para las nuevas generaciones es más práctico el uso de ollas de aluminio y aparatos eléctricos (Figura 8). Aunque no negamos que es más fácil procesar los ingredientes en una licuadora, es un fenómeno que ha causado la pérdida del uso y por lo tanto comercialización de vasijas de barro, piedras de moler y morteros, entre otros utensilios originarios.

Figura 7. Plato de *sub'anïk*, se puede observar cómo los platos de plástico han reemplazado los cuencos de barro (foto: Xiomara Grajeda).

Discusión

"La cultura define qué es comestible, cómo se lo tiene que preparar y cómo y con quién se lo debe comer" (Long 2018:106). Al presentar estos platillos, me imagino entrando a la casa de mi abuelo Ramón, ya que el pul'ik era su favorito y pedía que lo prepararán para su cumpleaños o cualquier celebración familiar importante, siempre acompañado de algún licor blanco fuerte. Se preparó también en la petición de mi matrimonio, en la boda de mis tíos y muchos otros eventos en los que nos reuníamos como familia. Recuerdo la boda de mi tío Ernesto, los hombres sentados en las mesas en el salón principal y las mujeres afuera al cuidado de los niños y de servir en la cocina. Cada familia y persona individual podría contar sus propias experiencias y vivencias, sin embargo, hay festividades comunes en las cuales se comparte esta comida excepcional: por ejemplo la celebración del patrón San Martín de Tours, dentro de las cofradías que tienen su propio sistema de organización, en las bodas o petición de matrimonio y en los funerales. En cualquier caso, se come como comida principal en el almuerzo y se acompaña de un trago de licor puro, mayormente para los hombres. La última vez que se preparó dentro de mi familia, fue en el funeral de mi abuelo, en estos casos suele preparase al día siguiente del velatorio, es el último plato de *pul' ik* que se compartió con el abuelo Ramón, creo que este hecho, es una clara evidencia de la importancia de esta comida en la vida de los sanmartinecos. Es tan importante, que no se encuentra en cualquier lugar o restaurante, es un honor ser invitado o invitar a comer estos platillos y socializar, a nivel familiar y comunitario. Las vivencias entorno a esta comida, tienen diferentes matices, son historias de alegría o de tristeza. Pienso en todos los exiliados del conflicto armado interno, en los que hemos salido de nuestro lugar de origen por muchos motivos, y cómo se extraña poder comer un plato de *pul'ik* y unos tamalitos. También pienso en las bodas, en la feria del pueblo, en los cumpleaños y en todas las fiestas en las que se cocina alrededor del fogón, el calor del hogar (Figura 9).

Figura 8. Cocimiento del *sub'anïk* en una olla moderna, con hojas de *maxen*, también reemplazando las ollas de barro (foto: Xiomara Grajeda).

Desde las últimas décadas del siglo XX, los europeos y estadounidenses de clase media han estado fascinados por el encanto de todo lo original, incluso tratando de imitar o producir ellos mismos artículos hechos a mano (Lee 1991). En este sentido es notable el regreso por el gusto de estos platos y recetas, por lo tanto, el significado de tradición cambia ya que surgen nuevos tipos de identidades que se producen en la sociedad posmoderna. Como resultado a veces, se olvida que

Figura 9. Ceremonia de petición de mano, los novios en el centro (Dora García y Milan Kováč). acompañados de los padrinos (mis tíos Ernesto y Rogelia Patzán) (foto: Selvin García).

los grupos étnicos originales no existen solo para presentarse como un artefacto viviente de museo, se ignora el hecho de que también son parte de esta sociedad moderna (Graburn 2001:8). Es por ello por lo que las reflexiones de este artículo demuestran la adaptación y supervivencia de dos platos sumamente importantes del pueblo kaqchikel de San Martin Jilotepeque, sus ingredientes originales y otros elementos coloniales que han enriquecido la cocina tradicional. Estas recetas se han convertido en elementos de identidad, parte de la vida maya contemporánea, que aunque pudo haber sufrido transformaciones, el aroma, los ingredientes base y su sabor han perdurado durante siglos. El principio más importante es identificar los cambios, que complementan pero no transforman su base fundamental, por lo tanto, no existe un mundo binario de sociedades frías y cálidas del que habla Lévi-Strauss (1966). Solo hay un núcleo en constante adaptación que no quiere renunciar a su naturaleza física o social, a pesar de la enorme presión de siglos de patrones coloniales y la "nostalgia imperial" (Rosaldo 1989) ideológicamente transmitida a las víctimas de la colonia.

Conclusiones

Las costumbres alimentarias de los mayas actuales se pueden entender a partir de la perpetuación de los platos tradicionales, de la cosecha del maíz, los chiles y otros ingredientes propios de la región. Sin embargo, las costumbres también se están transformando con la introducción de nuevos elementos, tanto en ingredientes como en utensilios de la cocina. Este hecho no se puede negar ni cambiar, pero se puede concientizar sobre la mezcla resultante de la colonización y de la

modernidad actual. Por ejemplo, la introducción del arroz como acompañante, las carnes, entre otros, además del uso de nuevos utensilios para su preparación. La cocina mesoamericana también ha brindado al mundo importantes elementos, como lo es la variedad de chiles que son consumidos y que nos caracterizan culturalmente. En este contexto, la presentación de dos recetas de San Martín Jilotepeque – elaboradas de generación en generación dentro de las familias de este lugar poco conocido – ayuda a la promoción de la riqueza enorme de las costumbres alimentarias mayas del Altiplano de Guatemala.

Como parte importante de las actividades familiares y comunitarias, tienen una carga social importante en las diversas actividades, parte de la vida, de la muerte, de la religión y del tejido social y cultural de los sanmartinecos. Según las enseñanzas de mi abuelo Ramón Patzán, el fogón siempre debe estar prendido y ese fuego nunca debe apagarse; es donde se cocina; alrededor de él se come y da calor al hogar (Figura 10). Sin lugar a duda en su hogar nunca faltó ese calor, ni el maíz para hacer un buen *pul'ik*. Espero que estas recetas, a través de este escrito se conozcan y ayuden a su permanencia. Son los manjares de San Martín Jilotepeque, que esperamos no mueran. Este articulo tiene como objetivo presentar una parte importante de la vida misma, la comida, que se entreteje con historias tatuadas en el corazón de las familias que desde la colonia han luchado contra el racismo, la persecución y el sistema imperante. Muchas veces la que llamaron o aún llaman "comida de los indios", se presenta en la actualidad muchas veces en programas de televisión y revistas internacionales y nacionales, como algo exótico y novedoso. Paradójicamente, algunos alimentos mayas marginalizados, han quedado sujetos al consumo y al prestigio social de la clase alta (Bourdieu 1984). No es sólo comida, son conocimientos ancestrales, son ingredientes cosechados en las tierras fértiles de Guatemala, por los agricultores que trabajan arduamente para que en nuestra mesa tengamos los deliciosos tamalitos de maíz y muchas otras recetas como el *pul'ik* y el *sub'anïk*. Por lo tanto, mi interés es preservar estas comidas de carácter festivo y emblemático

Figura 10. Convivencia de la familia en la cocina, alrededor del fogón con mi abuelo Ramón Patzán (foto: Dora García).

en su contexto social émico, de las que me enorgullezco.

El tema es muy complejo y es posible abordar desde diferentes perspectivas, sin embargo, en este caso es importante preguntarse, en qué grado el cambio es insostenible para la tradición y en qué medida y bajo qué circunstancias se convierte en parte de la identidad. Finalmente, la tradición culinaria es muy importante para el estudio de la resistencia maya.

Agradecimientos

Quiero agradecer profundamente a mi familia, a mi madre Maria Patzán, por haberme enseñado a cocinar estos deliciosos platillos. Especialmente a mi abuelo Ramón Patzán (†), a quién dedico este artículo, gracias por sus enseñanzas, por el amor a la tierra y al trabajo. Un homenaje a sus luchas y esfuerzos ante las persecuciones y tantos problemas que superó, gracias por la madre que me dio. Agradezco también al pueblo de San Martín Jilotepeque, un pedazo de mi corazón y de mi sangre.

Gracias por la invitación de Harri Kettunen a participar en la 15a Conferencia Anual Maya en la Playa de 2021. A Maxime Lamoureux-St-Hilaire y Mat Saunders por el espacio en el evento y publicación. Especialmente a Maxime por su comunicación atenta y apoyo en la preparación de este artículo. También a los revisores y editores por sus comentarios. Agradezco Milan Kováč por su apoyo para realizar este trabajo. Finalmente a la Agencia de Subvenciones en Ciencia proyecto VEGA 1/0855/21 y a la Agencia de Ciencia y Desarrollo proyecto APVV-17-0648, ambos realizados en la Universidad de Comenio de Bratislava, por hacer posible el desarrollo del presente estudio.

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"There Was Only Joy in their Hearts When They Feasted": Maize and Human Mediation among the Highland Maya

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According to the Popol Vuh, the purpose of the Creation was to form beings who could act as mediators between this world and the world of the sacred, providing the means to perpetuate life. Human beings are thus created to sustain and provide for the world, maintain its life-giving ability, and ensure that the lives of the gods themselves are renewed in their proper season. Ceremonial feasting unites those who participate physically and socially, making the substance of the specially prepared maize part of people's bodies, the living embodiments of their ancestors who share the same divine maize flesh and blood with them. Having shared a meal together, there is a common bond between them that both purifies and strengthens them to carry out their ritual labors as mediators between this world and the world of the sacred.

Key Words: *Highland Maya, maize, reciprocity, ceremonial feasting, human mediation, Creation*

According to the Popol Vuh, a document composed in the highlands of Guatemala by surviving members of the ancient K'iche' Maya nobility a few decades after the Spanish invasion of their lands in 1524, the climactic event in the final creation of mankind occurred when maize was discovered within the cleft mountain of Pan Paxil. It was this miraculous maize that the grandmother goddess Xmucane used to form the flesh of humanity (Christenson 2007:193-195). The Popol Vuh describes this creative act most frequently as a couplet pairing the verbs *awaxoq* (meaning "to be sown") with *saqiroq* ("to dawn"): "How shall it be sown? How shall there be a dawn for anyone? Who shall be a provider? Who shall be a sustainer?" (Christenson 2007:71).

The purpose of the Creation was to form beings who could act as mediators between this world and the world of the sacred, providing the means to perpetuate life. The two K'iche' words used to describe these future mediators are *tzuqul* ("provider") and *q'o'l* ("sustainer"). *Tzuqul* is a provider of any kind, although generally in the sense of food. Barbara Tedlock (1992:114) notes that one of the names for living K'iche' priest-shamans in Momostenango is *tzuqunel* ("feeder") because they symbolically "feed" the world and the ancestors with their ceremonies. *Q'o'l* is a provider of sustenance, primarily in the form of food and drink, and one who nurtures in any other way, such as a mother caring for an infant. Human beings are thus created to sustain and provide for the world, maintain its life-giving ability, and ensure that the lives of the gods themselves are renewed in their proper season. Maya gods are not all-powerful or immortal, and a god cannot be reborn without passing through old age, weakness and ultimately death. Both life and death must dance together on the world's grand stage in predictable but inevitable cycles. It is the responsibility of human beings to perpetuate this cycle through their traditional ceremonies and ritual offerings.

Although the world of the K'iche' Maya has changed profoundly since the Popol Vuh was written, there are certain core elements embedded in the way they view the world that have not changed in fundamental ways for centuries. Maize, for example, continues to be sacred. It represents the source of life itself, but like all living things it must pass through repeated cycles of death and rebirth. The lives of human beings are linked to these cycles. The relationship between the Maya and maize is one of reciprocity. Human beings could not exist without maize as the principal staple of their diet. But nature, as established by the creator gods, also requires human beings to tend, care for, and nurture the maize crops. Traditionalist K'iche's regularly celebrate ceremonial meals in sacred houses dedicated to Indigenous deities and sacred ancestors where the feast is symbolically eaten by both the living as well as beings that they believe are present in spirit. Having shared a meal together, there is a common bond that is established between them that both purifies and strengthens living participants to carry out their ritual labors as mediators between this world and the world of the sacred.

Maize and Reciprocity

Maya gods are not infallible. They made three failed attempts to create beings who could support and sustain them through ritual prayers and offerings. Ultimately, the beings that were successfully able to maintain the universe were made of maize:

> This, then, is the beginning of the conception of humanity, when that which

Figure 1. Lineage Shrine, Momostenango (all photographs by the author).

> would become the flesh of mankind was sought. Then spoke they who are called She Who Has Borne Children and He who Has Begotten Sons, the Framer and the Shaper, Sovereign and Quetzal Serpent:
>
> "The dawn approaches, and our work is not successfully completed. A provider and a sustainer have yet to appear—a child of light, a son of light. Humanity has yet to appear to populate the face of the earth," they said.
>
> Thus they gathered together and joined their thoughts in the darkness, in the night. They searched and they sifted. Here they thought and they pondered. Their thoughts came forth bright and clear. They discovered and established that which would become the flesh of humanity....
>
> Thus their frame and their shape were given expression by our first Mother and our first Father. Their flesh was merely yellow ears of maize and white ears of maize (Christenson 2007:192-195).

The implication is that human beings are intended to feed and nurture the gods through their actions. Maize itself is a deified, sacred substance but it requires human beings to tend, care for, and nurture the maize crops (Figure 2). There is no such thing as wild maize. It's an entirely domesticated crop and requires near-constant attention to survive. People and maize are thus inextricably linked to their mutual benefit. Significant stages in the life cycle of human beings are linked with

Figure 2. Maize field, Santiago Atitlán.

maize. Among the modern K'iche's, when a woman becomes pregnant, the event is announced by a respected elder of the community at certain lineage shrines (Figure 1). This ceremony is called "the sowing" of the future child as if that child was born from a cultivated maize field (Tedlock 1992:80), further connecting humans with maize as an expression of their essential being. Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán wrote in the seventeenth century that when a male child was born the Maya of Guatemala burned blood shed from the severed umbilical cord and passed an ear of maize through the smoke. The father then planted the seeds from this ear in the child's name in a specific area of the maize field. Parents used the maize from this small patch of land to feed the child "until he reached the age when he could plant for himself, saying that thus he not only ate by the sweat of his brow, but of his own blood as well" (Fuentes y Guzmán 1932-2933:I, 281, translation by author).

In most highland Maya languages, the word Indigenous people use to refer to themselves is some variation of *qas winaq* ("true people"). What distinguishes a true person is whether or not they eat maize. If they do eat maize, their flesh is composed of sacred substance. I first began working as an ethnographer in K'iche'-Maya communities in Guatemala back in the 1970s. At the time, I found it curious that when I struck up a conversation in K'iche' with someone I didn't know, that person would sometimes interrupt me in mid-sentence and ask me what I ate. Specifically, they would ask if I ate maize tortillas. When I affirmed that I ate what they ate, including maize tortillas and tamalitos, they would nod as if that explained a great deal. After several such experiences, I asked a friend of mine why people were curious about what I ate. He replied, "You can speak our

language. I wondered if it was because you ate maize from here. If so then you have the flesh of the ancestors in your flesh and therefore you can speak what they spoke."

People emphasize that one must eat "local maize" to speak properly. It's a common topic of conversation that the further you go from a community, the more distinct the dialect of the local language becomes and the more different their clothing and customs are. In Western thought, we would explain this by noting that languages and customs tend to diverge when communities are split into sub-groups based on class, distance, social relationships, and even family groupings. But among highland Maya traditionalists, language is a function of the food they eat, particularly maize. No traditional Maya would ever eat a meal without maize because that is literally what forms their flesh, blood, and identity. But this must be local maize, or that person will not speak properly or integrate into the community's standards and rules of conduct. Their view of the world explains why young people who leave their communities forget how to speak the language and adopt non-Maya ways of dress and behavior. When outsiders such as tourists come to a highland Maya community, locals generally forgive their inability to speak Mayan languages or minor infractions of conduct that would be considered appalling if done by a Maya. This is because outsiders are not really considered to be the same species. They are wheat people, Big Mac people, or Kentucky Fried Chicken people. They may be perfectly good people in their way, but they are not of the same flesh and can't be expected to understand.

Feasting with the Gods

Before the Spanish Invasion of the K'iche' nation in 1524, ritual feasting was a significant part of the ceremonial life of the highland Maya. Fr. Bartolomé de Las Casas, writing soon after this invasion, described the feast celebrated at the conclusion of New Years' rites among the ancient highland Maya:

> On that day there were great feasts in which they ate many birds, and much game, and they drank diverse wines, mostly the highest lord and the high priest who celebrated from one house to the other in town. They danced and leapt before the altars and gave the gods to drink of the most precious wines, soaking their mouths and faces….
>
> Each afternoon they walked in procession with great songs and music, bearing this principal idol, or as many as there were, placing them in eminent places; and there the lords played ball before him and the rest (Las Casas 1958:clxxvii, 152, translation by author).

Francisco Ximénez served as a parrish priest in the K'iche' region in the first years of the eighteenth century. He wrote a history of the K'iche' people based on writings compiled soon after the Spanish invasion that in many cases are now lost. Based on one of these texts, he wrote that in Pre-Columbian times, the images of the ancient K'iche' gods were brought from their temples to join in the great feasts, receiving the same food and drink that the mortal celebrants consumed (Ximénez 1929:I, xxx, 85-86; see also Carmack and Mondloch 1983:196). Such shared meals between gods and people continue in the Maya highlands today. As Vogt (1976:1) wrote concerning the Maya of Zinacantán, "men eat what the gods eat," and the interaction between humans and gods in such ceremonies is considered essential to a good life and the regeneration of the universe. Food and

drink are "the medium of contact with the gods":

> Although Zinacantecos of low status may sit around the foot of the ritual table, no one sits at the head. There the ancestral gods preside and partake of the liquor and food served. Their living descendants are arranged in such a way that the elder ones are seated at the sides of the head of the table, next to the gods . . . With the gods invited to join and partake of the meal, liquor is served from the same glass to all in the house, an action expressing communality and continuity from the deceased ancestors down to the youngest Zinacanteco (Vogt 1976:41).

The seating order at the table reinforces the social system, both uniting people with gods as mediators and reinforcing the hierarchy within that system. As Houston and his co-authors suggest, feasting among the ancient Maya served to socially homogenize participants, constructing intimacy, a "sense of social bond and community," and even kinship (Houston et al. 2006:102). Ceremonial feasting unites those who participate physically and socially, making the substance of the specially prepared maize part of people's flesh, the living embodiments of their ancestors who

Figure 3. Maize blessing ceremony, Cofradía San Juan, Santiago Atitlán.

Figure 4. Sacred chest carved with split-cob maize, Cofradía San Juan, Santiago Atitlán.

share with them the same divine maize flesh and blood.

Feasting of this kind is taken very seriously, and it's not merely a friendly form of hospitality or a casual celebration. Ruth Bunzel wrote in the mid-twentieth century that the K'iche's were not "hospitable" and did not invite strangers to eat with them (Bunzel 1952:44). Even after many weeks of working closely with certain families that had been otherwise welcoming and friendly, she wrote with some regret that they never asked her to share a meal with them. This has been my experience as well. Even with K'iche's that I considered close friends, it was rare to be invited to eat with them. Even when invited to a meal, I was generally seated at a table in a separate room from where the family was eating. At the time, I interpreted this as some kind of honor as most families ate seated on the floor or on mats around the cooking hearth. I was very wrong.

At one point, a K'iche' friend of mine came to visit me accompanied by his wife, which he had never done before. They were unusually solemn and formally invited me to dinner, emphasizing that I would be eating *with* the family. When I arrived, each family member hugged me and invited me to sit with them on a mat near the hearth. Throughout the meal, after a few bites, one of the family members would lift their food in my direction and give me a little blessing, a wish for good health, or encourage me to eat more. From that evening on, my relationship with the family changed. I was hugged more, included more in the family's daily activities, and insulted in good-natured ways typical of K'iche' households. As my friend's wife told me during that first meal, we were now family, and we always would be. The phrase she used was *amaq'el, chib'e q'ij saq* ("forever, as long as the sun shines").

Figure 5. Offering of Maatz' atole, Cofradía Santa Cruz, Santiago Atitlán.

Feasting and *Cofradía* Houses

In most larger traditional K'iche'an Maya communities, formal ritual practices are focused on the *cofradía* house, dedicated to the veneration of a particular deity or saint. Ritual feasting and drinking in honor of the gods and saints are significant activities within the *cofradía* system. The interior of both sacred mountains and *cofradía* houses are conceived as the birthplace of life-giving power. Here, ceremonies are carried out that traditionalists believe influence the natural world around them. Maize, incense, rainclouds, water, fertility, and earth all combine to give birth to life itself. Thus, seed maize is brought to the *cofradía* house to be blessed (Figure 3). Many of the most sacred belongings of the *cofradía* are kept in a sacred chest in the house, and it is marked with a massive carved ear of split-cob maize flanked by cacao pods (Figure 4). The principal elder of the *cofradía* house explained that split-cob maize is the "heart of maize and of people. It is the source of power for everything."

The *alcalde*, or head of the *cofradía*, provides a ceremonial meal to accompany important ceremonial observances within the *cofradía* house. This meal generally consists of a piece of boiled meat in a peppery sauce, accompanied by steamed tamalitos wrapped in leaves, salt, and a beverage—either *aguardiente*, a locally made liquor called "canyon water," maize coffee, or a carbonated drink such as Coca Cola. On the most sacred ritual occasions within the *cofradía* house, the participants also prepare a drink called *maatz'*, an atole made from maize that is toasted, ground fine, and

placed in a boiling pot of water, often with small bits of unground maize (Figure 5). When the latter is added the mixture is conceived as a "woman who gives birth to children." Cacao is often added as well, which is considered a kind of divine "maize" that the gods and ancestors eat. Ruth Bunzel (1952:44) wrote that in Chichicastenango, maize atole, often mixed with cacao, is the principal ceremonial drink and that any important ritual includes bringing a jar of atole. It is always the first offering of meals within the *cofradías*. Bunzel (1952: 45-46) suggests that such meals are not simply a courtesy but an essential part of the ceremony and are sacramental in nature. Part of the ritual is the veneration of the food itself. Ceremonial food is brought to the *cofradía* by participants in full ceremonial dress. A rocket is set off when the food leaves the bearer's home and again when the food arrives at the *cofradía* house. There, the jars of atole are greeted with long speeches, accompanied by music.

In the *cofradía* meals at Santiago Atitlan, individual bowls of meat are brought from the cooking house and given to each of the participants in turn seated at the table in general order of their rank within the *cofradía* system. The tamalitos are brought in a single vessel, and all take from it. Once all have been served, the *alcalde* gives a formal speech thanking first a series of gods and ancestors for providing the food to be eaten (Figure 6). He prays that the food will strengthen the participants so that their minds and hearts will have renewed life, their arms and legs will be able to endure the work they are required to do, and their necks and backs will bear their weight in their pathways. Often the *alcalde* will speak of their work as a burden they must bear, no matter the weight or the difficulty. This burden is made tolerable by the food that the gods and ancestors bring to them. According to E. Michael Mendelson, an anthropologist who worked in Santiago Atitlán in the early 1950s, ritual feasts are an essential part of *cofradía* obligation and the participants refer to them as a "service" (Mendelson 1957:135).

Figure 6. Alcalde, Cofradía San Juan, Santiago Atitlán.

The wording and gestures of the *alcalde* imply that the gods and ancestors are present at the

feast. Indeed, the table where the food and drink are consumed stands perpendicular to the altar and chests that bear the *cofradía's* patron deities and saints. When referring, for example, to the Heart of the Sky, the *alcalde* looks up and gestures toward the sky with his hand. He looks down and gestures toward the ground when referring to the Heart of the Earth. When the name of each deceased ancestor is mentioned, the *alcalde* gestures with his hand toward the table as if they were seated there along with the living. The understanding is that in calling upon each deity or ancestor, they are acknowledged as being present. The *alcalde* lists each participant by name and title and calls on the patron saint of the *cofradía* to bless that individual so that the soles of their feet, knees, heart, arms, head, and thoughts will have power and that nothing harmful will happen to them during the year.

Having finished his formal prayer, the *alcalde* addresses each participant individually by rank and encourages them to eat and take a drink. In turn, those seated at the table raise a bit of their food or drink first toward the altar, then toward the *alcalde*, and then to each participant present in general order, thanking them. Each individual acknowledges this gesture of gratitude in turn before moving on to the next person (which makes eating rather difficult with constant interruption to thank those present or to acknowledge their gestures of gratitude in return). A bit of drink, and sometimes a morsel of food, is splashed onto the table or floor as an offering to the gods and ancestors so that they may join in the feast.

Because participants eat the same food and drink from the same table, in a sense, they share a common body. Of course, ancestors were once living community members, and their descendants bear the same flesh and blood. Even the saints appear to share this corporeal bond. On one occasion, the wife of the *alcalde* of the Cofradía of San Juan remarked, "We will all one day be saints like these on the altar" (Andrew Weeks, personal communication, 2016). For the Maya, saints and ancestors are not transcendent above the living in material ways, differing more in rank and status. Nevertheless, on ceremonial occasions, they all interact, including sharing food and drink.

Feasting with the Ancestors

Prior to the Spanish Invasion ritual feasting was a significant part of the ceremonial life of the highland Maya. The *Popol Vuh* notes that feasting and drinking were a major, if not the major, function of the Great Houses that each lineage constructed at their capital city of Q'umarkaj (Figure 7). This is especially true regarding bride negotiations (Christenson 2007:265-267). Feasting served to unite families with bonds that were based on shared flesh, not simply matrimonial ties:

> And yet again they began to feast and to drink to their daughters. They who were called the Three Great Houses gathered together to celebrate. They would drink their drinks and eat their food, and this alone was the bride price for their sisters and their daughters. There was only joy in their hearts when they feasted within their great houses (Christenson 2007:265).

The Title of Totonicapán, composed a year or two before the Popol Vuh, also describes these feasts, including a description of a sample menu served in ancient times:

> They exchanged their daughters between themselves. They bore their daughters to the drinkers of sweet drink. They were given to the poor and the widowers. They went to their homes to give them: "We give her to you without cost, we offer her to you," they said.

Figure 7. Great Houses, Q'umarkaj.

> Merely one large jar of cacao and one gourd cup of guacamole; merely one vessel of food of some kind and one platter with the thigh of a wild pig; merely one gourd vessel of maize tamales wrapped in *q'anaq'* leaves and *kub'* leaves. This was the price for their daughters that they set. It was done there at Chi Ismachi'.
>
> Thus they came together, these three nations of the K'iche' (Christenson 2022).

Until recently, courting was a highly formalized ritual in the Guatemalan highlands. It focused on feasting as a means of bringing a new bride into the family, thus joining two separate lineages into the same flesh. Ancestors are an integral part of this process and must be included in all aspects of the bride negotiations and eventual marriage. Gifts to the prospective bride's parents extend over a considerable period and mainly consist of food, particularly maize atole and cacao (Bunzel 1952:25). Atole is an essential part of this gift exchange throughout the Guatemalan highlands. While various food gifts may be given during bride petition ceremonies in the Tz'utujil Maya town of Santiago Atitlán, maize atole is always included. Wealthy families may give additional gifts as a means of impressing the girl's parents, but atole must be given by the family of even the poorest of hopeful bridegrooms (Mendelson 1957:61-62).

The marriage feast joins the two families in a far more profound way than in most societies. Having eaten maize together, the two families become literally of one flesh and are no longer considered separate lineages. Thus, after the girl enters the boy's home, there can be no further intermarriage between the two families—ever. Such a union would be considered incestuous.

As we have seen, food was also an essential part of marriage negotiations among the ancient Maya. According to the Popol Vuh, no gift exchange other than food was necessary or even desirable

among the earliest ancestors of the K'iche' people (Christenson 2007:265). Later, when the lineages fell into dissension and broke apart, the demand for more than food and drink during bride negotiations was blamed for the split. It is also significant that the outward expression of this dissent was the desecration of the ancestral dead—the most violent means possible of breaking familial ties:

> And yet they were also divided because there began to be contention. They began to envy each other regarding the bride price for their sisters and their daughters. For it was no longer merely food and drink that they demanded. This, then, was the root of their division. They turned on each other, desecrating the bones and the skulls of the dead (Christenson 2007:267).

Digging up the bones of the dead is a chilling choice of insult—it means the rejection of common family ancestry established through ritual feasting in the past. All families have tiffs; however, this represents the permanent severing of blood ties.

Conclusion

In modern K'iche' communities, maize continues to be not only a staple of their diet, but essential to their concept of self. In a very literal sense, traditionalist K'iche's consider themselves to be the people of maize. Reciprocity is central to their way of looking at the world. They would not exist if it were not for maize. By the same token, maize could not exist without the people who lovingly plant the seeds, tend their maize fields, harvest the mature crops, and prepare it on a daily basis to feed their families. They continue to be the mediators that their ancient book, the Popol Vuh, declared them to be in the sixteenth century. The cultivation of maize reflects the great cycles of the world first set in motion by the ancient gods and perpetuated by the humans they created for this purpose.

Nearly fifty years ago, I was working on a K'iche' language dictionary in a remote area of the western highlands of Guatemala near Cunén. I chose this area because little Spanish was spoken there (at the time), and the language was relatively free of foreign-language loan words. One morning I was working on vocabulary related to medicinal plants with a young couple well-known in the area for their knowledge of traditional remedies. They had a little three-year-old daughter who played alongside her mother as she ground maize dough for the morning meal. Maize is never ground dry for every day use. The kernels are boiled in water mixed with lime to soften the hard shell of the maize grains and then left to soak overnight in a large pot. The maize is then ground on a volcanic stone, adding water periodically to keep the resulting dough moist. Both mother and father became so absorbed in our discussion about traditional remedies that the woman lost track of what her daughter was doing. She had gotten into the pot of maize grains, and several of them had dropped through her fingers to the hard-packed dirt floor near the family hearth. When the mother noticed what had happened, she immediately stopped what she was doing, gently took the remaining grains from her daughter's hand, put them back in the pot, and placed her daughter on her lap. Then one by one, she picked up each kernel of maize that had fallen to the ground, carefully wiped every speck of dirt from it with her apron, kissed it, and placed it back in the pot. By the time she had picked up the last kernel, she was crying—we all were. Finally, she held her daughter close and said: "We must always respect our maize. It is our mother, it is our father, we are its children."

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The Dynamic Relationship of Food and Indigenous Language: A Case Study of K'iche' Food

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Abstract. *This paper draws on anthropological linguistics and food studies to examine how K'iche' Maya foodways are elucidated by the study of interactions between language and the materiality of food. The meaning and symbolism of food emerge from the diverse social and cultural settings in which people live. How people talk about food relates to how their cultural identities form around it, all of which become embedded in its physical substance. Thus, the conceptual development of food is inseparable from the structural development of language. In this sense, Indigenous languages in K'iche' communities highlight the importance of cultural meaning, spirituality, and agricultural practices that are interwoven with foodways. From this perspective, the conceptual and structural ties between food and language highlight their intrinsic relationship. By exploring this relationship, this paper examines how K'iche' Mayan language gives food culture a legacy of meanings that have persisted through time.*

Keywords: *Food, Language, K'iche', Guatemala, Foodways.*

Since 2018, I have carried out a long-term study of K'iche' foodways with a sample of ten women and their families in a small K'iche' Maya community located in *Chi u wi' meq'in ja'* (Totonicapán), in the Guatemala highlands. Once, I asked these women why *wa* (i.e., corn-based food like tortillas or tamales) are so important to them. One woman responded "without *wa* in the meal, we don't have food." In my personal and professional experience as a Guatemalan Maya, the conceptualization of corn-based food through the Mayan root "*wa*" is a crucial concept anchored in a legacy of food, language, and identity which is central to K'iche' Maya foodways.

Through more interviews, I acquired more information about why people associate with food and language. One quote from a K'iche' Maya woman I interviewed was particularly enlightening. After asking her about the meaning of *Ixim* (Maize) to her, she responded (also, see Figure 1):

"*Ri jal q'an are' kaq'alajsinik ri qawochib'al*
Ri jal saq are' kaq'alajsinik ri kasaqarik
Ri jal rexwach are' kaq'alajsinik ri uqajab'al ri q'ij".
The yellow cob represents our equality
The white cob represents the sunrise
The black cob represents the sunset.

I collected data through ethnographic and pragmatic linguistic research methods, including dietary records, in-depth interviews, and participatory observation. The collected data document both the material and sociolinguistic conditions that influence how K'iche' women make decisions about feeding themselves and their families. For most of my time in the community, I ate a lot of meals (during mealtimes), bought food, helped in food preparation, and accompanied in agricultural activities. This allowed me to connect with the K'iche' food concepts in the local language. I randomly assigned myself to families to collect data on food classification via semi-structured interviews, dietary records, and participant observation. I was part of them, as some women called me "mijo' (son), "don" (mister), and *Kel* which is my name in K'iche'. I focused on my primary interlocutor, the woman of the family, as well as secondary interlocutors that helped in food issues. The data presented here mainly derive from mealtimes as a broader synthesis of my participatory observation. To exemplify this, I examine the food lexicon of the K'iche' Indigenous Mayan language and its interconnections with enduring cultural concepts. Each of the K'iche' food domains – summarized throught this paper – must be considered to understand the multifaceted relationships between food, language, and cultural contexts.

Foodways as Food and Language

The concept of foodways has arisen as a framework for understanding the cultural attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to food elements. As first defined by Anderson (1971:2), foodways are "the whole interrelated system of food conceptualization, procurement, distribution, preservation, preparation, and consumption shared by all members of a particular group". As practices, foodways inform how people use their language and food knowledge to conceptualize and interact with social, cultural, and economic issues (Riley 2017, 2019). With a particular focus on the practices and beliefs that surround food consumption, a foodways framework allows for an understanding of cultural categorization of food; i.e., how people in a community allocate and organize food through

Figure 1. The *Ixim* Colors (all photographs by the author).

language. Foodways also address the expression of identity and agency through food. Thus, foodways are a pragmatic theoretical framework used to explore how the formal representation of knowledge and the meaning of food are organized within communities.

Foodways are also defined as material and symbolic practices linked to the production and consumption of food with a particular focus on the role of food and food-related behavior (Riley and Paugh 2018:4-8). As such, foodways offer a crucial entry point to understand the complex contours of the social, cultural, and economic facets of food. Linking food and language within the framework of foodways allows us to understand how people use language and food-related knowledge to conceptualize food (Riley 2017, 2018).

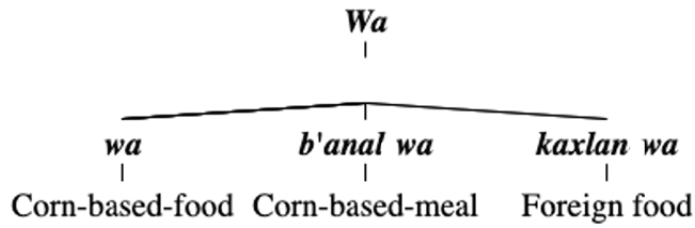

Figure 2. Food Domain of *Wa*.

Language works as a system that provides organization, structure, and hierarchy to the meaning and symbolism of food (Neuenswander and Arnold 1977; Riley and Paugh 2018; Staller and Carrasco 2009). Food and languages shape concepts in relation to one another – both dynamically and reciprocally – to articulate and elucidate food based on its specific cultural meaning. Within the context of foodways, language refers to a dynamic categorization system of semantics and semiotics. In other words, food-related language is treated as a set of symbolic and semantic resources that follow the logic of distinct foodstuffs (Duranti 1997; Riley and Paugh 2018; Salzmann et al. 2014).

Food extends beyond the classic definition of biological and chemical building blocks, specifically nutrients, to become a principal medium and object for social interaction with cultural aspects. As such, food contributes to the construction of group and individual identity (Hastorf 2020; Riley and Paugh 2018). The cultural construction of food and language may illuminate the ontology of food among Indigenous communities (e.g. K'iche' Mayan) since, to these communities, food is not only culture but a direct connection with the earth; a way of seeing the world that is both social and spiritual (Pesantubbee and Zogry 2021).

Food and language, as central elements of foodways, trigger experiences that in turn shape identity (Szatrowki 2004). In this sense, people use verbal descriptions of food when talking about its significance as an identity practice. Language also provides context for knowing and talking about food (Boerboom 2015): its production, use, exchange value, and the rituals of its consumption constitute a kind of food language with real-world implications. Food language thus illuminates the interconnectedness between people and the impacts of globalization (Jurafsky 2014); the words used by individuals to describe food illuminate both the past and present. Food and language also have symbolic elements that work to maintain transnational identities, from conceptual ideas to concrete realities, which in turn shape cultural food practices and meals (Balirano 2019). Thus, food and language reflect intimate and meaningful manifestations of cultural experiences.

In southern Mesoamerica, the cradle of Maya civilization, the legacy of Indigenous Mayan languages and food interactions is particularly rich. The cultural practices of contemporary Maya communities reflect certain continuities from past to present. For example, ancient Maya representations from ceramic vessels and stone stelae found in archaeological context often describe food elements shared by modern Maya cultural traditions (Demarest 2004; Houston 2001; Staller and Carrasco 2009). These archeological records suggest that food-related terminology and its related structures are deeply embedded in Maya culture, including that of K'iche' people (Aissen et al. 2017; Justeson 1986; Kaufman 1987; Macri 1997; MacNeil 2009; Taube 1989). Thus, the interwoven domains of food and language may lay the groundwork for the identity practice of contemporary K'iche' Maya communities.

K'iche' Maya Foodways

Modern Guatemala has two main population groups: Ladinos (of Indigenous and Spanish ancestry) and Indigenous Mayas. According to the National Institute of Statistics of Guatemala, 41.7% of the population is Indigenous, representing 22 linguistic Mayan communities with distinct languages and cultures (CENSO 2018). K'iche' Mayan is the largest linguistic group, with about one million speakers. Most of the K'iche ethnic group lives in the Western Highlands of Guatemala in the departments of Quiche, Totonicapán, Quetzaltenango, and Sololá. Most K'iche' speak their native language and a variable amount of Spanish, but some isolated, rural communities speak only K'iche' (Lewis 2001). Importantly, K'iche' people understand and articulate food concepts through the K'iche' language.

While most scholarship on Mayan languages has focused on their linguistic structures independent of a consideration of foodways (e.g. Aissen 2017; Kaufman 1974; Mondloch 2017; Sapón 2000; Tumm 2001), a few studies have explicitly studied these as related phenomena. For example, in Guatemala, Butler and Arnold (1977) document how Tzutujil Maya communities classify maize based on land and climate in order to produce specific meanings that shape local cultural concepts of maize based on their language. Neuenswander (1977) describes how the K'iche' of *Chi uwi' la* (Chichicastenango) have domains of *wa* (corn-based food) and *riki'l* (food served as a side to a meal). Trabanino (2012) also describes how K'iche' women of *Chi u wi' meq'in ja'* (Totonicapán) use the food concept of *Joch'* (hot local beverage), which is consumed during community celebrations to commemorate religious practices.

Wa and Ixim

Exploring the dynamic relationship between K'iche' food and language can shed light on the ancient Maya heritage of contemporary foodways. For centuries, writing, phonetics, and speech have maintained the legacy of food. Archaeological and ethnohistoric data suggest that corn-based foods such as tamales and tortillas are represented by the word *wa* in Classic Maya art and text (Hull 2010; Justeson 1986; Macri 1997; Taube 1989). Linguistics also demonstrates how *wa* has been consistently used since the Classic Period (250–900 CE; Staller and Carrasco 2009; Staller et al. 2016). K'iche' people use the word *wa* in the context of corn-based food and as a root for the intransitive verb *-wa'ik* (to eat). Additionally, the root *wa* is used to describe a domain of food as well as relevant sub-categories in current K'iche' communities (Figure 2).

Similarly, linguistic and archaeological documentation holds that *ixim* is the ancient Mayan word root for maize and that it has been consistently used for millennia (Brown 2006). In fact, some forms of the ancient Mayan hieroglyph for *ixim* may also have referred to the Maize deity as a way to embed the concept of *ixim* in concepts of sacredness (Bassie 2014; Wagner 2017). For the K'iche', *ixim* signifies sustenance and forms the basis for the cultural, agronomic, and religious organization of communities. The uses of the term *ixim* can shed light on fundamental elements that support communal connections in the Maya area. Even the *Popol Wuj*, a written account of the origins of K'iche' people transmitted orally for generations, describes the centrality of *ixim* in the identity of Maya people (Tedlock 1969). For example, the *Popol Wuj* describes how human beings were created with *ixim* (Colop 1999: 120, Figure 3). As Christenson holds, "This symbolic

K'iche'

Pan Paxıl,
Pan K'ayala' ub'i',
xpe wi q'ana jal,
saqi jal.
Are k'u kib'i' chikop
wa' k'amol recha':
yak,
utiw,
k'el,
joj.
E kajib' chi chikop xb'in utzijel q'ana jal,
saqi jal, chi ke.
Chila' kepe wi pan Paxil,
Xk'ut ub'e'el Paxil.
Are k'ut xkiriqo ri echa' .
Are k'ut xok utyo'jil winaq tz' aq,
winaq b'it.

English

Inside Paxil,
Inside K'ayala' its name,
came yellow ears of maize,
white ears of maize.
These therefore their names animals,
These obtainers their food:
Fox,
Coyote,
Parakeet,
Raven.
They four animals, named its account, yellow ears of ripe maize,
white ears of ripe maize to them.
There they come inside Paxil.
Indicated its path Paxil,
This therefore they found the food,
this therefore entered their flesh people framed,
people shaped.

Spanish

De Paxil
de K 'ayala', así llamados
vinieron las mazorcas amarillas,
las mazorcas blancas.
Éstos son los nombres de los animales
los que obtuvieron el alimento:
la zorra,
el coyote,
la cotorra,
el cuervo.
Fueron cuatro animales los que trajeron noticia de las mazorcas amarillas
de la mazorcas blancas.
Ellos venían d Pan Paxil,
y fueron los que enseñaron el camino a Paxil.
Allí encontraron el alimento,
los ingredientes para el cuerpo de la gente creada,
la gente formada.

Figure 3. Popol Wuj: The Creation of Human Being.

connection between maize and human beings is an ancient concept evident also in the Popol Vuh. In the account of the creation, the gods came together in the primordial sea to determine how the world was to be made" (2009:581). *Ixim* is a vital element coined in the food identity of K'iche' population. Accordingly, *ixim* is not only the staple food of Maya communities, it is also the main element connecting the individual and the nuclear family with the rest of the community. In this context, *ixim* becomes a central element through which support systems, kinship, and spiritual connection become evident (De Beausset and Cuj 2016). The distinctive cultural elements around *ixim* production, transformation, and consumption are revealed by examining its uses as food, especially in symbolically rich meals and beverages. Clearly, the concept of *ixim* is quite significant for K'iche' communities.

The examples of *wa* and *ixim* highlight the historical relevance of these roots in K'iche' language. Even today, both words have been adapted to express new concepts in K'iche' food language. For example, *kaxlan wa* refers to foreign food (bread and cookies) and *Iximulew* (the land of maize) is the K'iche' word for Guatemala.

Food and Language Legacy among the Contemporary K'iche'

Archaeological and epigraphic work has documented additional foods that were particularly significant to the ancient Maya, such as cacao (Carter and Matsumoto 2020; McNeil 2009) and beans (Brown 2009; Tokovinine 2014). Beyond maize, these studies highlight how multiple traditional Maya foods

K'iche'	English	Spanish
Ch'a'm	Sour	Agrio
K'a	Bitter	Acido
Ki	Sweet	Dulce
Tza	Salty	Salado
K'ok'	Aromatic	Aromatico
Chu'	Pestilential	Pestilente
Nin	Rancid	Rancio
Poqon	Spicy	Picante
Chaqo'n	Thick food	Comida espesa
Kok'	Not thick food	Comido no espesa

Table 1. K'iche' Food Adjectives of Flavor.

have deep ancestral roots which make them legacy resources for forming cultural practices and identities.

Today, the people of *Chi u wi' meq'in ja'* (Totonicapán) use their K'iche' language to give meaning to food experience beyond the traditional *meq'in* (hot) and *joron* (cold) concepts. The organoleptic (sensory) properties of food describe its physical characteristics as perceived by the senses, such as its taste, texture, smell, color or temperature. Yet, conventional organoleptic categories do not fit how K'iche' people describe their sensory experience of food in their indigenous language. Indeed, culturally-specific K'iche' categories desscribe food experiences based on local knowledge about flavors and smells (Table 1).

Table 1 showcases the ways in which the K'iche' use language to underline the importance of identity, cultural meaning, and consumption practices interwoven with food. K'iche' sensory characteristics of food are influenced by cultural values and categories that operate in relation to the land and communities within which individuals are born and grow, as well as in relation to localized sociolinguistic traits. K'iche' foods have symbolic meaning beyond purchase and preparation for meeting the physical needs of the family. Beyond substance, flavor, and texture, the K'iche' have sociolinguistic categories for food defined by temporality. Such categories include "solid corn food base", "solid non-corn food base", "spicy food", "liquid food" (including drinks and hot beverages), and "food served between meal times" (Cuj 2020; Cuj et al. 2020; Cuj et al. 2021).

The sociolinguistic domains listed in Table 2 show how K'iche' people have maintained community, social cohesion, organization, and Indigenous knowledge to preserve traditional food as well as to incorporate newly available—and often heavily advertised—foods in local markets (e.g., *Xaq munil* to refer to snacks). K'iche' food categories engage with the complex roles of foodways in many spheres of cultural ideation in ways which differ from conventional western food groups. Indeed, sociolinguistic domains of K'iche' food are based on cultural concepts and language that differ from biomedical and nutritional knowledge. These characteristics reflect how the K'iche' Maya have maintained community cohesion, social organization, and indigenous knowledge to preserve food and language elements threatened by current food transitions despite adverse systemic pressure. In other words, K'iche' people use an organized and allocated food logic to give cultural interpretations that constitute an Indigenous ontology of food. This ontology reflects how the dynamic relationship between food and K'iche' language is a central tie for binding communities together.

Figure 4. *Q'aq'* (Maya stove).

The commensality of mealtimes – when social groups gather to eat and talk – provides the perfect occasion for culturally-specific aspects of K'iche' foodways. For example, K'iche' women eat around the traditional *q'aq'* (local Maya stove, see Figure 4) to ensure that the food is hot and adequate to eat while men eat at the table. Around the *q'aq'*, K'iche' women use an index language to describe cooking processes with onomatopoeic verbs. For example, the verb *poq'owik* (to boil) emulates the sound of boiling water. K'iche' women also use the verb *lejenik* (to make tortillas) which emulates the sound of shaping the tortilla dough. Through this practice, K'iche' women use their language to reproduce K'iche' terms about their foodways (see figure 5).

Other good examples of K'iche' terms and foodstuffs (as displayed in Figure 5) include *sub'*

K'iche'	English	Spanish
Wa	Corn-based food	Comida a base de maiz
Riki'l	Non-corn-based food (served as a side to a meal)	Comida no basada en maiz (servido como acompañamiento de una comida)
Kunel	Seasoning / condiment	Sazonadores / condimientos
Xaq munil	Snacks	Meriendas / Bocadillos
Xaq kaqatijo	Food served between meal times	Refacciones (comida servida entre comidas)
Meq'in	Hot Beverage	Bebidas calientes (Atoles)

Table 2. K'iche' Food Groups.

(corn-tamalitos), *joch'* (local hot beverage), *kinaq'* (beans), and *q'or* (corn dough). Through these mealtime exchanges around the *q'aq'*, this food terminology becomes part of the daily commensal practices of K'iche' women. In this food context, K'iche' language reproduces native words in meal, food, and nutrition conversations that women use to maintain food and linguistic identity. From a language perspective, cultural food practices focus on people's relationships with food and how these impact individual, familial, and community behaviors surrounding commensality, especially through food language. These practices include beliefs and behaviors surrounding food which shape cultural and linguistic practices. Food language encompasses the way in which people express personal and sociocultural meanings through their food habits (Riley and Paugh 2018), including the production, marketing, preparation, and consumption of foodstuffs.

Discussion

People eat food, not nutrients, as noted by several scholars studying the cultural elements of food (Hastorf 2016; Hawkins 2007; King 2003; Neuenswander and Arnold 1977; Staller and Carrasco 2009; Staller et al. 2016). The ways in which a given people speak about food stem from shared cultural elements as well as linguistic structures, individual experiences, and perceptions. The language we use to talk about food thus reflects a culture of eating and provides a framework to interpret food-related behavior. Language and food advocacy—along with many other disciplines and Indigenous activism—needs to consider the central relationship between food and language in shaping broader cultural approaches to food. Importantly, the fact that food has been popularly understood in terms of biology does not mean that cultural conceptions of food have less value. This approach can contribute to understanding how food and its logic impact ontology and language according to varying cultural contexts.

Food and language are fundamental elements of cultural identities. K'iche' foodways open a

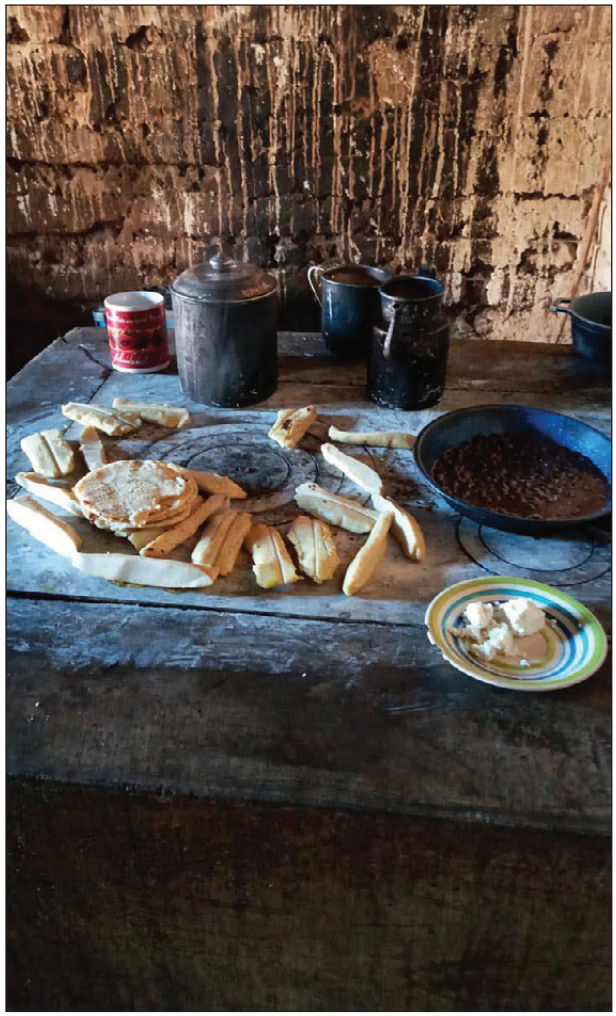

Figure 5. A classic *Q'aq'* (Maya Stove) with foodstuff.

pragmatic avenue evaluate the importance of cultural practices such as digestibility, cooking, and eating Indigenous context. Since Guatemalan Indigenous Maya people are some of the most affected populations with regards to food issues such as chronic malnutrition (Bogin 2022), it is of paramount importance to harness the approach of social sciences in highlighting the centrality of culture and language in defining foodways.

As Christenson points out, specifically Maya foods such as *ixim* are essential to all the aspects of their cultural identity, ritual practices, familial relationships, and even their ability to speak their language properly (2009:599). K'iche' mealtimes constitute private-family spaces where food and language elements arise to tie livelihood and are perfect sites to capture cultural food concepts. The seating orders at the table and around the *q'aq'* define commensal spheres of exchange for Maya dialogues, as well a place where the sharing of food is the central element. The wording and gestures of each of the mealtime participants pave the way for an in-depth analysis of onomatopoeic verbs, names of food, and allocation of specific meals.

While this paper addresses the important interplay between cultural elements and food, we must remember that these only represent one approach to the complex topic of foodways. Nutritional deficiency has been recognized for specific foods that have high cultural importance. For example, maize may be a culturally significant food, but it also carries a lysine and tryptophan deficiency; both of which are essential amino acids in human nutrition. Yet, combining maize with beans provides a complete protein. Nonetheless, as discussed above, maize is vital to the K'iche' social fabric since it enables the integration of cultural aspects of food that may in turn impact nutrition. The intent of this paper is to recognize the cultural and linguistic importance of food without overlooking its nutritional aspects. As a result, I hope to open the door for new approaches to study food as simultaneously nutritional and cultural.

Conclusion

Words from the past serve as social memory in the present. Understanding how language and food are entangled in K'iche' foodways shines a light on the cultural and indentitarian practices forming the cultural legacy of Indigenous K'iche' communities of Guatemala. Paying attention to the connections between food and Mayan languages preserves and promotes cultural and historical heritages. A focus on Mayan languages and food, with their culturally specific concepts and complexities, also pays respect to the speakers' own knowledge systems and helps combat misconceptions that stem from centuries of colonialism and discrimination. Mayan languages influence how food is perceived and understood within Maya sociocultural contexts. Within the Guatemalan context, describing language and food is complicated by the disctinct cultural logics of its 22 Mayan linguistic communities, whose definitions of food resources and languages vary considerably. However, these variations share common points for understanding food and language together, thus allowing the language of food to emerge.

Archaeological and ethnohistorical resources offer a wealth of data on the roots of food as contextualized in Mayan languages in the deep and recent past. Tracing these cultural, linguistic, and biological histories from the past to the present is key for promoting and respecting culturally specific understandings of food by Indigenous peoples in Guatemala, including K'iche' communities. By documenting the interaction between food and language in the K'iche' Maya context, this paper helps fill the significant knowledge gap in our holistic understanding and evaluation of cultural fooways, and can hopefully inform others' understandings of the important link betwen Indigenous languages and foodways.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank the K'iche' women of *Chi u wi' meq'in ja'* for their feedback on a draft of this article, for the stimulating discussions on K'iche' Mayan language, Maya culture, Maya food, and cuisine, and for their help with regard to Mayan linguistics. I would also like to thank the Center for Latin American Studies and Anthropology Department at Vanderbilt University. Finally, I want to acknowledge reviewers and editors for the feedback that substantially improved earlier versions of this manuscript.

All research processes for this study were carried out in accordance with Vanderbilt's Institutional Review Board (IRB# 170404 and IRB# 201038) and the Institute of Nutrition of Central America and Panama (INCAP's, IRB # 096-2020) research allowances.

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Book Review:

Mayalogue: An Interactionist Theory of Indigenous Cultures. VICTOR MONTEJO. 2021. SUNY Press. Albany. 258 pp. $95.00 (hardcover), ISBN: 9781438485751

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In his latest work, Victor Montejo – Jakaltek Maya scholar and emeritus professor of Native American Studies at the University of California, Davis – seeks to problematize the relationship between Indigenous peoples and anthropologists. His point of departure is Jakaltek culture, particularly with reference to his experience growing up in the western highlands of Guatemala and the intent "is to discuss how Native knowledge is produced (Maya epistemology) by referring to the traditional knowledge that I learned as a child and as a Maya man who has lived and struggled between two worlds" (6). Jakaltek culture is presented as an extension of the other Maya linguistic communities in Mesoamerica, and linkages between Maya worldviews and those of other Indigenous communities in the Americas and in other parts of the world are emphasized through the work. Beyond the need to decolonize the relationship between academics and Indigenous peoples foregrounded in work, the desire is to create a space for interaction and conversation that moves beyond critique and highlights the importance of building "a Native theory as contribution to the dialogue between anthropologists and Natives" (1).

For Montejo, the "Mayalogue" transcends Western binaries and "include[s] the nonhuman persons as part of the cosmic web of life we call *quinal*, which means *life, time, and existence*" (1). To illustrate this shift in perspective, the work engages Maya culture and history as well as the contributions of Indigenous and non-indigenous scholars past and present to "argue that those traditional communities [studied by anthropologists engaged in 'salvage' ethnography] had their own philosophy of life that was based on an interactionist mode between humans, nature, and the supernatural world" (20). The work provides a primer on the arc of anthropological theories that marked Indigenous peoples as savages, or at best as barbarians, from the standpoint of Western (and academic) culture, and it serves as a response to denialist theories that served as "racist statements that negate the human abilities of Indigenous People to produce knowledge" (39). In response, Montejo reflects on how Mayalogue is grounded in both empirical knowledge and "the ideological understanding of the world and life" found in the *Popol Vuh*, which is reflected in the Maya calendar "used as a unifying element of universal categories" (12). The influence of Maya cosmology is unpacked in the attention given to a range of customary beliefs and practices: oral

tradition and mythology; Maya conceptions of cycles of time and the flow of history; the relationship between the human person and our animal spirit bearer (*yijomal spixan*); and ideas of community service embodied in the Mesoamerican cargo system that has its own counterpart in Maya cosmology where the four year bearers take their place "at the four corners of earth sustaining the heavens and take turns carrying the year's load" (163). This comprehensive view of life reveals the Mayalogue as "a trialogue or *komontatism* approach to cultures (*a community of beings and their relationships*), where Indigenous People understand themselves as part of a whole in a continuous process of reciprocity" (45). Reciprocal interrelationships are inscribed on the landscape in the way in which house construction mirrors the shape of the universe (48), the *Witz-ak'al* is given thanks as "the guardian of the mountains and valleys" (65), and Maya crosses present in local communities represent the continuing presence of the supernatural in daily life (168).

The larger message of the book is that Maya (and other Indigenous) cosmocentric perspectives build on myths that show how humans are engaged in "a continuous process of world building, world maintenance, world dismantling, and world renewal" (222-223). This tracks with contemporary concerns for environmental justice or earth care in other discursive contexts, and Montejo's contribution is in the insistence that "Native belief systems" are pertinent in global conversations about ecology and the human place in the cosmos, in the growing acceptance of "the tri-focal philosophy of connectedness between humans, nature, and the supernatural world" (223). The COVID-19 pandemic is mentioned as an example of the possibility of disruption at the global scale. In the face of such disruption, the book's last chapter is titled "Prophetic Cycles and World Renewal." The Mayalogue, then, depends not only on the teaching of the ancestors but extends into a future yet to be apprehended. In an earlier chapter introducing readers to Maya cycles of time and the Maya calendar as foundational for both knowledge and action, Montejo remarks that "to know is to understand our responsibilities as humans and recognize the 'dignity' of other living beings, while constructing a world of respect, peace, and brotherhood" (96). Towards the end of the work, he comments on the attention that Maya views of time received on 21 December 2012, the end of the roughly 5200-year period since the inception of ancestral Maya time. While we don't know what the future holds, one key to making sense of Maya cycles of time is to note that 2013 "was the beginning of another set of thirteen *b'ak'tuns* (13 x 400)" that won't end until the year 7212 (225). In Montejo's words, "As human beings we cannot avoid the cosmic cycles through which earth must go as it follows its path through the universe. For this reason, we must rethink and correct our actions in relation to the natural world, and the unknown powers and mysteries of the universe" (226).

Montejo has produced a book worthy of consideration, particularly by undergraduates receiving their first exposure to Maya culture and those with interests in epistemology and the comparative study of knowledge systems that take Indigenous worldviews seriously. Unfortunately, the work would be stronger with a more complete editing regimen by SUNY Press. It is not always clear which Mayan language is used when words are translated from English, and consistent errors in text references and in the formatting of the bibliography also detract from the work. Still, the focus here should be on Montejo's effort to frame the Mayalogue, "a trialogical communication and interaction practiced by Indigenous People for the maintenance of unity and harmony in a more balanced world" (100). In a world where all too often we can hardly hear each other over the clamor focused on particularistic desires, this is an essential discourse for the human journey.

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