# The Protestant Ethic and Development Ethos: Cacao and Changing Cultural Values among the Mopan Maya of Belize

Erik Nathaniel Stanley Orlando, Florida

M.A Anthropology. University of Virginia, 2009M.A. Anthropology, Florida State University, 2005B.A. Anthropology, University of Central Florida, 2003

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#### **Erik Stanley**

Title: The Protestant Ethic and Development Ethos: Cacao and Changing Cultural Values among the Mopan Maya of Belize

#### Abstract:

My dissertation employs a Weberian perspective to explore the cultural manifestation of Protestantism and the Spirit of Capitalism in indigenous Mopan Maya society. To this end, I trace how cacao has been transformed from a once sacred plant at the heart of Mopan spiritual ecology to a secular commodity bound for the world market. Cacao's deep history and spiritual importance among the Mopan make it an ideal focus for examining culture change and continuity, hegemony and counternarrative. The recent availability of markets for cacao in southern Belize has allowed for significant expansion of cacao among the Belizean Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya with many people expanding their cacao cultivation beyond the home garden to extensive cacao plantations. Drawing on ethnographic encounters in the Mopan Maya village of San Jose Belize, my dissertation explores how Protestantism and development enhance the latent possibilities within one another and reinforce a configuration of society congruent with hegemonic western modernity. In the midst of these changes, cacao lies at the center of competing ideologies between traditional Mopan values of *Kustumbre* (tradition) and those of western modernity.

I argue that Protestant conversion has laid the ground work for adoption of development by religiously sanctioning an individualistic Weberian capitalist ethic and condemning indigenous spirituality, providing the moral foundation in which development projects for commercial cacao could take root. While visible social inequality was previously held in check through fear of *obia / pulyah* (black magic), Protestant denunciation of indigenous spirituality as witchcraft/demon worship has undermined the enforcement of economic equality, allowing for the emergence of capitalist values. At the same time, indigenous environmental ritual has become a fault line in Maya communities between "New Testament People" – Protestants and younger Catholics who reject ritual practice - and Catholic elders who continue to practice "Old Testament" ways. I suggest that the 'New Testament' world view promulgated through evangelism provides a cultural narrative consistent with the goals of high modernist development. As cacao's sacred symbolism has declined, many Mopan increasingly view cacao as the object of agronomic improvement and as a fungible commodity.

Protestant condemnation of nature spirits reconfigures the relational landscape of Mopan *Kustumbre* into a collection of natural resources ripe for maximization and efficient management. Human domination of nature through capitalist development not only provides material wealth, but also is a public proclamation for New Testament people that they no longer fear retribution from the spirits of nature, in the same way that they no longer fear the *obia* of their jealous neighbors. In both Protestantism and development, environmental calamities are no longer the manifestation of disrespected spirits or a lapse in relationality. Rather, they are constructed as a technical problem which can be managed through the application of resources and ingenuity.

# Committee George Mentore (Chair) Fred Damon Eve Danziger Roy Wagner

Hank Shugart

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10. <u>Conclusion</u> – The conclusion reviews the central arguments of the dissertation, describing the transformation from the old spiritual and social uses of cacao to its current place as a profane commodity. I then examine the interactions between Protestantism and development which enhances the efficacy of these modernizing institutions in transforming indigenous societies. Finally, I explore future research directions suggested by this study.

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#### Summary of Argument

My dissertation explores the Mopan Maya's relationship with cacao as a means to speak to larger issues of changing social, environmental and spiritual values. Cacao's deep history and spiritual importance among the Mopan make it an ideal focus for examining culture change and continuity, hegemony and counter-narrative. My dissertation argues that Protestant missionization serves as an ideological catalyst for the remaking of 'modern' selves in Mopan society. I suggest that the 'New Testament' world view promulgated through evangelism provides a cultural narrative consistent with the goals of high modernist development. I explore the complex relationship between Protestantism and development by tracing and historicizing the social life of cacao a once sacred plant at the heart of Mopan spiritual ecology that has become repositioned as a secular commodity bound for the world market.

The social, spiritual and environmental transformations that have occurred among the Mopan of San Jose and their cacao speak to the tremendous impact of Protestant conversion and international development on contemporary indigenous communities. Protestant missionization and development have been major transformative forces during the era of decolonization (1981-present) that occurred in rapid succession in southern Belize. Protestant conversion challenged the old beliefs and caused social upheaval in religiously divided communities, since there was no longer one unified community to sanction those who questioned the wisdom of the ancestors. The condemnation of environmental ritual in Protestant theology has become a fault line in Maya communities between "New Testament People" — Protestants and younger Catholics who reject ritual practice - and Catholic elders who continue to practice "Old Testament" ways. On the eve of Belizean independence, and less than five years later after the arrival of Protestant missionaries in San Jose, large scale development for cacao and other export crops began in earnest, resulting in the massive expansion of cacao acreage and sales. I argue that religious conversion in indigenous villages such as San Jose helped make the switch from sacred plant to commodity possible in the span of a few short years.

Protestantism and development enhance the latent possibilities within one another and reinforce a configuration of society congruent with the hegemonic western modernity. Development and Protestantism each seek to break apart holistic social cosmologies in order to promote "modern" individualism, the foundation of both saving souls and consumerism. Both advance the modernizing process by encouraging rupture from the past, promoting different values, bodily comportment and a new outlook on life. These modern institutions attempt to change local value systems as a means to promote the hegemonic adoption of outside material practices, legitimized within an alien morality and cultural logic.

Protestant conversion has laid the ground work for adoption of development by religiously sanctioning an individualistic Weberian capitalist ethic and condemning indigenous spirituality. Protestant theology promotes individualism in which conversion is a matter of personal choice and faith, rather than a concern for moral holism of the community. This emphasis on the individual as the locus of salvation promotes an ethos in which differentiations in wealth are valorized as blessings from Jesus to those who live a moral (Protestant) life. This value system is in marked contrast to notions of "limited good" and the "expectation of reciprocity" within *Kustumbre* wherein inequality is the result of personal selfishness that threatens the harmony of the social whole. In contrast to the Limited Good of *Kustumbre*, the prosperity gospel taught by Protestant preachers legitimizes economic inequality and

"modern" Weberian Capitalism as a tangible display of Jesus' favor (or disfavor) to their more conservative neighbors. I argue that the valorization of Weberian individualism by Protestantism provides the moral foundation in which development projects for commercial cacao could take root. In the context of these new social values, New Testament believers engage in commercial cacao projects more readily and on a larger scale than their Old Testament counterparts.

While visible social inequality was previously held in check through fear of *obia / pulyah* (black magic), Protestant condemnation of indigenous spirituality and accusations of witchcraft/demon worship has undermined the enforcement of economic equality. Anxiety over Mixed Mindedness has lead to a disconnect in the transmission of intergenerational knowledge as young Mopan people (both Catholic and Protestant) purposefully "forget" *Kustumbre* in an effort to be modern, weakening the power of Old Testament elders as the proveyers of truth and social morals.

In addition to changes in Mopan society, modern institutions have also transformed indigenous relations with nature. Protestantism's emphasis on disempowering fetishism and dominion over nature is congruent with environmental ethics of development. Protestantism seeks to objectify the natural world by stripping it of agency, so that believers are no longer mystified by fetishism and superstitions. With further destabilization of the previous holistic cosmology, Protestantism disenfranchises the Maya *Cheil* of their ownership of cacao, creating an ideological opening for private ownership. This gap is then filled by ideologies of development, which promote congruent notions of human-environmental relations. As the spiritual owners of the wild cacao have been vilified by Protestant ideologies, ownership of cacao is increasingly shifted from the *Cheil* to capitalist smallholders.

The demystification of nature reconfigures the relational landscape of Mopan *Kustumbre* into a collection of natural resources ripe for maximization and efficient management. Human domination of nature through capitalist development not only provides material wealth, but also is a public proclamation for New Testament people that they no longer fear retribution from the spirits of nature. As cacao's sacred symbolism has declined, many Mopan increasingly view cacao as the object of agronomic improvement and as a fungible commodity which can be alienated for profit. Whereas before, problems with cacao such as diseases could be mitigated with relational rituals, Protestant condemnation of the Old Ways has delegitimized these beliefs as pagan superstition. Increasingly, New Testament farmers turn to the technical solutions offered by development, such as chain saws for pruning and biochar kilns, in order to manage disease and improve their cacao. Under carefully managed technocratic regimes to improve marginal people's environmental health and security, nature becomes less threatening and subject to human dominion. In both Protestantism and development, environmental calamities are no longer the manifestation of disrespected spirits or a lapse in relationality. Rather, they are constructed as a technical problem which can be solved/managed through the application of resources and ingenuity.

#### Chapter 1 - Introduction

#### Introduction

My dissertation uses changing Mopan Maya relations with cacao as a lens to explore the conjunctures of competing value systems. Suspended in webs of significance, cacao lies at the heart of Mopan economics, kinship, sociality and relations with cosmos. I argue that the shift in the values surrounding cacao is paradigmatic of a larger ideological revolution in Mopan society initiated by the advent of Protestant conversion and international development. In the midst of these changes, cacao lies at the center of competing ideologies between traditional Mopan values of *Kustumbre* and those of western modernity.

Cacao is an ideal locus for the investigation of modern Mopan values because the Maya have cultivated this plant for centuries and it is deeply embedded in their cosmology. The ancient Maya have been growing cacao for more than 2000 years, and archaeological vessels from the region depict chocolate being used for religion, feasting, trade and tribute (McNeil 2006; Thompson 1956). After the Spanish conquest, cacao remained an important part of the Maya diet and was used in syncretic Catholic-Maya offerings to Saints and nature spirits (Vogt 1976). Before the advent of the commercial cacao industry in southern Belize, Maya households produced only small amounts of cacao in order meet the needs of domestic use, gift giving and minor sales within the community.

During this time, the Mopan would use cacao to make bitter and spicy chocolate drinks known locally as "käkäh", used in daily meals as well as to celebrate life cycle events and collective work. Cacao served a central role in Mopan food cosmology because of its importance in creating conviviality between people through shared drinking. Cacao drinks were also seen as spiritually potent and used as sacred offerings in planting rituals and shamanic healing. Just as drinking cacao created bonds of sociality between villagers sharing käkäh, the ritual offering of cacao sought to create relationships with powerful spirits to intervene on behalf of human concerns. These behaviors and beliefs are collectively referred to as the "old ways" (Kustumbre) in San Jose, and refer to the traditional way of life (Danziger 2013).

The recent availability of markets for cacao in southern Belize has allowed for significant expansion of cacao among the Belizean Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya with many people expanding their cacao cultivation beyond the home garden to extensive cacao plantations. As development aid for cacao poured into the region, Belizean Maya farmers began to increasingly plant large stands of cacao (average of 2.2. acres per farmer with ~ 700 trees per farm) on semi-privatized land. Belize has now become a minor producer of cacao in the world chocolate market. Today nearly all of Belizean cacao is

grown by small-scale Mopan Maya farmers who produce fair trade and organic certified cacao for export (McAnany 2006).

For the Mopan, cacao farming has been considered "easy money" in comparison to the farming of the *milpa* (swidden agriculture). As more Maya men began to seek part-time employment outside of the village, cacao became seen as a low effort crop that could provide necessary cash for household needs such as children's schooling and the purchase of non-local shop goods. Cacao trees are long term crops, unlike corn and beans, and thrive without a constant cycle of burnings and planting. Once cacao trees are planted, they can be opportunistically harvested from the 5<sup>th</sup> year on. Cacao trees will continue to bear constantly for the next twenty years before production tapers off over the following fifty years or more.

Cacao farmers are a diverse group that is a cross section of the community including full time farmers, young men who working for wages part time out of the village, men too old for the physical demands of milpa farming, whole families with children, widows and single women. This diverse group is drawn to cacao farming because of the relative ease and low time commitments required in addition to meet the needs of household consumption. Commercial cacao cultivation now provides many Maya families with money for educational expenses, staple foods and luxury items such as TVs, radios and pickups. Cacao farmers have also become a powerful faction in both local and regional politics and have used their influence to draw further development projects to the village. But even as the future of cacao for the Belizean Maya looks bright, new diseases and market turmoil threaten the periodic collapse of the industry.

Mopan cacao is now deeply enmeshed in both traditional Maya society as well as global processes of change. Suspended in local and global webs of significance (see Geertz 1973), the story of the change associated with cacao is a metaphor of the profound structural transformations occurring in Mopan life. Despite cacao's long term place in this indigenous agricultural and social system, since the mid 1970s, the Mopan of San Jose have been undergoing a "structure of the conjuncture" between Mopan traditional values and the values of modernity. I posit that two successive social transformations in southern Belize create the conditions for desacralization and commodification of cacao to occur.

The first was the wave of Protestant conversion among the Maya of southern Belize beginning in the mid 1970s (Schackt 1986). Through religious conversion, I argue that a new model of environmental relations arose in the local practice which disconnected nature from the spiritual realm (Steinberg 2002). This religious change removed cacao from the sacred domain as many Maya came to see ritual instruments such as cacao as emblematic of the old Maya/Catholic syncretism, and therefore "satanic"

and "backwards". The advent of commercial cacao development projects following decolonization in 1981, built upon this demystification to further shifted cacao from a sacred crop used for ritual offerings and domestic consumption to a commodity bound for the world market.

While Protestantism and development occupy purportedly separate spheres of a secularized Western tradition, throughout my dissertation I argue that they are both promulgating forces in the contemporary civilizing project of modernity. Even as development projects provide alternative material possibilities and comprehensive frameworks for commercial cacao farming (Ausdal 2008; Emch 2003), Protestantism adjusts the relational expectations amongst community members to render developmental alternatives as theologically viable. Conversion and development projects repositioned Mopan cacao cultivation in the secular realm as an alienable commodity disconnected from previously sacred values.

Cacao's symbolic role in Mopan cosmology is subverted by ritual discontinuance and demystification of the natural world. As the cultural significance of cacao shifts from sacred to profane, it becomes a commodity-object rather than a locus of interpersonal and spiritual relations. Through cacao, cultural and political identities are formulated, consolidated and exported. At the center of geographic negotiations between state and local actors, cacao farming is a locus of territorial contestation and a major determinant of the contours of modern Mopan landscapes.

The ideological changes brought by Protestantism and development have destabilized the old system of values based on *Kustumbre* (tradition) as outside narratives of modernity offer enticing alternatives to tradition. The ideological struggle between these competing values has caused a rift among the Mopan which is played out in the daily practices of cacao use. For the Mopan, those "old heads" who held on to the traditions of the *uchb'en k'in* (ancient days) are contrasted with progressive villagers who seek a modern way of life unconstrained by superstition and communal obligations (Gregory 1972). The ideological contest for the "hearts and minds" of the Mopan is situated in the historical moment between change and continuity. In this "structure of conjecture," actors mediate performative and prescriptive structures so that they have the potential to alter the paradigm that they live within the "microsociology of their interactions" (Sahlins 1985: p xiv). In daily practices such as eating, drinking, field maintenance and marketing, the actions of the Mopan toward their cacao speaks to the underlying values which motivate these choices. This re-imagination is unevenly distributed as actors engage in this process from different social as well as geographic positions, allowing some to take advantage of new opportunities while marginalizing others. (see Piot 1999 page 172). In this context, my project examines how different social actors respond to the new ambiguity of cacao as a cultural

symbol, allowing for a 'cartography of the present' that speaks to broad themes in Mopan life, including sociality, alienation and the relation of the self to the world (see Piot 1999 page 16). In the confluence between the "old ways" and outside notions of progress, the Mopan are forced to reimagine the paramount values of their society in the habitus of daily life as they struggle to understand what it means to be both "modern" and "Mopan."

# The Setting and Methods

Before I came to southern Belize, my interactions with chocolate had been exclusively as a First World consumer. Chocolate occupies a ubiquitous place in the U.S. supermarket, always readily available and familiar from countless deserts and Halloweens. Until I began my fieldwork, I had experienced chocolate in many forms: milk and dark chocolate bars, chocolate covered fruit and a whole variety of candies. But the chocolate that is made by the Mopan for their own consumption was unlike anything I had experienced before. It was a dark and gritty spiced drink with the earthiness of black pepper and a sheen of cocoa butter on top. The flavor of the local chocolate beverage is strong and bitter, wholly different from the over-sweetened confections consumed in the United States.

Not only are the Belizean Maya using cacao for their local chocolate recipe, but in recent decades they also begun to sell their cacao branded as authentically Maya to global consumers. As I began to search for a dissertation topic during my preliminary fieldwork in 2008, I became fascinated by the changing role of cacao among the Mopan of Belize. This exploratory fieldwork helped lay the foundation for my dissertation project by allowing me to establish personal contacts in the region and by providing an understanding of the complex and competing interests of various stakeholders involved with Belizean cacao.

I returned to Belize in 2009 and began the main portion of my PhD fieldwork. Initially, I established myself in the port town of Punta Gorda, the hub of the Belizean cacao industry. Punta Gorda is home to roughly 5,000 Belizeans. On market days, this usually sleepy town turns into a bustling polyglot melting pot of ethnic mix of Creoles, Garifuna, Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya, Mennonites, ex-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> A note about terminology – In my dissertation, the term Maya refers to the pan-linguistic ethnic group, the maximal ethnic grouping which includes more than 5,000,000 people, speaking 32 languages across 5 countries. The more narrow term, "Yucatean Maya" refers to the more than 750,000 lowland Yucatec, Mopan, Itza and Lacandon Maya who form a distinct cultural group and speak closely related "Yucatean" Maya languages. The most narrow ethnic identifying terms, such as "Mopan Maya" or "Q'eqchi' Maya," refer to specific ethno-linguistic Maya groups. Finally, the term "Belizean Maya" is used to denote all the Maya currently population living in Belize, including Mopan, Q'eqchi' and Yucatec Maya, who share similar colonial encounters with the British commonwealth.

colonialist and recent American expats. Since the 1990s, Punta Gorda (or "PG" as it is locally known), has grown from a backwater provincial capital and market town to a hotspot of nongovernmental organizations (NGO's) working on environmental and human development in the region. I first became immersed in the Belizean chocolate industry through volunteering at the TCGA (Toledo Cacao Growers Association) co-op on Main Street in Punta Gorda. During my time there, I learned about the business of cacao and how this indigenous cooperative serves as an interface between peasant farmers and global corporations. During this time, I attended farmer training field schools, participated in regional events such as "CacaoFest," observed purchasing and standards, and saw project planning in action. I was also able to collect archival anonymous data on all 728 cacao farmers in Belize, including village residence, the years that their cacao was planted and the amount of cacao produced by each in 2008 and 2009. Additionally, this data from my fieldwork was augmented by an assortment of physical and electronic artifacts related to cacao production including advertisements, promotional videos, internet websites, material culture and even photographs of architecture as evidence.



Map of Belize. From: CIA World Factbook (2005)

Although working in the cacao depot had given me an inside look into the cacao industry, I wanted to understand how the commercialization of cacao was seen from the perspective of the indigenous farmers and how cacao fit into the bigger overall picture of Maya culture. After an initial three months spent in Punta Gorda learning about the business and development of cacao, I began the nine month, main phase of my fieldwork by moving to the remote Mopan Maya village of San Jose with my wife Michelle. Through daily interactions with the Mopan of San Jose and other neighboring communities, I began to understand how the commercialization of cacao was impacting the daily lives of the farmers who produced and consumed it.

Located at the end of a twenty mile gravel spur off of the Southern Highway, San Jose is at the far end of a two hour bus ride from the district capital, Punta Gorda and less than ten miles from the Guatemalan border. San Jose is the second largest Mopan village in Belize and is one of 43 Mopan and Q'eqchi<sup>12</sup> Maya villages scattered throughout southern Belize. I was initially drawn to San Jose because of the rapid growth of a modern cacao industry in a community that on the surface seemed very "traditional." As I began to learn more about cacao and the Mopan Maya people who farmed it, both the continuities and the ruptures with the past soon became apparent as well as how the memories of the past are negotiable.

Although San Jose is an indigenous Mopan community in which everyone's first language is Mopan Maya, most people in San Jose are multilingual with many people knowing a mixture of languages including Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya, Spanish and English. English is Belize's national language and many people in San Jose learn English beginning in primary school. But rather than relying solely on English for my research, I wanted to understand these processes within the local language. In order to conduct a multilingual ethnography, during the summers of 2009 and 2010, I undertook language training in Yucatec Maya in Mexico through the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Once in the field, my initial training in Yucatec Maya allowed me to continue language work in Mopan Maya (a closely related language³) with native-speaking tutors throughout the duration of my fieldwork and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> The ethnonym Q'eqchi' is used throughout my dissertation following the Tumul K'in orthography, although the spelling Ketchi is also widely used in Belize.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> A note on orthography – The orthography of the Mopan words used in my dissertation is based on the *Tumul K'in* version of the ALMG orthography, except for Spanish loans which appear in standard Spanish orthography. The orthography of various Maya languages is a contentious subject among linguists (see Richards 1993). Recently in Belize, *Tumul K'in* Maya high school has begun to publish written materials in Mopan Maya (such as vocabularies and language introductions) that call for a distinctly Belizean variety of Mopan, which replaces the Spanish j with h. This linguistic change is done to reflect the different history of the Belizean Mopan over the past 125 years as subjects of an English speaking colony in contrast to the Spanish influence in Guatemalan Mopan Maya.

conduct interviews, transcriptions and participant observation in Mopan Maya, Spanish and English. This multilingual approach let me clarify lines of inquiry in multiple languages to understand local perspectives with more nuance.

With a population of 1000, San Jose is a Mopan Maya community that is second largest Mopan village in Belize. The Mopan Maya are a relatively small group within the larger Yucatean Maya language family, with approximately 20,000 speakers currently living in southern Belize and the western part of the Guatemalan Peten Over the last 60 years, San Jose has grown from scattered homesteads into a major regional center among the Belizean Mopan as a hotspot of cultural and economic revival.

San Jose occupies a unique place in the geography of southern Belize. The village sits at the northwest corner of the cultural center of Toledo Mopan, on the edge of the great wilds of the Columbia Forest Reserve. The frontier that extends out beyond San Jose has remained stable since the establishment of the village in 1955, checked by the boundary of the Columbia forest reserve to the north and west. Lying beyond the farms of San Jose, the Columbia forest reserve is descendant from the timber lands formerly owned by the crown during Belize's colonial history.

San Jose is a juxtaposition of material culture that is both seemingly timeless and hyper modern. Nearly every household in the community has a cellular phone, even though coverage is spotty at best and San Jose is the largest village in Belize without central electricity. Thatch houses dot the hillsides of the village, with more than a third topped with solar panels to produce DC electricity, thanks to past development projects.

Despite these innovations, San Jose is organized like most Mopan communities in the region. On the central hilltop, the Catholic Church occupies the central hill of the village adjacent to the school and town hall, and is lassoed by the road that forms the epicenter of the village. From outside the church doors, the village spreads out on all sides, a combination of thatch and zinc roofs stair stepping their way up the mountain sides. Just down the Western slope from the church, along a dirt path that wove past the old community center, I rented a pink plank house tucked into the hollow between mountains.

Peasant agriculture is the lifeblood of San Jose, where most people engage in peasant farming that is still done by hand. These indigenous agricultural practices are informed by traditional environmental knowledge of *Kustumbre* (tradition) that has been honed in this environment for generations (Danziger 2013; Anderson et al. 2005; Barrera-Bassols and Toledo 2005; Faust 1999). Like other Mopan villages in Belize (Osborn 1972; Howard 1977; Gregory 1972), every family in San Jose plants food primarily for domestic consumption and then they sell the surplus at the regional market in

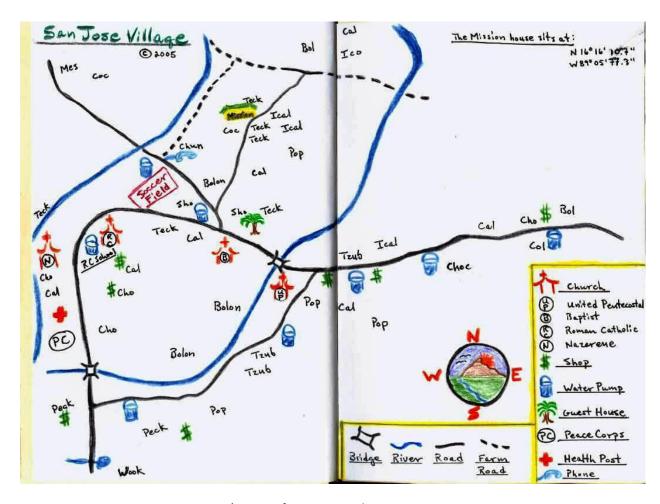
Punta Gorda. Encircling the village center are small, family farms (< 10 acres) which produce both short term staples such as corn and beans as well as long cycle tree crops such as cacao.

While short term crops like corn and beans remain the basic staples of Mopan farmers, one of the most striking things about San Jose (and the reason that I chose it as the central site of this ethnography) is the amount of cacao that is grown here. San Jose is located in the heart of the cacao growing belt in southern Belize and its climate is ideally situated for growing cacao. Groves of cacao blanket San Jose in a dark patchwork of forest, while fresh cacao beans are set out to dry in the sun along the road when harvest season arrives.

Although San Jose lacks many modern conveniences (such as electrification or paved roads) and most people were peasant agriculturalist who still live in thatch houses, the community had positioned itself at the forefront of the cacao development in the region. San Jose has the highest per capita production of any village in Belize. With not much more than their machetes, the approximately 71 cacao producing households in San Jose produce more than one fourth of all the cacao beans sold in Belize (24,549 lbs of cacao in 2008).

In order to gain firsthand knowledge about these processes, I involved myself with all aspects of cacao production, processing and consumption. I also was involved more broadly with involved daily life of the community ranging including church services, as well as labor exchanges for the construction of new homes and collective agriculture. In addition, I conducted 20 semi-structured interviews with both male and female cacao farmers who ranged in age from their early 30s to their 80s. Interviewing a wide demographic range of cacao farmers allowed for multiple perspectives on the vast changes occurring.

Upon completion of a year in southern Belize, I returned home and began to analyze the field notes and interviews I had collected using qualitative data analysis software, Atlas.ti, which allowed for the coding and organization of more than 1000 pages of ethnographic data. Out of this process, central themes emerged which drive the narrative of my dissertation. In addition to qualitative data, my fieldwork also generated quantitative production data which was compared to demographics collected from the 2010 Belize census. From this data, I analyzed statistical data on the inequalities of development using the statistical software Stata to perform multilineal regressions for statistical significance of the relationship between cacao production and social factors such as gender and ethnicity. This data was also used to generate geographic representations of cacao production using the program ArcGIS, which appear in chapter 8.



A Protestant Mennonite Missionary's Map of San Jose, Belize

# **Background - Development and Protestantism in San Jose**

While the idyllic image of San Jose may seem to be timeless relic of days gone by, in the past 35 years, changes both great and small have been transforming life in San Jose at a rapid pace. Within living memory, San Jose had been connected to the rest of Belize via a dirt road spur to the paved Southern Highway. While a few families in San Jose have recently purchased pickup trucks for transporting goods and people between villages and to the regional market in Punta Gorda, most people travel via the repurposed American school buses which rumble down the dirt roads of the Toledo hinterlands four days a week.

Improved infrastructure has brought an increasing stream of outsiders into Belizean Maya villages. San Jose receives infrequent, though increasing, visits from outsiders including a Roman Catholic priest, Protestant missionaries, government school teachers, development workers, occasional

tourists staying in the community guest house, Peace Corps volunteers and anthropologists (see Fink 1987 400). The road has not only brought outsiders, but also brought "development." In San Jose, a whole range of development projects have been planned, implemented and (usually) abandoned by the more than 32 NGOs (non-governmental organizations) which operate out of the nearby district capital of Punta Gorda. In Belizean Maya communities across the region, development has brought clean drinking water, medical attention, the construction of corn and rice mills, crop "improvements" and numerous other projects of varying scales. At the same time, a business mentality is also emerging in the community as entrepreneurs increasingly pooled family resources to invest in commercial ventures, most commonly a "chicken" bus, a corner grocery shop or a plantation of cacao.

Many of these changes are rooted in the profound transformation in Belizean society which occurred during the era of decolonization. As Belize achieved its independence in the early 1980s, international development projects soon began in earnest with the goal of raising the livelihoods of the Belizean Maya and make them producers and consumers in the world economy. I refer to "development" as the broad range of internationally based projects which present themselves as designed to improve the economic and social livelihoods of the impoverished (Ferguson 1990; Mitchell 1991). In contrast to earlier colonial projects, international development obscures the links between territorial sovereignty and political accountability through the decentralization of international donors and the implementation of projects by NGO's (non-governmental organization) (Wainwright 2008). In this new paradigm of development, the role of the state is minimized and international actors play an important role in the creation of modern post-colonial values. The effects of neoliberal development of the post-colonial era have been felt prominently in Toledo, the southernmost district of Belize, where San Jose is located. Toledo is a multiethnic district of about 20,000 people, the majority of whom are Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya who predominantly reside in small rural villages.

Since the mid 20th century, the Maya of Toledo have been the object of colonial era projects designed to raise standards of living, improve the health of, and economically integrate indigenous people into the capitalist economy (Gregory 1976; Osborn 1982; Wainwright 2008). Following Belizean independence from Great Britain in 1981, neoliberal restructuring of the post-colonial economy gutted many of these government run programs as financially unsustainable (Moberg 1992; Thomson 2004). In Toledo, the gap in governmentally provided social services was soon filled with a diverse array of development projects lead by international NGOs in areas such as agriculture, health care, sanitation, clean water, sustainable food, infrastructure, rural electrification and education.

Commercial cacao production is a paradigmatic example of international development projects promoting economic and environmental sustainability by "settling" shifting agriculture onto the landscape by promoting long term crops and the privatization of Mopan and Q'eqchi' communal reservation land (Wainwright 2008). Development projects for the commercialization of cacao have brought a wide range of agronomic infrastructure to San Jose including three enclosed drying floors, paid pruning teams and large moveable kilns used to produce organic biochar fertilizer. San Jose now has more cacao than ever before and for many people in the village, cacao provides one of the primary sources of income. People now say that San Jose is "coming up," and this has been due in large part to the success of commercial cacao development.

At the same time that development initiatives have become an integral part of San Jose life, the transformation of Mopan religion has also been the focus of non-local Protestant missionaries. Over the last three decades, the Mopan of San Jose have undergone a second religious conversion in the form of Protestant evangelism mirroring Evangelist movements that swept the highland Maya communities of Guatemala in the latter half of the 20th century (Cook 1997: p 127; Steinberg 2002). Belizean Maya villages have been the target of conversion by Protestant missionaries of competing sects, creating a veritable marketplace of churches amongst which villagers have their choice (Steinberg 2002; Schackt 1986). While the Catholic Church remains the geographic center of the village, it no longer has a spiritual monopoly on Christian faith. In addition to the original Catholic Church built at the village founding in 1953, San Jose hosts six Protestant churches established by missionary teams from the United States. A proliferation of Protestant denominations in what was formerly a unanimously Catholic village spurred a dramatic religious conversion as many villagers welcomed Protestant missionaries. Within a decade, most Belizean Maya communities were split religiously between Catholic and multiple Protestant churches. Today, Protestant churchgoers outnumber Catholics in San Jose.

The Mopan of San Jose speak of a time before the coming of the Protestant churches when the entire village was Maya-Catholic and all the people were "of one mind." Prior to the introduction of Protestantism, the Maya of Southern Belize practiced a synergistic mixture of Catholicism and a substrate of indigenous practices forged out of Spanish conquest and forced conversion. In traditional Mopan Maya-Catholic religion, the pre-Columbian Maya gods and rituals became reimagined in the context of Catholic symbolism (Steinberg 2002; see Redfield and Villa Rojas 1934; Tedlock 1982; Vogt 1976). For the Mopan, this syncretism constitutes the "old ways" often referenced by my informants. While village elders still continue to practice the "old ways," these beliefs and practices are increasingly under attack by Protestant missionaries and their converts.

Protestant missionaries offer a "new life" free from the old superstitions and encourage the Mopan to reject tradition in favor of a more "modern" lifestyle. Many missionaries equate Mopan material poverty with spiritual and cultural poverty, which by extension, equates Mopan economic and social advancement with abandonment of traditional belief systems, including those that deal with the natural world (Steinberg 2002: p 99). As the Protestants draw more followers to their churches, old practices are increasingly shunned as missionaries attempt to change local religious practices to be in line with "modern" Protestant doctrine. Many Protestants came to vilify the ritual use of cacao as demonic idol worship that is emblematic of an "unmodern" past to be rejected in the name of progress. For Mopan converts, Protestantism provides alternatives to the Maya-Catholic belief system allowing for not only the autonomy of religious choice but an opportunity to "break with the past" - both collectively and personally. (Meyer 1998; Engelke 2004; Piot 1999 p 57; Robbins 2005).

# **Cacao and Modernity**

Today in San Jose, cacao is a major part of Mopan life on an unprecedented scale. From the vantage of the agronomic development, cacao is the main industry in San Jose and more a part of Mopan life than ever. Large fields of cacao surround the village and agronomic techniques have maximized the yields of cacao trees. Money from cacao sales now supports a more "modern" lifestyle. Cacao has even become an important symbol of Mopan ethnic resurgence and identity through global sales of the "Maya Gold" chocolate bar. At the same time, people speak of cacao with a sense of loss. While cacao has brought new money to the village, it has largely been replaced in the domestic sphere as local markets have become increasingly flooded with cheaper non-local commodities. As San Jose became increasingly integrated into the cash economy, new "shop goods," such as instant coffee and juice packets have begun to replace cacao as the instrument of sociality. While cacao is still served, it is now rarely used for special occasions or to honor special guests. Now nearly all of the cacao grown in San Jose is destined for the far reaches of the global market as a high end candy bar in the first world. Cacao has now largely become demystified and the formerly sacred plant has become profane. For most of the Mopan, cacao is no longer used as a tool for creating of qualitative relations between society and the divine. Now, cacao is seen primarily as a fungible commodity in a cash based economy and a symbol of modernity.

In San Jose, cacao has become the focal point of a much larger social struggle about the changes in Mopan cultural values. As both *Kustumbre* and new ways of life vie for relevance in Mopan society, the paramount social values are destabilized and subject to radical reassessment. With the coming of Protestant conversion and development, Mopan relations with cacao have increasingly shifted away

from relational Kustumbre to become reorganized around the values of modernity. Modernism implies a truly radical rupture with history and tradition (Scott 1998: p 93). Profound sociocultural changes often accompany modernization including the increasing flexibility of land tenure; growth of individualism and slackening of extended family ties; greater class differentiation and conflict, intensified opposition between young and old, modern and conservative; weakening of traditional authority and wavering of traditional social standards; and even the growth of 'Protestant Ethic' religious ideologies'" (Geertz 1961: 120; Wilk 1997 Page 20). Beyond a simple break with the past, modernity elevates and institutionalizes processes of change. Ideologies of modernity offer "a revolutionary break with traditional social and cultural forms" and promised to usher the "manifold forms of traditional life" into a "unitary, interlocking, and global modernity" embodied by the contemporary US (Gilman 2003p 6). Modernity positions itself as the endpoint in social evolution- in which 'the West' is ontologically separated from, and ahead of, 'the rest'" (Wainwright 2008 Page 38; Mitchell 1991). In postcolonial realities "modernity" becomes a moral dimension of temporality so that, the structures of the past are typically construed as the products of myth, superstition, and religious prejudice to be reexamined and redesigned according to scientific reasoning and self-determined progress.

In Weber's formulation, modernity is a response to an existential problematic wherein what had been seen as an unchanging cosmos ceased to be taken for granted (Eisenstadt 2000: p 4; Weber 1905). Faubian writes, "Modernities in all their variety are precisely those responses that leave the problematic in question intact, that formulate visions of life and practice neither beyond nor in denial of it but rather within it, even in deference to it . . ." that is, societal responses that glorify change (Faubian 1993: p 113-115). Modernity is an expression of continual progress rooted in narratives of emancipation and human empowerment. Modernity emphasizes autonomy and continuous expansion of the realms of personal and institutional freedom, removed from the fetters of traditional political and cultural authority (Eisenstadt 2000: p 4-6).

With autonomy, reflexivity and exploration are heightened and exercised in the active construction and mastery of nature, including human nature (Eisenstadt 2000: p 4-6). The control over nature makes it possible to conceive of an artificial, engineered society designed according to conscious, rational, scientific criteria rather than mere products of historical circumstance (Scott 1998: p 94). Every surface and aspect of society could therefore be improved upon through human ingenuity and calculation. According to Harvey, the scientific domination of nature (including human nature) "promised freedom from scarcity, want and the arbitrariness of natural calamity" as well as from myth

and the darker aspects of human nature (Harvey 1989: p 12; Scott 1998: p 96-97). With the introduction of modern scientific agriculture in San Jose, Mopan farmers have participated in numerous projects to "improve" through selective breeding, field maintenance and post-harvest initiatives.

At the same time that modern values underpin projects to master nature, they also are integral in ideological attempts to disentangle the "real" world from the imagined realm of superstition, culture and belief. Keane explains the moral dimensions of modernity as a "story of human liberation from a host of false beliefs and fetishism" intended to increase human agency (Keane 2007: p 5). Rationality disempowers objects, allowing people to move beyond the confines of superstition. This commonsense "association of modernity with emancipated subject" is seen as liberating "native societies" from submission to mere inert materials, emphasizing instead human enlightenment and agency (Keane 2007: p 5). The improvement of the human condition is vested in the authority of scientific knowledge and its tendency to disallow other competing sources of judgment. Insofar as rational thought and scientific laws could provide a single answer to every empirical question, it follows that scientifically designed schemes for production and social life would be superior to received tradition (Scott 1998: p 93-94). Modernist ideologies seek to dispel the traditional Mopan superstition surrounding cacao, and instead to recreate the formerly sacred plant as nothing more than a demystified crop ready for the open market.

Different elements of "modern society" are seen to form a necessary and integrated package, exercised through globalization of new systems of knowledge (Asad 2003: p 13; Ferguson 1994: p 10). These sometimes conflicting, often evolving principles include: constitutionalism, moral autonomy, democracy, human rights, civil equality, industry, consumerism, freedom of the market, secularization of world view; the rise of scientific rationalism and critical reflexivity and are assumed to accompany things like industrial economies, modern transportation and communications systems (Ferguson 1994: p 10). In modernizing projects, this whole package of elements becomes universalized (Gilman 2003). For Mopan who reject the Old Ways, the demystification of cacao is part of a larger package of modern identity including integration into the cash economy, increasing individual autonomy and the freedom from the constraints of tradition.

While some in the village imagine "the West" as a beacon of progress, more significant is the process whereby the values of the European Myth are absorbed, incorporated and rearticulated within existing local social structures. Although these powerful forces originate outside of Mopan society, the local is the generative site of modernity and the source of cultural reimagination (see Piot 1999 8). The large scale influx of foreign development organizations and Protestant missionization entails the

introduction and institutionalization of these projects' architectural knowledges. In the re-negotiation and construction of cultural values, the articulation of religion and development allows for the creation of an "alternate modernity" that is both distinctly Mopan and distinctly modern (see Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Eisenstadt 2000: p 2; Piot 1999). Local narratives "about underdevelopment as sinfulness, about personal sin and redemption, about the End Times and the everyday" are metaphors/expressions of anxiety and possibility latent in a Mopan modernity (see Piot 1999 page 66). An examination of local modernities "disrupts epistemological divides between modernity and tradition, global and local, core and periphery - divides which have long served as premise for the West's domination of its other" (Piot 1999 page 8).

### **Kustumbre** (The "Old Ways")

However, not everyone accepts this foreign way of life. Despite great changes in the Mopan life in recent decades, there remains a "degree of coherence with the "deep structure" of the culture" (Danziger 2001 p 23). While most cacao farmers in San Jose eagerly adopt new agronomic techniques of cacao farming, some conservative elders have reacted to new innovations and markets with ambivalence or outright rejection, remembering fondly the "old ways" of *Kustumbre*. They say that the Mopan no longer respect (*tzik*) their cacao like before. For the Mopan of San Jose, those "old heads" who hold on to the traditions of the *Kustumbre* are contrasted with progressive villagers who seek a modern way of life unconstrained by superstition and communal obligations (Gregory 1972; Steinberg 2002; see Re Cruz 1996). The more traditional farmers are predominately older, Catholic and less involved in the cash economy while modernizing farmers tend to have greater involvement in the outside economy and are often Protestant converts.

Kustumbre, or "tradition," is the Mopan term used to describe the sacred quality of traditional social and religious customs. Kustumbre is built on indigenous values that are distinct from those of the capitalist market, "although they still understand and recognize the rules of the market." (Wilk 1997 Page 148). Despite its timeless appearance, the "tradition" of Kustumbre is a fluid cultural adaptation that crystallized over centuries of resistance and adaptation to colonialism (Wilk 1997 Page 234; see Wolf 1982). Kustumbre as a practice orients Mopan life towards local reproduction and social solidarity. The rules and obligations of Kustumbre bind the community together in mutual obligation

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Many of the most distinctive aspects of *Kustumbre* such as "the civil-religious hierarchies; communal land tenure; mixed subsistence and cash crop farming; folk Catholicism; flexible bilateral kinship and the mobile household" did not emerge and solidified until the late 19th century (Wilk 1997 Page 234).

and cooperation, forcing individuals to act outside their own short-term economic self-interest (see Wilk 1997 Page 148).

The traditions of *Kustumbre* are thought of as authoritative community morals and behavior that prescribes the true ways of being (see Danziger 2001 p 24). It is referenced as authoritative in diverse areas of Mopan life including social relations, agriculture, labor, religion, environmental relations. *Kustumbre* is the time-tested wisdom of "those who died before us". (Danziger 2001 p 32). The Mopan feel reverence for the traditions of Kustumbre, saying 'we are used to them' (sukaho'on tii) (Danziger 2001 p 24). <sup>5</sup>

As an indigenous cultural system, *Kustumbre* is motivated by underlying sets of paired values, based on hierarchy and holism. This duality of values follows a broader pattern cross-culturally within Dumontian understandings of value (1986). For Dumont and his followers, such as de Coppet (1995), Iteanu (1990), and Jamous (1992), society is organized around pairs of paramount values in complementary opposition. Often, one of these values is primarily concerned with individual assertion, status, and respect. In contrast, the other opposing value is more social or transcendentally encompassing and defines the society's member's place in the cosmos as a whole (Abse 2007). <sup>6</sup> For the Mopan, the two paired/principles values of *Kustumbre* are *tzik* (respect) = hierarchy and *ki uy ool* (holism - social harmony). I argue that respect / hierarchy is the paramount value in Mopan society. At the same time, the holism of *ki uy ool* helps to ameliorate the tensions of hierarchy which can lead to tension and social fragmentation.

## **Hierarchy and Holism**

In Maya cosmology, *Kustumbre* is centrally organized around hierarchical difference in respect which is "embedded in the flow of time in their universe" (see Vogt 1976 34). This hierarchy is often expressed through metaphors of seniority ("senior" and "junior"), which are applied not only to the biological age of people, but also the ranking of spirits, features of the landscape, and even ritual paraphernalia such as crosses (Redfield 1934; Vogt 1976 p 34,). Within this hierarchically organized cosmology, the concept of "respect" (*tzik*) is the central organizing principle employed to mediate these differences in Mopan culture (Danziger 2001; Gregory 1975). As a sacred instrument of sociality and sacrifice, *tzik* relations govern the use, consumptions and disposal of cacao in traditional Mopan society.

<sup>5</sup> A linguistic phrase that mirrors the feeling of attachment between longtime spouses (Danziger 2001 p 24).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Examples of these paired values can be seen in Jamous' (1992) study of among the Berbers of the Moroccan Rif as well as Abse's analysis of the Mazatec case of *b'exkon* (respect) and *kjoanda* (blessing).

Tzik is human action that communicates an attitude of deference and respect between hierarchically unequal parties (whether other people, nature or the supernatural) within a holistic social cosmology (Dumont 1986). This inequality is based on differences in age, gender, prestige as well as in kinship and compadre relations (Danziger 2001). In Mopan social relations, tzik relations are maintained through compulsory respect greetings that acknowledge the unequal hierarchy in order to allow for the creation of social relations between the two parties. In addition to greetings, the maintenance of tzik relations relies on proper conduct between parties. Actions such as murder, incest, profligacy, mockery, carnality and a lack of self-discipline are antitheses to tzik. Tzik relations are not limited to interpersonal relations, but also extend to the respect for the spiritually alive nature. The Mopan of today say that the old people "respected" the supernatural owners of nature (yum) through ritual offerings. In this way, ritual offerings to the divine are structured within the same paradigm of tzik which motivates interpersonal relationships.

Tzik (respect) is the symbolic foundation of Mopan social structure which is thought to hold "together the very foundations of the human and cultural universe" (Danziger 2001 p 32). Through religious and social sanctions, Tzik creates a series of taboos that "are intended to keep people apart from other people or from creatures or things, either all together or in certain matters, and this is what they achieve" (see Evans-Pritchard 1965:p 181). Tzik (which also means "to honor") has overtly religious connotations and is important in a variety of traditional customs, most notably in the context of the civil-religious hierarchy. Proper tzik behavior is central to the Mopan's sense of ethnic identity, differentiating themselves from animals and other ethnic groups who the Mopan believe lack this essential quality (Danziger 2001 p 32).

Respect/tzik attempts to create social harmony in order to counterbalance "the tendency toward fission and mutual distrust" which jeopardizes community solidarity (Danziger 2001). Without the continued display of proper respect, the Mopan believe interpersonal relations are prone to disintegrate due to a "lack of integration and cooperation; schisms, malice, fear, envy, and distrust; . . . gossip and quarrelsomeness" (Gregory 1976; see Lopreato 1962: p 21). And "the tension between individual ambition and community egalitarianism" can boil over to violence or village fission (Danziger 2001 p 22).

To counterbalance these destructive tendencies toward antisocial individualism, Mopan society is organized around displays of holism and sociality that emphasize the collective happiness of the immaterial heart (*ool*). As the heart of being, the *ool* acts as the "point of contact between the individual and the cosmic forces animating the universe" (see Fisher 1999 p 483). In contrast to biological heart

(päsikal), the ool is the "immaterial heart" and the seat of sociality. Unlike the unitary "soul" found in the Euro-American tradition, the Yucatecean Maya groups conceptualize the inner self as animated by four distinct forces: spirit/shadow (pixan), social heart (ool), the heat (k'inam) within the blood, and breath (ik) (Fink 1987; Can Canche 2012). I argue that Mopan cosmology of the body follows this division of the inner self. While each of these forces is required for human life, three of these forces (pixan, k'inam and ik) are also manifested into invisible beings such as spirits, gods, landscape features and crystals that are distinctly non-human. For example in San Jose, the term pixan is most often used as "spirit" or animating force, not only for humans but is also often used to refer to incorporeal spirits that haunt the night. Similarly, Ik can refer not only to the "breath" but also the wind and supernatural "bad breezes" which can cause sickness. Finally, the heat of k'inam not only animates human blood (k'ik'), but also gives poisonous animals their venom. In contrast, only the ool (the immaterial, social heart) is uniquely characteristic of humans, with no attribution of this force to non-human entities. Therefore, I argue that the ool is a central to understanding Mopan notions of conviviality.

The cultural logic of *ool* draws on cultural notions of "metaphysical balance" and "centeredness" that provides a model not only for the organization of the cosmos but also to the proper form of interpersonal relations (Fisher 1999). <sup>7</sup> Through the gift giving and sociality accompanying the "expectation of reciprocity," (Gregory 1974) the Mopan express the emotional feeling of harmonious social life as *ki uy ool* (happiness of the heart). This happiness is rooted in the quality of life that comes from living with others in everyday life. (Fisher 1999; see Bourdieu 1977)

Mopan emphasis on happiness in the *ool* as the goal of convivial social relations is expressed linguistically in introductions (*Ki inw ool a k'altikech* – I am happy in my heart to know/remember you) or as an expression of friendship (*inw et ool* – "my friend" or literally – one who shares the same social heart as me). Additionally, the phrase *toh inw ool* (my heart is straight) is the obligatory reply to social greetings, both informally as well as in the invocation in Maya-Catholic mass. In each of these cases, the affect of personal relations is expressed in predications of the *ool*, rather than other animating forces such as the *pixan*, *ik or k'inam*. By locating interpersonal relations in the *ool*, the Mopan ground interpersonal conviviality in the social heart.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Cultural logic of *ki uy ool* is neither a "primordial quality tied to certain symbolic structures" (essentialism) nor the result of "Maya culture and ethnic identity as active forms of resistance to non-Indian sociopolitical structures" (constructivism). Rather, cultural logic is a "generative principle expressed through cognitive schemas that promote inter-subjective continuity and are conditioned by social, political, and economic contingencies" (Fischer 1999 474-5).

Feelings of *ki uy ool* are not merely an expression of individual happiness, but of harmony between the self and the constellation of interpersonal relations which jointly compose social identity (see Overing 2000: p 309). Through the proper giving and receiving of respect (*tzik*), the Mopan build affective social relations which enrich the happiness of the personal *ool* within the holism of society. In such a holistic culture, "the organization of society is understood to exist in conformity with an overarching cosmological order, wherein everything (and everyone) has its predetermined and natural place" (Abse 2007: p 12).

For the Mopan, kinship and social relations are animated by affective feelings of ki uy ool brought into existence through every day face-to-face interactions of co-residence and reinforced through daily activities of living, working and especially eating together.<sup>8</sup> Through these linked expressions of everyday life, positive feelings are created as expressions of underlying Mopan values which privilege the creation of sociality. Like other Amerindian indigenous societies, the Mopan live together within a community that provides a continuous stream of opportunities "for expressing, monitoring, and managing the amicable relations" (see Mentore 2005 194-195). The physical proximity of close residence instills ties of reciprocity and mutual dependence which form the basis of sociality between households. In this relational cosmology, Mopan society is linked together as a series of relationships between households, both between and within village through social institutions such as kinship, marriage exchanges and the institution of compadrazgo (god-parenthood) (Danziger 2001; Wilk 1997). Social rituals not only increase the number of a person's social relations, but also facilitate the ongoing togetherness of conviviality through collective labor, feasting and rituals. These ties produce the collective community, physically bringing distinct bodies of separate people together into the empirical reality of inter-social life. For the Mopan, it is not merely enough to accrue an ever growing network of social relations. Rather, these relations must continually be mobilized so that a sense of conviviality (ki uy ool) is renewed. Ki uy ool (social harmony) forms the basis of interpersonal relations that organize society. Harmonious social relations create symmetry between the personal and collective experience of continuity/belonging and embodies "both the means and the actuality of convivial village society" (see Mentore 2005 p 52).

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> The importance of conviviality as an animating force in social relations is prevalent among many cultures. In particular, this form of sociality among the Mopan Maya parallels its importance among indigenous people of Amazonia (see Overing and Passes 2000; Mentore 2005; Uzendoski 2004).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> Affiliation with development groups, such as cacao groups, allow for new forms of social organizations within familiar social patterns.

# **Limited Good and Expectations of Reciprocity (Balancing Holism / Hierarchy)**

In Mopan society, harmonious social relations of the *ool* are maintained through an indigenous ethos of equality that minimizes ambitions for wealth, prestige or power. Within this "ideology of equality", there were few tangible differences in the material condition of housing, food and clothes) between well off households and the less fortunate. Everyone "lived in the same type of stick/thatched house; no one owned, or otherwise controlled, any land; each household made their milpa with the same basic tools, "and all had the same limited access to outside economic opportunities" (Gregory 1975). Someone who is seen as taking too much of the whole is negatively sanctioned by the rest of society. In an effort to maintain equality amongst members of the village actions such as burning your house down, witchcraft accusations, the evil eye, or even murder are employed as means of social control. In the paradigm, the production of excess cacao was discouraged and those seen as hoarding were in danger of drawing the ire of their neighbors.

In contrast, social energies are organized around the paramount value of holism, which values the creation of convivial relations through collective action and exchanges of food and labor (Dumont 1986). Rather than being organized around capitalist accumulation, the primary concern in Mopan social life is concerned with converting mundane things into social relations, prestige and respect (see Bohannan 1955). In this holistically oriented society, the Mopan channel their ambitions into local priorities such as making a good milpa, providing sustenance for the family, civil-religious obligations and the accumulation of social/kinship relations (Thompson 1930 p 86).

As an expression of holistic values, the Mopan traditionally viewed both positive and negative experiences through the lens of what some anthropologists have called a culturally sanctioned value of "limited good" (Foster 1965). Foster defines the "image of limited good" as an economic/social paradigm in which...

all of the desired things in life such as land, wealth, health, friendship and love, manliness and honor, respect and status, power and influence, security and safety, exist in finite quantity and are always in short supply, as far as the peasant is concerned. Not only do these and all other "good things" exist in finite and limited quantities, but in addition there is no way directly within peasant power to increase the available quantities. (Foster 1965 p. 296: See Gregory 1975)

An ideology of limited good restricts the expression of individualism because both good and bad are seen as a whole to be shared by society. Adhering to these egalitarian material practices is thought to be an outward "expression of a willingness to conform to the norms and ethics" of *Kustumbre*, such as "sharing land, participating in communal labor groups, and accepting the *Alcalde* as a legitimate judge

of conflicts" (Wilk 1997 p 169). Even though households in Mopan villages would vary in terms of relative wealth and status, these differences were minor. Within this system of limited good, differences in resources were largely the result of these synchronic differences in the lifecycle of the household, rather than long term economic/class differentiation (see Wilk 1997).

A social orientation towards limited good is mediated by what Gregory calls "the expectation of reciprocity." <sup>10</sup> Through "expectation of reciprocity," the ethic of limited good is "a foil aimed at checking the accumulation strategies of village capitalists" (Wilk 1997 p 170). The common Mopan sentiment is that those who have more should share more, each according to their own means. This expectation is not limited only to money/wealth, but also extends to talents and resources. In all areas of life, sharing one's wealth, financially and otherwise, with those less fortunate is expected. In a culture where having more than others is both physically and spiritually dangerous, those with more money, resources or talents are coerced into social obligations which required the expenditure of this wealth. In the old days, this would primarily mean sponsoring a fiesta, serving in the civil/religious hierarchy, or other socially acceptable paths of prestige. Rather than a vestige of some primordial/precapitalist egalitarianism, the ethos of "limited good" and the "expectation of reciprocity" is, in fact, a relatively recent Mopan cultural response (Gregory 1975). In the face of creeping inequality, the ideology of limited good serves to reinforce the belief that sees "the principles of market exchange as antithetical to those of the village economy" (Wilk 1997 170).

# Development, Protestantism and the "Modernization" of Mopan Habitus

Through the introduction of Protestantism and development, Mopan values of hierarchy (*tzik*) and holism (*ki uy ool*) surrounding cacao have been challenged by well funded outside interests. In San Jose, Protestantism and development serve as vehicles for the incorporation of outside values of "modernity" into Mopan habitus. Through engagement in international development projects and the appeal of Protestant theology, modernization is promulgating the literal dis-integration of prior local cosmologies. In contrast to the gradual rise of modernizing ideologies in the West, which took "place through the long-term discursive development of explicit ideas and formally directed institutional

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Although Gregory intended the "expectation of reciprocity" as an alternate explanation to what he and others perceived to be the flaws in Foster's limited good, but rather than contradictory explanations it seems that both speak to the same social reality from different perspectives. Limited Good describes a social outlook on cultural notions of scarcity, while the expectation of reciprocity describes the social mechanism for dealing with these notions of scarcity, namely that those with more resources have a moral and social obligation to help those with less (rebalancing inequality in a zero sum world).

adjustments", among many indigenous people this change "has derived rapidly from out of a highly disruptive and socially shared historical experience" of colonialism (Abse 2007).

Through the implementation of tangible projects in target communities, both development and Protestantism alter the practices and organization of daily life according to the priority of hegemonic modernity. They seek to transform cultural understandings of "deep-life" through transforming the "socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures" that make up a people's habitus (Bourdieu 1977: p 76). In what Habermas refers to as "the colonization of the life-world," modernizing endeavors attempt to reorganize fundamental matters such as birth, death, old age, sexuality, and other dimensions of individual and collective meaning, suffering and rewards into accord with "modern" values (Habermas 1985; Robertson and Chirico 1985 p 224). In this colonial encounter, "Traditional forms of authority, exchange and association eventually have been replaced by the imposition of modern western forms, effectively also introducing an associate alien configuration of values and thus partially eclipsing but not entirely displacing the pre-existent traditional ideology" (Abse 2007).

Discourses of modernity pervade both the goals and methods of development and these seemingly distinct entities share many of the same underlying spatial and temporal realities. I argue that both Protestantism and development implement parallel ideological packages concurrent with the ideals of modernization that enhance the latent possibilities within one another (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993; Piot 1999). By discussing transformations in Mopan social and environmental relationships, I link Protestant missionaries and development organizations as cooperative arbiters of hegemonic modernization.

One of the greatest strengths of both Protestantism and development has been to define modernity as the teleological goal of progress. The spatial-temporal scheme of progress is envisioned as ideology of emancipation from tradition and superstition. Both Protestant churches and development "reconfigure temporality" by demonizing tradition as a marker of backwardness and instead valorizing a forward looking outlook which demands a break with the past (Piot 1999 page 9, 135; Robbins 2005; Wainwright 2008). This oppositional schematic aligns... "Protestant Christianity with the idea of modernity, referential language (as expressed in the values of transparency and truth), and the signifying practices that underlie abstract value (as expressed in money and commodities) in

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> Despite the purportedly secular nature of modernity, Sahlins et al. (1996), argues that many of the most distinctive characteristics of Western modernity, "such as the nature-culture divide, the valorization of economistic reasoning, the sense of society as an external, coercive force that is counter-posed against a natural, free individual, and the imagination of selfish desire as the animating force behind human action, all have their roots in the Biblical narrative of the Fall" (see Robbins 2004b p 1143).

opposition to paganism, the past, performative and magical language, and ceremonial exchange" (Keane 2007: p 222).

Modernizing projects of Protestantism and development attempt to standardize the multiplicity of temporal and spatial realities held by indigenous/colonized people to the hegemonic values of Euro-American "common sense" (Piot 1999 page 163). Protestantism and development each invert notions of space so that "the distant metropolitan or global becomes seemingly close and immanent, even at times appearing locally authored." (Piot 1999 page 9). Internalized and adopted as an empowering motif of progress, the goal of modernization incorporates subjects through the allure of material comfort paired with a value system permissive of individual advancement. Through these shared modernizing values, Protestantism and development attempt to enact a profound realignment of cultural values and social practices. In the place of traditional holistic cosmologies of Mopan *Kustumbre*, these modernizing projects promote an ideology in which the individual becomes disarticulated from society, nature and the supernatural.

Both Protestantism and development promote values which foster individualism at the expense of convivial social relations. In both Protestantism and development value systems, the creation of the autonomous individual is a necessary prerequisite in the creation of a modern subject. In many parts of the world, the projects of development and Christianity have been intertwined as a moral narrative of the emancipation of the individual. Protestant missionaries create "faith" as a personal choice and provide an opportunity for the believer to break with traditional religious organizations and structure. The narrative and experience of protestant liberation from the uncertainty of the Old Ways constitutes missionization as a modern project in San Jose, advancing a value system conducive to the work of international development organizations. The growing emphasis on the individual as the locus of salvation promotes an ethos in which differentiations in wealth are valorized. This is in marked contrast to notions of "limited good" in which inequality is the result of selfishness that threatens the harmony of the social whole."

In a similar fashion, development creates the means for individual economic advancement, disconnected from social obligations for reciprocity of labor and wealth. Just as salvation is now an individual matter for Protestants, so too are the profits from the commercial cacao. The rise of individuality is an expression of the underlying shift in values in Mopan society. In a variety of contexts, Protestant conversion has been linked to market integration (Weber 1905; see Comaroff & Comaroff 1993; Meyer 1998; Robbins 2004b p 1149) by upsetting local patterns of sociality and promoting a shift "from relational dependency and the gift to a preoccupation with autonomy and the money/commodity

form" (Piot 1999 p 9). This changing ethos has given rise to growing inequality both within and between communities. Within the paradigm of individual choice, Mopan social holism has also been redirected towards smaller autonomous groups offered by the numerous Christian churches and the plethora of development "groups." In this new atomistic worldview, the self pulls back from the reciprocal relations and the hierarchically organized holism of society is ruptured. The individual self is recast as the natural common denominator and "the measure of all things." Stripped of its cosmologically sanction holism, society becomes "a residual place: it is no more than a juxtaposition of individuals" (Abse 2007; Dumont 1986).

At the same time that ascendancy of modern individualism disarticulates the self from society, it also challenges conceptions of nature by creating a qualitative distinction between people and their spiritually infused environment. Through ideological changes brought by Protestantism and development, the Mopan cosmos is no longer appeased through the creation of qualitative relationships. Both development and Protestantism set humans apart from their surroundings and allow for nature to become under the dominion of people. Nature is now re-imagined as a collection of "natural resources" to be rationally used and environmentally managed, rather than agentive spirits to be respected.

In Protestantism, relationships with the God are mediated through Jesus rather than spiritually enacted with materials of the world. As a doctrine that values individual agency, Protestantism "ties that moral value to the preliminary task of getting people to see what beings in the world are actually agents (God, humans, not spirits of fetishes) and what kinds of agency properly belong to them" (Keane 2007: p 52). In the creation of modern subjects, Protestantism creates distinctions between persons and material objects devoid of agency (Keane 2007). In this emergent secularist world view, the division of the world into realms of the natural, real, secular, objective are posed in contrast to the social, contrived, religious, subjective (Asad 2003).

In this desacralization, Protestants condemn the religious offerings of cacao as part of the material practices associated with the Old Ways and the ritual uses of cacao in Maya-Catholicism become emblematic to the "primitive" sphere of spiritual agency. For Mopan Protestants, the cacao offerings represent the backwardness of beliefs that falsely attribute agency to nature spirits, rather than Jesus. Because of the danger associated with "old ways," Protestantism has attempted to purge cacao from its place in the sacred realm and reposition it safely in the realm of profane commodities. By demystifying the world and sanctifying individual advancement Protestantism paves the way for development schemes born of the same societal worldview. Protestantism divests spirituality from the

formerly sacred creating the world as an object to be improved upon by human work and management. Material practices of *Kustumbre* that once symbolized these connections become devoid of true meaning, signifiers without a signified, and can therefore be subject to external intervention. Spiritual divestment of the natural world encourages a rational worldview, calculable by science, and less vulnerable to the unpredictable whims of the spirits. Without a compatible world view and ultimate Truth, local investment in the "progress" promised by development would be difficult to secure.

Concurrent with the demystification of eco-spiritual relations of Protestant Evangelism, agricultural and health oriented development projects encourage the creation of a secularist worldview wherein the land, spirits and the self are understood as separate entities. Through the creation of "technical" solutions to the problems of poverty, development allows the social restructuring of peripheral societies as the enactment of modern rationality. Development initiatives position cacao as a resource to be maximized through the use of technological and scientific agronomy. Today, crops are to be quantified rather than sacrificed, managed rather than worshiped and sold rather than respected. Disconnected from its former role as a sacred "god food," the desacralization of cacao to be repositioned as a bulk commodity in global corporate supply chain.

# **Conclusion and Chapter Roadmap**

Big changes are afoot in San Jose and the story of cacao was much more complicated than it had originally seemed. The more I learned about cacao, the more it became apparent that changes in planting, harvesting and drinking were not isolated changes. Instead, the transformation of cacao from sacred to commodity acts as a microcosm of the underlying shift in Mopan paramount values. Through the introduction of development and Protestant conversion in San Jose, the entire cultural system which had contextualized the relationship between the Mopan and their cacao was destabilized and in the process of being reorganized around alien values.

Historically, Protestant conversion stripped cacao of its sacred properties by demonizing the Old Ways, in which cacao held spiritual significance. In the context of cultural humiliation, the desacralization of cacao set the stage for large-scale development projects. In the transformation of cacao cultivation, development seeks not only to reorder Mopan agriculture, but also to restructure Mopan life ways according to the values of modernity "as the dominant mode of enframing the world" so that modernist values of individualism, quantification and alienation replace qualitative relations between the Mopan, their cacao and the wider cosmos (Wainwright 2008; see Mitchell 1991).

What had started out as a study of the "social life of cacao" among the Mopan had become about big issues like modernity, progress and the place of self in the world. Using cacao as the focal

point of this investigations allows changes in abstract values to be rendered visible in the Mopan *habitus*.

This book is laid out as follows. Part 1 of my dissertation ("*Kustumbre*") sets the backdrop for the major social and environmental changes affecting the Mopan's relation with cacao in the "old ways" of Maya culture. I begin in chapter 2, by contextualizing the cultural, historical and ecological background of this study. I follow this background in chapter 3 by describing the former importance of communal cacao drinking in Mopan society for social events, communal labor and religion rituals. Chapter 4 examines the role of cacao in a Mopan spiritual and environmental cosmos based on respect to the spirit owners of nature. Chapter 5 builds off the previous chapter to analyze how cacao was used as a ritual implement in ceremonies of consecration and petition to the spirits which are culturally imagined as "feeding the gods."

Parts 2 and 3 of this book address the outside institutional catalysts for the profound changes which have transformed Mopan life. In part 2, titled "Protestant Conversion," I explore how religious change has destabilized Mopan social, spiritual and environmental relations. Chapter 6 describes how religious conversion caused a social schism in Mopan communities and undermined the previous economic ethos of "limited good" in favor of Weberian capitalism. Chapter 7 examines how Protestant conversion has demonized the spirits and rituals of Mopan environmental *Kustumbre*, leading to a desacralization of cacao.

The third part of this book is concerned with the changes brought by "Agricultural Development." Chapter 8 investigates how the availability of international markets for cacao has created social inequality and consumerism in Mopan villages, while at the same time providing new opportunities for the expression of Maya identity. Chapter 9 considers the case study of the cacao fungus Monilia from a post-development perspective to demonstrate the self-perpetuating nature of development as a tool of hegemonic modernization. In chapter 10, I revisit the central themes of my argument and propose future research directions suggested by the questions raised in my inquiry.

2. **Background** - Chapter 2 examines the role of cacao in Mopan history and agriculture. I begin by provide a brief historical background of the Mopan Maya in Belize and contextualize their interactions with cacao within the local agricultural landscape. I then describe how cacao is an integral part of the Mopan agricultural repertoire that is based on bringing together complementary oppositions of shifting/permanent, sacred/profane, and market/domestic use crops. Finally, I give a brief overview of

the history of cacao cultivation in southern Belize, and examine the ways ancient Maya uses cacao as the object of trade, tribute and as general money. I then trace the history of commercial cacao production in Toledo from the British colonial era of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. In these different developmental epochs, commercial cacao has been subject to a variety of development regimes, being implemented first as a colonial plantation crop, then later as the object of a neo-liberal development project during decolonization, and finally as a high end, Fair Trade product.

- 3. The Sociality of Drinking Cacao Chapter 3 describes the importance of communal cacao drinking in Mopan society. The Mopan prepare a variety of chocolate beverages (käkäh) which are consumed both for daily meals and in ritual feasting. I describe a number of these recipes, leading to a discussion of cacao's symbolic place in the context of the Mopan meal. I then forefront the ways that cacao acts to create convivial relations between members of society. Mopan practices of eating and drinking, as exemplified by cacao, mediate unequal parties through feeding. The daily act of sharing chocolate beverage creates conviviality between people who eat together, strengthening ties between kin and compadres. These exchanges offer a window into underlying notions of sociality that are built around an indigenous system of *Kustumbre*, motivated by the values of *tzik* (hierarchy) and *ki uyool* (harmonious sociality). I extend this discussion of Mopan sociality to describe the role cacao plays in constructing social relations through group feasting for collective labor and religious fiestas. In all of these events, I argue that eating together cements the bonds of sociality between participants.
- **4.** The Relational Ecology of Mopan *Kustumbre* Chapter 4 investigates the sacred ecology of Mopan *Kustumbre*. I explore the cultural landscape of traditional Mopan cosmology, in which the natural environment is invested with moral concern. I show how Mopan agriculturalists create relationships of value with spiritual forces which personify nature. In this "animistic" and "perspectival" environmental cosmology, respect (*tzik*) is created between the human world and the supernatural through ritual exchanges and offerings. The most immediate of these sprits of the landscape are the "*yum*," (owners of nature) who act as intermediaries for a distant God (*Dyos*). I then describe the *yum* of the wild cacao is known as the *Cheil* (those of the forest) as a case study of Mopan relationality with the spirits of the landscape.
- **5. Feeding the Sacred** In chapter 5, I describe how the Mopan utilize cacao to create and maintain relations of respect with spiritual nature. The Mopan believe that the supernatural *yum* must be "paid" with desirable offerings (such as cacao or copal incense) in order to ensure environmental benevolence.

These offerings are culturally imagined as "feeding the gods," in a way that mirrors the importance of the social drinking of cacao in Mopan society. I then provide an analysis of the Mopan ritual process as a rite of passage in which sexual abstinence is an essential locus of building up creative potency (*K'inam*) necessary to create relationships with spiritual nature. Finally, I ground this discussion of ritual practice in a survey of traditional ceremonies in which cacao is used as a sacred offering including rites of consecration, healing, feeding the dead, agricultural rituals, fishing and healing. In each of these rituals, offerings of cacao provide a medium for mediating the hierarchical difference between Mopan humans and the supernatural.

#### Part 2 – Protestant Conversion

- 6. Protestant Conversion and Social Schism Chapter 6 examines the changing role of cacao in Mopan Maya religious life in the context of religious schism. The transformation of cacao from sacred to profane is representative of the larger processes of Protestant religious conversion in Mopan society. Unlike the hybridity of Maya-Catholicism, the "second conquest" of Protestantism demanded rupture with the past as a sign of a modern Christian identity. Protestant ideology emphasizes modern values such as an individual faith, the primacy of text and a denouncement of fetishism. I explore how these values of conversion have led to the fracturing of social holism of *Kustumbre* that was built on ties of kinship, *compadrazgo*, and residence. Protestant conversion has called into question the spiritual holism of Mopan communities that were previously of "all of one mind" religiously. As a result, social activities such as collective labor are increasingly self-segregated by denominational membership. Schism has also resulted in the decline of the cargo system of political-religious authority and a general secularization of social life. But even as conversion has sundered the familiar relations of *Kustumbre*, new opportunities for leadership and prestige have arisen in the diversification of churches. A similar renewal of religious life has occurred as competing churches have come to replace religious brotherhoods as totemic divisions in Mopan society.
- **7.** The Demystification of Nature and Ritual Abandonment- Chapter 7 builds on the themes of the previous chapter to investigate how Protestant conversion among the Mopan has led a disenchantment of nature and the abandonment of ritual relations with the spirits of the landscape. Protestantism has desacralized the natural world and vilifying cacao offerings to saints as "idol worship." Now, many Mopan Protestants say that the *yum* should no longer be considered the owners of nature. Instead, the *yum* are evil spirits (*k'ak'as ik*) sent by the devil to lead them astray. Converts are encouraged to leave

the dangerous Old Ways behind and instead "go to Jesus" with their problems. Within the new divided religious life of San Jose, continued ritual practice has become a social fault line between conservative "Old Testament People" who continue to follow the rituals of Mopan *Kustumbre*, and "New Testament People" who argue that the ritual use of cacao and other sacred implements should be left in the past. I then describe how the fear of Mixed Mindedness precludes the hybridization of the Old Ways with the values of modernity. Protestantism encourages converts to "forget the past" and leave the rituals of *Kustumbre* behind as pagan superstitions and even acting out the old rituals as a matter of cultural pride is believed to be an opening for demonic possession. The contention of traditional Mopan religious practice has transformed the religious significance of cacao from sacred to profane. I argue that disenchantment of nature laid the ideological foundation so that development projects for the commercialization of cacao could later flourish.

#### Part 3 – Development

8. The Development of Mopan Society - Chapter 8 explores the advent of commercial cacao cultivation as a catalyst for the modernization of Mopan society. In the development of the Belizean cacao industry, capitalist values are encouraged while traditional models of Mopan economic life are disparaged as old fashioned and unproductive. Development initiatives seek to increase production by promoting a business mentality among cacao farmers and encourage investment to increase long term profits. As the ideologies of individual profit have helped to break apart the previous ideology of limited good, the spoils of development have caused rising inequality between different ethnicities, villages and households. Profits from commercial cacao have allowed for a proliferation of consumer goods and cacao's former role in domestic consumption has declined in favor of store bought alternatives. The commodification of cacao has also provided the impetus for the creation of wage labor in the village, as those who work part-time outside of the community have begun to pay others to maintain their cacao farms in their absence. Despite the benefits brought by commercial cacao, it also requires new expenses which can strain family budgets, which can draw them into outside systems of credit and debt. Even as individualistic development has sundered many of the bonds which previously animated Mopan communities, it has also been the source of new forms of social organization, such as the development groups.

While cacao no longer maintains its formerly important position in Mopan cosmology, social drinking and ritual use due to Protestant conversion, it has now become a prominent symbol of Belizean Maya identity under the "Maya Gold" Fair Trade brand. By examining advertisement and documentary

films, I show how Maya identity plays a central role in the marketing of Belizean chocolate by development personnel, corporations and the Mopan themselves. The successful marketing of Belizean chocolate has been a key enabler of an indigenous renaissance that is taking place in southern Belize as outside resources are used in the creation of an ecumenical Mopan Maya modernity that seeks to bridge the rifts of religious schism with celebrations of cultural tradition.

- 9. Post-Development and the Reorganization Socio-Natural Relations Chapter 9 examines the transformation of the Mopan's relations nature which has occurred following the commercialization of cacao. Throughout this chapter, I employ theories of post-development to a case study of Monilia, a cacao fungus that has devastated local production in recent years. I first describe the changing landscape of southern Belize, and argue that the expansion of cacao as an export commodity has created the conditions in which the disease Monilia could fester and spread throughout the region. I then show how Monilia is not merely a natural disaster, but a social problem as well. Cacao projects that were promoted by development as "easy money" have become increasingly hard work with new pruning regimes required to control Monilia. In response to outbreaks of disease, development groups have responded with technical solutions and agronomic extension training to combat Monilia organically. In these endeavors, development can be seen as a self perpetuating system which necessitates its own existence through future technical interventions, leading to the expansion of agricultural surveillance. In all their varied overt purposes, I argue that these projects attempt to instill Western values of mononaturalism and scientific mastery over nature in place of the relational/animistic environmental paradigms of Kustumbre. While development programs have achieved a major reorganization of Mopan relations with nature, this transformation of indigenous environmental knowledge is incomplete as the causes and cures for Monilia remain contested.
- **10. Conclusion** In the conclusion, the arguments made throughout this dissertation are brought together and synthesized. I describe the vast changes brought by Protestantism and development which have impacted the Mopan's relationship with their cacao, transforming what was once a sacred crop into a profane commodity. Based on the case study of the Belizean cacao, I argue there is a synergy between Protestant conversion and development as parallel institutions of modernity. I conclude by suggesting research directions for further study based on this study.

#### Chapter 2 – Background

#### Introduction

In chapter 2, I review the central place of cacao in the Mopan history and agriculture. I begin by giving a brief history of the Mopan Maya, locating them geographically in the highlands of southern Belize, an area ideally suited for growing cacao. I then discuss theoretical perspectives from the "anthropology of trees," drawing on authors such as Bloch, Levi-Strauss, and Fernandez in order to contextualize Mopan understandings of cacao within broader anthropological concerns concerning the relationships between people and their environments. Next, I describe the botany and ecology of cacao as the biological template for its social, cultural, symbolic, religious, and ritual life. I follow this discussion with an examination of cacao's role in the larger Mopan Maya agricultural landscape of kitchen gardens and feral groves. I then examine how cacao is an integral part of the Mopan agricultural repertoire that is based on bringing together complementary oppositions of shifting/permanent, sacred/profane, and market/domestic use crops.

Finally, I give a brief overview of the history of cacao cultivation in southern Belize. I begin this discussion by first examining the ways ancient Maya used cacao as the object of trade, tribute and as general money. I then trace the history of commercial cacao production in Toledo from the British colonial era of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present. In these different developmental epochs, commercial cacao has been subject to a variety of development regimes, being implemented first as a colonial plantation crop, then later as the object of a neo-liberal development project during decolonization, and finally as a high end, Fair Trade product.

# Part 1 - The Mopan Maya

The modern Mopan Maya are linguistically and genetically related to the ancient Maya famous for their pyramids, hieroglyphs and apocalyptic calendars.<sup>12</sup> In fact, the ancient Maya overshadow their descendants in American popular consciousness to the point where people were often confused about my research. "Aren't they all extinct?" they would ask. I would assure them that the Maya are still with us, about 5 million of them from 5 countries and, increasingly now, within the US. Today, even as different Maya communities have endured a devastating civil war in Guatemala, the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas, migration, displacement, the upheavals of NAFTA and structural adjustments in their home

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup> Although the primary language of the Classic Era Maya was from the Cholan branch of Maya, the Yucatean branch (of which Mopan is a present day representation) was an important language in the Post-Classic era, especially in the Yucatan.

countries, the Maya remain a culturally vibrant people who engage the 21<sup>st</sup> century on their own terms (Burns 1993; Nash 2001).

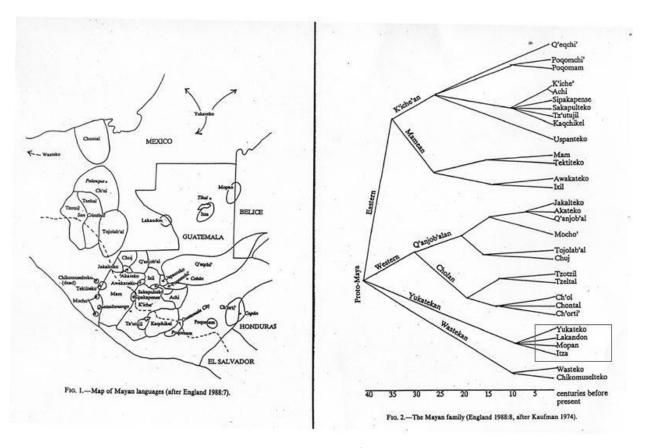
The Maya are a large group of indigenous Native Americans living in southern Mexico Guatemala, Belize and parts of El Salvador and Honduras. Currently, there are more than 7.5 million Maya people speaking 29 distinct languages. Some of these languages have over a million speakers while others with only a handful of elderly speakers remaining (Coe 2006:p 11). Today, there are nearly 5,000 Mopan living throughout Belize, not only in rural villages but increasingly in urban centers as well. Along with more than 10,000 Mopan living in Guatemala, <sup>13</sup> plus an increasing population in the United States, the Mopan are a growing population which continues to expand into the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Mopan language is an offshoot of the larger Yucatec family which broke off from Yucatec proper prior to conquest. During the Classic era of the ancient Maya, the ancestors of the Mopan spoke proto-Yucatecan and probably lived to the north of their current homeland, on the periphery of the Yucatan peninsula (Fink 1987 400; Thompson 1930 37). Historical linguists claim that the split between Mopan and Yucatec occurred 10 centuries ago when their languages began to diverge, probably as the ancestral Mopan became separated from the greater Yucatec homeland (Danziger 2001 18; England 1988; Kaufman 1974). Since this time, proto-Yucatecean has divided into the closely related languages Mopan, Yucatec, Itza and Lacandon. <sup>14</sup> Despite nearly 1,000 years since these languages began to diverge, they are remarkably close in terms of linguistic time depth. Although each of these related languages, "exhibits significant phonological, lexical, and structural differences" (Ulrich, and Peck 1986; Ulrich and Ulrich 1966; Thompson 1930), they remain mutually intelligible even to the present day. (Danziger 2001 18; Fink 1987 400; Thompson 1930 p 37). Although the modern Mopan of southern Belize rarely interact with the Yucatec Maya of Northern Belize and Mexico, when they do they often are surprised by the closeness of their languages and can quickly find shared basis for conversation. When Mopans meet Yucatec Maya speakers, they recognizes them as members of a shared group although they may come from "far off villages," and see each other more similar to each other than with any of the other ethnic groups that inhabit the region (Briceño Chel 2009 personal communication).

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> Today, the Belizean Mopan maintain relations with Guatemalan Mopan-speaking communities through trade, marriage and the circulation of dance regalia. Belizean Mopan think of their Guatemalan Mopan neighbors as more magical and keepers of long forgotten esoteric/ritual knowledge (Danziger 2001 p 21)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup> Mopan and its sister languages of Lacandon and Itza Maya are relatively small groups with few living speakers, compared with Yucatec proper which has more than 750,000 speakers and covers a large geographic of the Yucatan Peninsula.



Geographic and Historical Distribution of the Maya Language Family

(England 1988; see Kaufman 1974)

Even though Mopan and the other Yucatec share a very similar language, social organization and cosmology, over the centuries the Mopan Maya slowly began to diverge and become culturally unique. Although there are no ancient sites that can be distinctly identified archaeologically as Mopan, linguistic reconstruction shows a period of migration that included linguistic and cultural contact with highland Maya groups like Chol Maya, and more recently, with Q'eqchi' Maya (Fink 1987 400). During this precontact period, many highland Maya terms and concepts were assimilated into Mopan (Verbeeck 1998). These terms show a high degree of cultural borrowing ranging from everyday things like the names of animals, but also extend to important ritual and cosmological concepts. For example, the elderly farmers of San Jose still invoke the names of the old agricultural gods of the mountains and plains (witzhook) in their prayers. This concept shares similarities to the neighboring Q'eqchi' god of the "hill and valley" (tzuul-taka). Similarly, term hook is probably derived from earlier contact with highlands Chol which occurred nearly 1000 years ago (Thompson 1930; Verbeeck 1998). Similarly, Thompson claims

that traditional Mopan worship of mountain and river deities is much closer to highland Maya religious tradition than to those of the other lowland Maya groups like the Yucatec and Lacandon (1930:603).

It is during this pre-colonial era that a distinctly Mopan culture begins to emerge which mixed a substrate of Yucatecan ideas and language with new borrowings from the highlands. This mixture reflects a duality in Mopan, incorporating both lowland and highland Maya characteristics into their culture. This type of incorporation is not unique to the Maya. This early pattern of cultural contact and borrowing has continued over the past millennium. Throughout their history, Mopan has incorporated pieces of highland Maya culture, then, after conquest, with Spanish and British, and now other ethnic groups in Belize. This pattern of incorporating outside ideas and reimagining them within indigenous values allows for resilience of Mopan culture in the face of change.

While linguistic evidence hints at the importance of migration and culture contact/assimilation early in Mopan history, there is no historical or archaeological evidence of a Maya identity that is distinctly "Mopan" before the colonial era. As the Spanish began their conquest of the Maya world in 1530, Yucatec Maya from the north began to flee into Mopan areas from the persecution of conquistadors. This flow of refugees probably forced the proto-Mopan to migrate to the south in the vicinity of present day Poptun, Guatemala, just a few miles from the Belizean border (Verbeeck 1998). This area of the Peten was beyond the margins of early Spanish conquest and the Mopan remained unknown to the Spanish until after 1675 (Villagutierre 1985:p 16). In his 1677 expedition through the area, *Fray* Joseph Delgado makes a reference to the Mopan as trading partners with neighboring Manche Chol Maya, but never encountered the Mopan himself.

Nearly 20 years later, the Spanish launched an expedition to "pacify" the Mopan and bring them under the control of the Dominican Friars. At the time, about 10,000 - 12,000 Mopan lived in widely dispersed settlements spread out from southeast Peten (50km south of lake Peten Itza) to the Belizean coast south of the Mopan River in the present day Toledo district (Thompson 1930 37; Verbeeck 1998). This settlement distribution points to a general southeast migration of the Mopan, probably as a result of population pressure as an increasing number of displaced Yucatec and Chan Maya refugees entered the area in the wake of the Spanish conquest of their homelands (Verbeeck 1998). As the Spanish incursions continued deeper into unconquered Maya territory, the Mopan themselves soon became the target of Spanish colonial ambitions. In 1695, Captain Juan Diaz de Velasco and the Dominican Fathers

<sup>15</sup> By the end of the Classic era and into the Post-Classic, there is linguistic evidence for Chol-Yucatecan bilingualism that is also found in the early colonial Maya texts such as the Chilam Balam (Bricker 2000).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> In fact, a similar incorporation happened in English with the Norman Conquest during the 10<sup>th</sup> century in which ideas and words from a Romance Language became incorporated into a Germanic substrate.

Agustin Cano and Joseph Delgado led a small force into the Mopan area. Although the Mopan were reputed to be a war-like people, hostilities were short lived. After a brief struggle, the Mopan were defeated by the Spaniards and forced to convert to Catholicism. In the aftermath of Spanish-Catholic conquest, the defeated Mopan were forcibly relocated to scattered villages and homesteads in the vicinity of San Luis Peten, Guatemala (founded in 1708) (Thompson 1930 p 37). The Guatemalan Mopan continue to inhabit this area up to the present day and the city of San Luis remains the cultural capital of the Mopan.

The Mopan were not the only groups displaced by the Spanish and the upheavals of conquest scattered many other indigenous people from their homelands as well. In the reconfigured ethnic landscape of the colonial era, the Mopan came into contact with other Maya groups such as the Manche Chol (from what is now southern Belize) and the Itza Maya (from near Lake Peten, Guatemala) as well as highlands groups such as the Q'eqchi'. Through cultural contact, exchange, and intermarriage, the colonial era Mopan incorporated new ideas and practices into their cultural repertoire which was instrumental in the creation of a uniquely "Mopan" Maya identity.

# The Mopan in Belize

By the beginning of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish exploitation, taxes and forced labor had taken their toll on Maya society. After Guatemalan independence in 1821, conditions became even worse for indigenous people and many of the Q'eqchi' Maya from the Verapaz region fled to the Mopan areas of the Peten to escape forced labor on European coffee plantations (Danziger 2001 p 18; Wainwright 2008 Page 44). While the jungles of the Peten provided sanctuary for the Mopan and Q'eqchi', their reprieve from Guatemalan oppression would only be temporary. In 1884, the Guatemalan government began construction on a railroad to open up the Peten for colonization. During this era, the tightening grip of Guatemalan colonialism pushed many Mopan communities into the jungles and eventually beyond the British frontier. With outside forces slowly encircling them, some of the Guatemalan Mopan and Q'eqchi' began to migrate to the east and cross the ambiguous border into British Honduras (Thompson 1930: 41; Sapper 1897: 54; Clegern 1968: 93; Wilk 1997 Page 57).

British Honduras, as Belize was first called, was a small English colony, perched on the Caribbean Sea between the Latin countries of Mexico, Guatemala and Honduras. British Honduras was initially colonized by Europeans during the colonial expansion of Britain and Spain in the Caribbean. The early colonial history of this area grew out of the struggles between these powers, and the fortunes of British Honduras ebbed and flowed with the balance of power. While the Spanish made incursions along the

coast of what became British Honduras as early as 1531, they failed to establish a permanent presence in the area. Although the Spanish failed to found a permanent colony, their military actions throughout the 15th and 16th century dramatically destabilized the existing Maya population of the region and led to massive depopulation, especially among the Manche Chol of what is now southern Belize (Bolland 1977: p 20).

Beginning in the 17th century, the area became an enticing place for British privateers and pirates. The presence of extensive coastal islands and coral reefs off the coast of Belize, the second longest in the world, provided a haven for these marauders as they preyed upon the treasure ships of the Spanish empire (Ashcraft 1973: p 26). Hidden away from the main shipping lanes, the plunder of these pirate ships fueled the British economy in its slow war of attrition against the Spanish treasury. While the prospect of pirate booty created economic activity in the area, it was the potential for cutting and exporting logwood (*Haematoxylum campechianum*) that was the impetus for early settlement in the area.

Since the Spanish displaced the Manche Chol during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the hinterlands of what is now Southern Belize became increasingly depopulated through deliberate colonial policy. Although small groups of Maya Indians had lived in the interior of Belize since before contact, they largely remained hidden from the settlers who initially exploited timber in the coastal areas. As British loggers moved further inland and began exploring the unknown forested interior, they encountered small groups of Maya. The British viewed Maya swidden agriculture as a threat to their commercial logging. To discourage the Maya from resettling the area, the loggers harassed any Maya they encountered and the British even kept Maya slaves until the 1820s (Wilk 1997: p 55). The British settlers slowly pushed the Maya deeper into the jungle and by the 1830s had likely cleared most of the territory of indigenous presence (Bolland 1977: p 23; Bolland 1981: p 601), with only infrequent contact occurring between British and Maya between 1840 - 1880s (Wainwright 2008 Page 44).

By the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the social and economic conditions of British Honduras had changed. The end of slavery and the major downturn in the logging industry lessened British hostility towards the Maya (Ashcraft 1973; Bolland 1977). Shortly after, Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya began to cross the invisible border of British Honduras in search of new farm lands and an escape from Guatemalan oppression (Danziger 2001 p 18). By the 1880s, nearly one hundred Mopan families had crossed into British Honduras and founded a new settlement at the present day site of *Pueblo Viejo* (Old Village) which is just over the boundary from Guatemala (Gregory 1972: 14-15; Sapper 1897 p 57; Thompson 1930 38; Wilk 1997 Page 57). While *Pueblo* Viejo was on the British side of the border, the

Mopan of Pueblo Viejo continued to experience harassment by both Ladino soldiers and antagonistic Maya groups from Guatemala. By 1890, the ongoing violence reached a breaking point. The British colonial government relocated the Mopan of Pueblo Viejo to the new village of San Antonio, 10 miles further away from the border (Wilk 1997 Page 57).

During the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the central Mopan village of San Antonio grew rapidly from 448 people in 1891 to 758 inhabitants in 1901 (Verbeeck 1998 p 13). This increase was part of a wider migration and by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century; more than 1,500 Mopan, Q'eqchi' and possibly Manche Chol Maya had migrated from Guatemala to the area that would eventually be known as the Toledo district of Belize, "a political space that did not yet exist" (Wainwright 2008 Page 44). Throughout the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the number of Belizean Maya continued to grow. The 1921 census counted 2,169 Mayas in southern Belize (Wainwright 2008 Page 62). The population continued increase due to both continued emigration from Guatemala combined with high birthrates (Wainwright 2008 Page 62).

The rapid increase in population created a scarcity of new lands for shifting cultivation and resulting tensions between members of San Antonio. Faced with this ecological and social pressure, a number of Mopan families began to fission off of the main settlement in San Antonio to establish alquilos (detached ranches) in the surrounding countryside. While some of the alquilos were ephemeral, others attracted new settlers and eventually formed the basis for new Mopan villages. After a few years, these new settlements soon faced the same population pressures. The common trajectory of growth, overpopulation and village fission has been replayed numerous times in Mopan history and has spurred the ongoing colonization of new lands in Belize by the Mopan.

Table II.	Mopan	Population	Change
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Village	1960	1970	1980	1990	1996 TMCC ethnic percentages
San Jose	250	420	599	765	M-100
San Antonio	1700	1057	1087	940	M-98, K-2
Crique Jute	90	120	164	180	M-100
Na Luum Ca	X	X	X	51	M-100
Subtotal	2040	1597	1850	1936	

Note. X = village not yet been established, M = Mopan, K = Kekchi, O = Other ethnicity including Garifuna, Creole, Mestizo, East-Indian. Sources: Osborn (1982), GOB (1991) and TMCC (1997).

(Emch 2003 p 118)

One of the villages that emerged out of this period of village fission and population dispersal was San Jose, where I conducted my fieldwork. The village of San Jose is just over 60 years old, formed out of the amalgamation of dispersed hamlets (*alquilos*) in search of new farm lands beyond the

boundaries of the colonial Maya reservation. In the early 1950s, several Mopan families from San Antonio and Santa Cruz founded a new *alquilo* seven miles to the north at a place called "*Ha Wari*" (Peccary Creek). Located in the fertile Maya Mountains, Ha Wari soon attracted more settlers who moved to the area. By 1955, the area had grown from an *alquilo* into a full-fledged village which was christened San Jose, after its new patron saint.

In the years since San Jose was founded, there has been a steady increase in the number of Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya communities in southern Belize, leapfrogging up the southern highway in search of new agricultural lands (Binford 1997). By the 1970's, the Belizean Mopan had established numerous villages throughout the southern Toledo district and began to move up the southern highway into the neighboring district of Stann Creek.

Unlike other indigenous languages which have become extinct or spoken by a dwindling population, Mopan is entering a time of linguistic/cultural fluorescence with a resurgence of ethnic pride focused on Mopan identity. Today, 15,000-20,000 people, including children, speak Mopan and it is increasingly being taught in formal schooling. Despite this revival, the total number of Mopan speakers globally is still very low and remains a potentially endangered language.

# Complementary Belizean Maya Landscape (Highlands and Lowlands)

In Belize, the Mopan homeland is concentrated in the southernmost Toledo district. Toledo is the largest district in Belize in area, lying to the south of Stann Creek and Cayo districts. This cosmopolitan district is shared by the Mopan with a variety of other ethnic groups including Q'eqchi' Maya, Garifuna, East Indians, black Creoles, along with a smattering of white expats, Peace Corps and tourists living side by side, next to the Carib sea (Danziger 2001 p 22; Howard 1977). Toledo is 1707 square miles, roughly 59 miles north to south and 25 miles east to west. The district's southern and western borders are flanked by Guatemala while the eastern coast borders the Caribbean Sea. As one moves from East to West, a land of mangrove coasts gradually gives rise to the rolling hills of the Maya Mountains. This landscape of "undulating hills... and forested limestone terrain", is also the home to some of the richest agricultural soil in the country (Ausdal 2008 p 575). The district is dotted with ruins from the ancient Maya and even today modern Mopan Maya farmers "will use the presence or absence of ruins as criteria as to the richness of the soil in that immediate area" (Thompson 1930 p 34). Toledo is also among the poorest and least developed areas in Central America, earning the nickname the "forgotten district" of Belize (Ausdal; 2008 McClusky 2001; Wainwright 2008 p 50). State infrastructure lags behind other districts and commercial agriculture production remains low (Wainwright 2008 p 45).

The landscape of Toledo can be divided into two distinct geographic zones: the upland "rolling hills" areas of the Maya Mountains and the lowland plain which extends from the edge of the hills to the coast (Emch 2003 p 113; Osborn 1982; Wainwright 2008). Each of these geographic areas displays distinct botanical, geological, cultural and agricultural differences. These distinctions organize the landscape into a spatially organized 'totemic system<sup>17</sup>' in which flora marks various microhabitats as the location for different cultivation activities and cultural practices.

While the Mopan settled in the rich uplands of the Maya Mountains around San Antonio, the Q'eqchi' founded riverside villages in the lowlands to the south and east. (see Ausdal 2008 p 567; Osborn, 1982; Wilk 1987). The complementary relationship between the Toledo Mopan and Q'eqchi' is of note. Both of these groups migrated to Belize in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century to escape military service and heavy taxation. The Q'eqchi' originated in the colder and higher altitude of the Alta Verapaz while the Mopan came from the lower and warmer Peten. After crossing first into Belize, the Mopan Maya established their villages in the rolling hills of the Maya Mountains (villages between 100-400m). The Q'eqchi' Maya arrived a few decades later and established their villages in the lowlands along rivers and streams. The Q'eqchi' population of Toledo has grown faster in terms of absolute numbers, although they are more dispersed with lower population density than Mopan villages (Emch 2003 p 120).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup> These totemic systems provide "a shared set of designations the knowledge of which informs people about relations among specific social categories... in which "things describe the activities of persons" (Damon 1998 p 74).

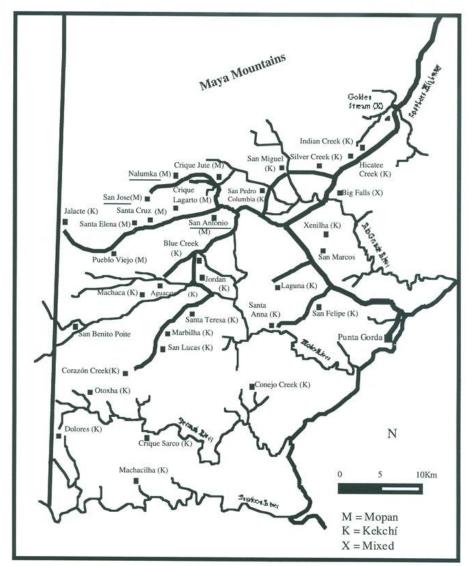


Figure 1. Maya Villages of Southern Belize

(Wilk 1997)

While the Mopan and Q'eqchi' share a similar history of migration and live in close proximity to each other, for the most part they keep separate villages, dress, languages, custom and somewhat different ways of life (Schackt 1986 Page 22). The complementary ethnic relationship between the Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya creates social boundaries maintained through relational processes of inclusion and exclusion (see Barth 19). Although the Mopan recognize the Q'eqchi' as Maya people, their languages are mutually unintelligible and they are infrequent, though not unheard of, marriage

partners (Thompson 1930 p 86). <sup>18</sup> In Mopan villages such as San Jose, Q'eqchi' Maya immigrants and spouses often still retain their original language, but quickly add Mopan to their linguistic repertoire (especially once their children are born). In these mixed communities, the Mopan often consider Q'eqchi' immigrants to be principle members of the sorcerer class (Thompson 1930 p 86). Additionally, Q'eqchi' migrants to Mopan communities have historically been earlier adopters of Protestantism (Schackt 1986; Ulrich 1982). Despite these differences, farmers in both of these areas share much in common, especially an orientation primarily towards staple crops such as corn and beans.

The heartland of the Toledo Mopan population is centered in upland hilly country near the western border, in villages nestled in the southern flanks of the Maya Mountains (Ausdal 2008 p 567; Wilk 1997 Page 57). These villages are located primarily in the northwest part of the district, adjacent to the international border with Guatemala in the west and the Columbia forest reserve in the north. The rolling foothills of the Maya mountains are fertile areas with rich soil and better drainage than the lowland coastal areas. Villages situated in the rolling hills also have better access to the plants and game animals of the colonial forest reserves. In contrast to the more mountainous areas, the southern lowlands display a number of important geographic differences. Q'eqchi' villages of the lowlands are often more remote and have been considered a "stronghold for corporate-type communities and strict alcaldeships." (Schackt 1986 Page 17; see Wolf 1966). Rather than the rich soil of the Maya mountains, the land of the coastal plain is primarily clay with swampy, poorly drained areas and slow moving rivers flowing into the mangrove shores of the Caribbean Sea. The Q'eqchi' lowlands are less integrated into the cash crop economy than their Mopan neighbors. Q'eqchi' villages raise more pigs and produce more root crops, which are better suited to the soils of the area (Emch 2003 116). The swampy, clay soil of the lowlands makes this area a marginal area of cacao production.

In contrast, the soil fertility, topography and climate of the Mopan uplands provide an ideal location for the cultivation of cacao (Emch 2003 p 116). Cacao's natural affinity for the uplands of Belize has helped to made it a central part of Mopan life for generations, deeply integrated into indigenous social life and spirituality. In recent decades, cacao has become a major cash crop in the Mopan areas of the uplands and today more than 70% of all the cacao in Belize comes from this region. The importance of cacao for the Mopan drew me to rolling hills of Toledo for my research because/as it offered a dramatic example of how the introduction of neo-colonial projects of Protestantism and

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>18</sup> Despite these differences, village ethnic identity usually trumps language in Toledo and within a generation, most villagers of Q'eqchi' decent living in predominantly "Mopan" villages eventually begin to identify themselves ethnically and linguistically as Mopan (Fink 1987 p 400; Thompson 1930 p 86; Verbeeck 1998).

agricultural development had reconfigured not only the Mopan's relationship with cacao, but also with the self, society and the divine.

#### Part 2 - Cacao

In part 2 of this chapter, I explore the place of cacao in Mopan agriculture. I begin by drawing on a theoretical understanding of trees in the cultural imagination. Building off this foundation, I then describe how the botany and ecology of cacao make it ideally suited to cultivation in southern Belize. Cacao is not only part of the physical landscape of southern Belize, but cultural ones as well. Before the coming of development, cacao was cultivated by the Mopan in kitchen gardens and harvested from feral trees in the forest. These practices are part of larger patterns of complementary opposition which structure in Mopan agriculture.

# **Trees in the Cultural Imagination**

The natural world of plants and animals "provides a rich canvas for the portrayal of crucial messages in the symbolic code" (Vogt 1976 Page 4-5). Standing at the center of social life in so many cultures worldwide, trees are particularly compelling metaphors "used to symbolize and model various social relations and processes" of the human condition (Damon 1998 p71, 89; see Rival 1998). Because of their role in nutrition, economics, religion, and social life, trees are exemplary vehicles for the expression of symbolic thought in a variety of domains in the 'science of the concrete' (Levi-Strauss 1966). The anthropological study of trees illuminates how these interactions provide local models for "complex productive processes, processes which, in Western frames of reference, are both social and ecological" (Damon 1998 p 70; Rival 1998).

Rival claims that, "trees are used to make concrete and material the abstract notions of life, and that trees are ideal supports for such symbolic purpose precisely because their status as living organisms is ambiguous" (Rival 1998:p 3; see Bloch 1998:p 52). While on one hand, trees seem to share the same life cycle of birth, maturation and death as humans, other characteristics, such as a long lifecycle, ambiguous gender and rootedness complicate this similarity. Bloch claims that it is this problematic correspondence between humans and trees that is "intriguing, problematic and uncertain" and allows people to "play" with these hazy resemblances through symbolic thought (Rival 1998 40).

For Fernandez, the significance of trees within the cultural imagination is their ability to evoke moral values, both within the community and in social persons, and motivate them to action (1998: p 85). Imbued with moral weight, trees can become both the instruments for social reproduction, and a living symbol of community vitality, yet these meanings are not static and ahistorical (*ibid* p 90). Rather,

they are contextual and change as peoples' relationships with the forest are transformed, both by internal cultural change and external corporate, state and developmental forces (Fernandez 1998:p 93; Rival 1998:p 15; see Sponsel et al. 1996).

Framed as moral symbols within the cultural imagination, an ethnographic study of the "social life of trees" is a wide-ranging endeavor concerned with their full range of meaning. Drawing on Turner's multifaceted approach to symbolic interpretation, <sup>19</sup> Fernandez offers a broad method for studying tree symbolism that incorporates the lexical, the intellectual, the emotive and the poetic aspects of culture. From this perspective, a comprehensive ethnography of trees must include such wide ranging manifestations as (but not limited to) botanical knowledge and classification, uses of trees and tree products, prehistoric and historical references, economics, politics, folklore, myths, proverbs and maxims, ritual use, religious knowledge, trees as a symbol of the health and vitality of society, land tenure, property rights and conflicts over trees (Fernandez 1998:p 87-88). In short, the study of trees is the study of culture, distilled and made manageable through the lens of a culture's construction of the natural world.

# The Botany and Ecology of Cacao

Cacao (*Theobroma cacao*) is a semi-deciduous tree in the family *Sterculiacea* that is the botanical source for chocolate. The fermented seeds of the cacao tree are the main ingredient in cocoa powder (used in baking and chocolate bars) and cocoa liquor (used in cosmetics, soaps and chocolate production).

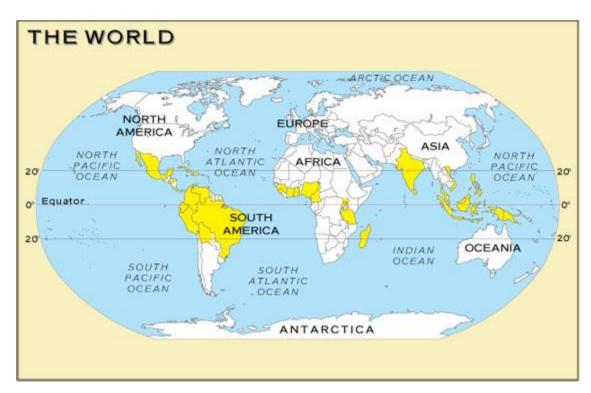
The active chemical in the cacao seeds that gives chocolate its pleasant stimulating effect is *Theobromine*. *Theobromine* ( $C_7H_8N_4O_2$ ) is a bitter alkaloid that is found not only in chocolate, but also other plants with a stimulating affect including tea, cola nuts, *yerba mate* (*paraguariensis*), and the guarana berry (Prance 2004). *Theobromine* has a similar stimulating affect on the body as caffeine, though is weaker because of their different degree of methylation (Malisoff 1943)

#### **Distribution of Cacao**

The native range of cacao is the tropical rain forest of the South America. During the pre-Columbian era, cacao spread out from the Amazon throughout Mesoamerica as far north as the Yucatan

<sup>19</sup> In his study of Ndembu tree symbolism, Turner states that the anthropologist investigating the "structures and properties of ritual symbols" must utilize the (1) external form of the symbol and how it is utilized, (2) the native exegesis by both specialists and laypersons, (3) and the outsider's (anthropologist) analysis of the symbols significance in relation to the other symbols within a cultural system - a *gestalt* (V. Turner 1967:p 20, 50-51).

(McNeil 2006a:p 9; Ogata, Gomez-Pompa and Taube 2006:p 83). Following European conquest of the New World, colonial powers established cacao plantations in tropical regions worldwide including Africa, the Caribbean Islands, and the Pacific islands.



**Map of Cacao Growing Regions Worldwide** 

https://cocoanibs.files.wordpress.com/2012/06/cacao-map.png

Even within these regions, however, the unique ecological requirements of cacao limit the areas where it can be successfully cultivated. Cacao thrives in the fertile, sheltered valleys with "a shaded, heavily humid atmosphere (over 90%) with a heavy annual rainfall (70 inches), and a high average temperature (circa 80°F) and with subsoil constantly moist because of the proximity of the rivers." (Million 1955:p 14; Wilk 1997 121). Cacao can be grown outside of these ideal conditions but only within a certain range. As a tropical tree, cacao is grown between 20° north or south. It cannot be cultivated at high altitudes and most cacao is grown below 600m, although some regions such as Columbia and Uganda cacao is planted up to 1400m. Additionally, cacao trees cannot survive in areas where the average yearly temperature is below 70° F or where hard freezes occur (Hebbar, Bittenberg and O'Doherty 2011; Millon 1955:p 17). Cacao cannot tolerate prolonged dry seasons of more than

three months except in exceptional climates and must have adequate drainage in areas with excessive rainfall.

## **Species and Types**

There are 22 known species in genius *Theobroma*, but only cacao (*Theobroma cacao*) is widely cultivated as cash commodity. A closely related species of cacao known *Theobroma bicolor* grows wild from Mexico to Brazil and Bolivia and is known commonly as *balamte* or *pataxte* among Maya groups. While *T. bicolor* is not grown commercially and is rarely cultivated in large numbers, the pods, pulp and seeds are used by people throughout Latin America (including the Maya) for consumption and ritual uses (Kufer and McNeil 2006:p 94-102). While Wilk claims that the "traditional *Q'eqchi' prefer balamte to cocoa for domestic use"*, the Mopan consider the seeds of the balamte a poor substitute for cacao (McBryde 1945: p 148; Wilk 1997 121).

Unlike cacao, *T. bicolor* has almost no caffeine, a low fat content and only 0.1% theobromine, the active compound in cacao, as compared to the 2-3% of theobromine found in *Theobroma cacao* (Millon 1955:p 13). The fruits of the *T. bicolor* also differ from cacao in that do not need to be picked because they fall on their own when ripe (Wilk 1997 121). Despite the similarities between T. *cacao* and T. *bicolor*, there have been no successful hybridizations of these two trees, although crosses between T. *cacao* and other members of the genus such as *T. Grandiflorum* have been successful in research settings (Cole 2010 p 244).

Within *Theobroma cacao* proper, there are three main varieties which have been recognized since the 16<sup>th</sup> century: *Criollo, Forestero*, and *Trinitario*. Together, these three varieties form the basis of hierarchical quality distinctions for different grades of cacao within the chocolate producing industry. Rather than three separate varieties, the distinctions between these three varieties can become blurry with hybridization between different types of trees growing in the same region.

The most highly sought after variety of cacao is called *Criollo* (Spanish: for native or first grown) (*Theobroma cacao cacao*), and provides 10% of the worlds cacao production, mostly to the high end chocolate market. *Criollo* cacao is found from South America to Mexico and was the variety cultivated by the ancient Maya (Ogata, Gomez-Pompa and Taube 2006:p 71). *Criollo* varieties of cacao are generally considered "delicate, more susceptible to disease and injury, and not highly productive" but produce a fine variety of chocolate (Millon 1955:p 12).

In contrast, *Forastero* (Spanish - *foreigner*) (*Theobroma cacao sphaerocarpum*) is a more heterogeneous group of trees that is the major variety found in originally in South America. As a robust variety, *Forastero* cacao has been planted extensively in colonial cacao growing regions worldwide,

especially in West Africa. Forastero cacao beans make up 80% of the world's chocolate, though it is generally thought of an inferior variety that lacks the fruity notes of *Criollo* based chocolate (although some varieties such as Ecuador 's *nacional* variety are notable exceptions). The beans of Forastero are bitter and require longer fermentation time than Criollo varieties.

A third variety, known as *Trinitario*, is a hybrid of *Criollo* and *Forastero* developed in Trinidad. *Trinitario* cacao comprises 10% of the world's commercial cacao crop. Trinitario cacao is a hybridization of *Criollo* and *Forastero* that attempts to retain the desirable characteristics from each of the parent plants, while minimizing their limitations. While true *Trinitario* varieties have a direct lineage to the hybrid varieties first selected for in Trinidad, the term has become a more widespread designation for any cacao trees with both *Criollo* and *Forastero* lineages (Hebbar, Bittenberg and O'Doherty 2011).

Today in the Belize, *Criollo* cacao is the heirloom variety of cacao, descendant from the cacao trees cultivated by the ancient Maya. To this day, *Criollo* cacao still grows wild in the forest reserves of Belize and some people attempt to cultivate these seeds for commercial production, though with limited success. While *Criollo* cacao trees still comprise a small minority of the current number of cacao trees in the country, most of Belize's present crop of cacao is comprised *Trinitario* varieties imported in the 1980s as part of government efforts to develop cacao as a cash crop for post independence Belize. These imported *Trinitario* plants have hybridized with the pre-existing *Criollo* stocks to create a new regional variety of *Trinitario* cacao particular to Belize which has the robust vigor of the *Trinitario* lineage and the fine flavor and fruity notes of local *Criollo* strains.

## The Life Cycle of the Cacao Tree

In its natural state, cacao is an understory tree in the tropical rainforest which thrives in deep, permeable soils containing high levels of organic matter. New cacao tree begin either as seeds distributed by monkeys, rodents, squirrels, bats, and birds who eat the fruit of the tree or as new trunk suckers that sprout off of existing trees (Young 1994:p xi). Because of these two dispersal strategies, cacao trees in the wild are often found either singularly or in small groves, scattered beneath the darkened canopy of the forest.

Under commercial cacao cultivation, the natural distribution of cacao on the landscape is changed to meet market priorities. Instead of natural dispersal methods, seedlings are started in cacao nurseries before being transplanted into carefully planned farms. Seedlings are planted in grid patterns ranging from 8x8 ft to 16X16 ft depending on environmental conditions and disease. This spacing produces densities of 300-600 trees per acre (Hebbar, Bittenberg and O'Doherty 2011).

Cacao trees grow best in thinned forests or intercropped with shade species to protect them from high winds, cool them during dry weather and provide ample leaf cover for soil development. Shade trees such as *Gliricidia sepium* (madre de cacao), *Theobroma bicolora* (pataxte), and *Erythrina umbrosa* are planted along with the seedlings to provide adequate shade during their early development (Hebbar, Bittenberg and O'Doherty 2011; Millon 1955:p 16-18). Minimal chopping/cleaning of newly established cacao farms reduces competition from weeds and allows the cacao seedlings to become established.

Within a year of sprouting, the cacao seedlings develop a branching joint a few feet (3-6 feet) off the ground called a "jorquete,", which is the point where the main five lateral branches split off from the trunk. Over time, the plant will continue to grow and send up new shoots (called "chuppons") and develop new jorquets as it expands upward and outward. Cacao trees can live for 25 years or more and grow to a height of 30 to 40 feet, though under cultivated conditions they average 15 to 20 feet (Wickizer 1951:p 283). The crown of a full grown tree, if left to develop freely, averages approximately 20 to 25 feet in diameter while for commercial cultivation the diameter averages 15 feet (Millon 1955:p 10).

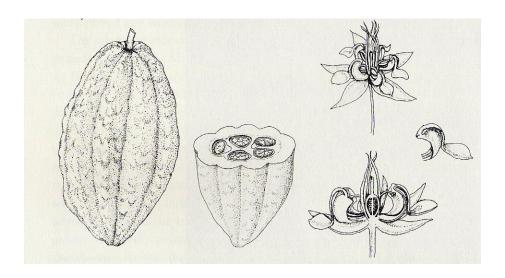
Cacao seedlings reach maturity and begin to bear fruit after four to five years. The cacao tree is a cauliflorous plant in which yellow and purple flowers emerge directly from the trunk and main stems of the tree. Flowers emerge from above old leaf scars called "flower cushions". Cacao flowers have five petals, five sepal, five fertile stamen, five infertile stamen and five ovaries. The cacao tree has a complex system of partial self-incompatibility in which some plants maintain the ability to pollinate themselves while others lack it. Unlike many flowering plants, cacao is pollinated primarily by tiny midges (family: *Forcipomyia*) and other small cecidomyiid flies that thrive in the damp conditions of the understory rainforest (Bletter and Daly 2006:p 34; Young 1982, 1983). These midges are less than 3mm in length in order to pollinate the tiny cacao flowers.

While cacao trees can produce many flowers, only 5% of these are pollinated and mature into fruit. In the wild, cacao has few fruits per tree but under human cultivation, the number of flowers, and subsequent fruits, greatly increases through pruning (Ogata, Gomez-Pompa and Taube 2006:p 70). While some cacao farmers in Belize practice intensive pruning regimes which result in high yields/per acre, most small farmers only perform minimal maintenance of their orchards so that average yields of Belizean cacao farmers are very low (180 lbs./per acre) (see chapters 8 & 9).

Pods grow slowly during the first 40 days after pollination, followed by a rapid increase in size over the next two months, with a final six week period during which time the cacao beans increase their

fat content and the fruit begins to ripen (Hebbar, Bittenberg and O'Doherty 2011). Five to six months after pollination, the pods are fully ripe and ready for harvesting.

Cacao pods are variable in shape and size ranging from 5 to 11 inches long, 2 to 5 inches wide and weigh approximately one and a half to more than two pounds when fully ripe (Millon 1955:p 10). As they ripen, cacao pods also vary in color between trees including purple, red, yellow, brown and green. Cacao pods contain 20 to 50 seeds (cacao beans) arranged in longitudinal rows in groups of five seeds (a quinquepartite structure) around a central axis and covered in a white fruit. As the cacao fruit ripens, the white fruit undergoes a chemical process of ethylene ( $C_2H_4$ ) production that changes in taste and texture of the fruit from starchy to sweet, acidic and mushy.



Cacao pod and flower. From (McNeil 2006a)<sup>20</sup>

#### **Pests and diseases**

The chief pathogens affecting cacao in the New World are primarily the airborne fungi Monilia (*Moniliophtora roreri*), "witches broom" (*M. perniciosa*) and "black pod rot" (*Phytophthora sp*) (Fulton 1989). While the cacao tree itself is resilient to these pathogens, the diseases infect the pods of the trees and causing pods to rot on the tree. Once infected, these airborne pathogens are transmitted to other cacao trees on neighboring farms until entire regions are impacted (see chapter 9). Production losses from these fungi can top 75% in some regions and can cause countries (such as Costa Rica) to go from net exporters of cacao to importers within a decade of the disease's introduction.

In addition to these agricultural fungi, other cacao growing regions worldwide are affected by other cacao diseases that negatively impact commercial scale production. Cocoa swollen shoot virus

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Fair Use: Using Images in Papers, Theses, and Dissertations (http://libguides.usc.edu/fair\_use)

(CSSV) Is widespread in the cacao growing regions of West Africa, while vascular streak disease is a major problem in Indonesia. Similarly, insect pests such as cocoa pod borers (in Asia), mirids and capsids (in West Africa) are also problematic in some regions causing major declines in yields (Hebbar, Bittenberg and O'Doherty 2011).

# Part 3 - Cacao and the Mopan

# The Mopan Agricultural Landscape

The cultivation of cacao in Mopan Maya communities is contextualized within indigenous paradigms of landscape and agriculture oriented around domestic consumption and local trade (Thompson 1930 p 41). Households engage in peasant agriculture and sustain themselves by growing large quantities of staples, fruits, vegetables and domesticated animals. Agriculture is the paramount labor activity for traditional Maya men, so that most men in Mopan Maya communities claim *campesino* (peasant farmer) as their occupational identity. Men fell forests with machete and ax, plant with a digging stick and harvest by hand. While women's activities are primarily oriented toward food processing and cooking in the household, they also tend gardens, assist in the harvest of certain crops (such as beans), and bring male kin/laborers food in the fields during men's collective labor. Even children play important roles in the tending animals, helping with harvests, collecting firewood and assisting adults in cultivation activities (learning by doing). Despite its seemingly timeless quality, the Maya agricultural system is both culturally cohesive and also hybrid, incorporating outside materials into indigenous paradigms. Even "traditional" Mopan agricultural practices are culturally hybrid; incorporating European material introductions such as machetes and chainsaws, horses and trucks within indigenous environmental values (Wainwright 2008 p 253)

Among the lowland Yucatecean Maya, agricultural land (*lu'um*) is culturally valued as both the prerequisite for social reproduction and as a sacred landscape embedded with spiritual and aesthetic concerns (Danziger 2001; Faust 1999; Osborn 1982; Redfield 1934, 1964; Villa Rojas 1945; Wilk 1997; see Shanin 1990; Wolf 1966). The landscape is seen as a tangible link to the ancestors (Burns 1993) and is a locus for interactions with the spirit world through prayer, ritual and sacrifice (Anderson, Newton, Tzuc and Chale 2005; Faust 1998; Faust et al. 2004). Mopan peasants depend on the natural landscape for the cultivation of staple crops, medicine, plants, wildlife, water and soil. Villages are surrounded by rings of agricultural fields for the cultivation of both short and long cycle crops as shifting milpas of short cycle, staple crops such as corn, beans and squash are complemented with plantations of long cycle tree

crops, most notably cacao (Emch 2003). The map below is a Mopan representation of the landscape of San Jose printed in the "Maya Atlas" as part of an indigenous mapping project. The map depicts a continuum of landscapes that extends from the settled world of the local community (*kah*) to fields (*kol*) and the forest (*k'aax*). The central village of San Jose (*kah*) in the lower right of the map is represented by the white circle filled with dots representing houses. Surrounding the *kah* is a ring of light green areas representing the *kol*, or the areas of agricultural activity shaped by humans. Father out (2 miles out or more), the dark green areas of forest (*k'aax*) provide habitat for game animals and also serve as a source of raw materials, medicine, and the harvest of bush food. In this cultural cosmology, these overlapping domains are fluid, continually flowing from one state to another as new lands are cleared for cultivation and houses, even as the forest reclaims abandoned fields and villages (Anderson, Newton, Tzuc and Chale 2005: p 120).

# The state of the s

Farms and Forests of San Jose

Mopan Map of San Jose, Belize. Maya Atlas (TMCC 1997)

#### **Kitchen gardens and Feral Groves**

The Mopan harvested cacao from two distinct sources on the landscape in the colonial era: kitchen gardens and feral cacao groves.

	Kitchen Gardens	Feral Cacao Groves	
Location	Kah	K'aax	
Proximity to the Home	Very Close	Very Far	
Number of Cacao Trees	Very Few (<10)	Medium Groves	
		(clumps of trees >50)	
Gender Responsible	Female	Male	
(Gendered Space)			
Ownership (relation	Trees are heritable	Cheil ("those of the	
with the natural world)	property,	forest") as spirit	
		owners, Humans as	
		respectful petitioners	
Geography	Scattered (human and	Naturally Clumped	
	natural)		

"Kitchen Gardens" are a widespread agricultural pattern through the tropics of Mesoamerica (Steinberg 1998). Kitchen gardens are diverse horticultural assemblages in which women tend plants around the vicinity of the house (in the village kah). Kitchen gardens are an important source of many of the fruit and spices that are important in the Mopan diet. In San Jose, Mopan kitchen gardens contain a fast array of plants including cacao, bananas, annatto, and papaya.

Women are the primary care takers of the kitchen gardens, which provide small amounts of crops close at hand for them to access while cooking without having to travel far to find the items. The plants that grow in kitchen gardens often grow there as a result of compost being thrown out near the house and as the seeds come up opportunistically, useful plants are tended and harvested. The Mopan create kitchen gardens as bricoleurs, shaping the surrounding environment to emphasize desirable characteristics in the landscape, while getting rid of undesirable species (see Levi-Strauss 1966; Damon 2006). While Mopan kitchen gardens have a high diversity of plant species, they are areas of minimal cacao production. Before commercialization, most Mopan households kept only a few cacao trees near the home to meet their domestic needs. Although kitchen gardens provide ready access to tree crops, herds of hungry, roaming pigs in Mopan villages destroy tree crops and made it precarious for cultivating slow growing seedling near the home (Thompson 1930 p 41). The destruction of wandering pigs is a major source of intra-village social tension over blame and responsibility for the damages they cause. In recent years, villages such as San Jose have banned free roaming pigs in an effort to protect

cacao orchards, a major shift in the local environment inspired by development initiatives (see chapter 3).

The cultivation of cacao is composed of a number of agricultural activities that are often conducted by a specific gender. For example, Mopan men traditionally plant of new cacao trees in June, following the planting of the milpa corn, or in September at the end of the rainy season (Wilk 1997 p 121). In traditional Mopan agriculture, men planted cacao with a digging stick in a similar fashion to corn. The placement and spacing of cacao trees was determined by the features of the landscape rather than a preconceived grid to maximize production per acre (as in modern cacao farms). Because only small amounts of cacao were needed to meet the cultural needs of Maya sociality, each household only kept a handful of trees

Seedlings are weeded occasionally by Mopan women in the first year, before their canopies grew enough to shade out competing understory plants (Wilk 1997 p 121). After ~ five years, the cacao trees begin to develop pods directly from the tree's trunk. Cacao trees will bear fruit for more than twenty years before they grow too tall and "bushy" to yield much fruit. Even when older trees no longer produce fruit, renewed fruiting and vigor can be induced either natural events such as hurricane damage, or human actions like pruning may remove the tree's canopy. Under ideal conditions, cacao trees can live up to 100 years going through cycles of growth, decadence and renewal.

Although cacao flowers and bears fruit all year around, the primary harvest season begins in December, peaking in March and April before rapidly falling off for the remainder of the year (Wilk 1997 p 121). Only the peak harvest times require concentrated labor. The minimal labor required for traditional cacao management made it an ideal crop for many excluded from the difficult work of milpa agriculture. Long cycle crops offered the opportunity for the elderly, women and children to harvest these fruits, directly contributing to the nutritional, social and economic health of the family. Because only small amounts of cacao were grown before commercialization, the amount of labor devoted to the harvest was minimal, but as production has increased it has placed increasing demands on peasant families. Harvest season for cacao coincides with planting season for milpa corn, causing the potential for labor stress/shortage during times of peak agricultural activity (Wilk 1997 p 121).

#### Cacao, Gender and Agricultural Labor in San Jose

Description	Who	When					
	Women	Men	(months)				
Distribution of labour							
Nursery establishment							
Construction of structure		X	From				
Soil mix	X	X	October to				
Filling bags	X		June				
Seed selection		X					
Sowing-Seed planting	X	X					
Watering	X						
Weeding	X						
Insect and disease monitoring		X					
Grafting		Х	March				
Field Management							
Transporting seedlings		X	June, July				
Transplanting	X	X	June, July				
Weeding	X	X	All year				
Pruning		X	All year				
Identification and control of		X	All year				
pests and diseases							
Harvest and post-harvest							
Identifying the ripe pods	Х	Х	From				
Harvesting	X	X	January to				
Pod breaking	X	X	June				
Fermentation	X	X	1				
Drying		X	1				
Store	Х		1				
Delivering to TCGA Depot	X	Х	1				
Access and control of resour	ces						
Collecting payment	X	Х					
Land ownership		Х					
Equipment		Х					
Skills		Х					

From: (Edesco 2008; p 20)

Often, the amount of cacao from kitchen gardens was insufficient to meet the needs for public events such as fiestas or weddings where cacao was needed to make chocolate drink. To supplement the cacao harvested from kitchen gardens, Mopan men would harvest feral cacao from deep in the jungle. Feral cacao groves are descendants of the cacao cultivated long ago by the ancient Maya that have survived to this day. When the ancient lowland Maya civilization collapsed, cacao farms were abandoned and soon became engulfed in the jungle that spread over the ruined landscape. The cacao

tree is well adapted to the climate of southern Belize and even after the ancient Maya stopped actively managing their cacao groves, the cacao thrived in the hot, moist understory of the jungle canopy. The fallen cacao seeds grew quickly and began to spread, growing 60 feet or higher cacao trees. As hurricanes or age would topple the trunks of the cacao tree, new trunks and branches would quickly rise up from the rootstock, growing tall and bushy as the plant sought out all the available light under the canopy.

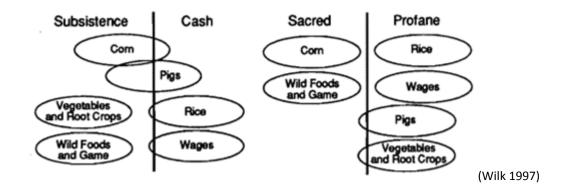
Even to this day, feral cacao grows far from the village, in thick clusters beneath the tall forest canopy. The experience of entering into one of these feral groves is jarring. Far away from human landscapes of the village, the deep jungle is an unsettling landscape beyond the realm of human control. Hiking through the jungle to find the cacao, the tall hardwoods and leafy palms of the high forest suddenly give way to a dense understory of cacao whose branches and trunks interlace to darken out the sky and cradle you in the twisted tangle of their woody embrace. The ground is thick with the carpet of sandpaper leaves of the cacao as the sticky sweetness of rotten cacao fruit fills the air with its pungent aroma. The dense canopy acts traps the heat and humidity of the tropical forest that descends on you with a heaviness. Shafts of light beams passing through the canopy illuminate the swirling particles suspended in the humid darkness of the cacao's under canopy.

Unlike kitchen gardens where humans could establish ownership over cacao trees, the cacao growing in feral groves in the nearby colonial forest reserves were thought to be "owned" by the supernatural beings known as the *Cheil* (literally "those of the forest"). These trees were thought of as the "farms" of the *Cheil* where they grew cacao for their rituals and feasts. Humans entering these dangerous places came as visitors, judged by their respectful (or not) attitude toward the *Cheil*. Those who showed respect by "paying" the *Cheil* with offerings of salt were shown hospitality by the spirits and given a share of the forests bounty. Taking fruit from feral groves without proper respect was thought of as "stealing" from the rightful spirit owners of the cacao. The ownership of feral cacao by the *Cheil* speaks to larger issues about the ways that the Mopan landscape is imbued with socio-spiritual relations which will be explored further in chapter 4.

# Mopan Agricultural Paradigms – Sacred/Profane, Shifting/Perennial, Home Consumption/Cash Crops

The harvesting of cacao from kitchen gardens and feral groves is part of the larger Mopan Maya agricultural system. Mopan peasants cultivate a wide variety of plants and animals to support the family nutritionally, economically and spiritually. But not all of this food carries the same value. Throughout

the Maya region, agricultural cosmology divides the products of agriculture along a number of continuums between ideal types such as sacred/profane, home consumption/market, and shifting/perennial (Wilk 1997). The following chart is Wilk's representation of this pattern among the neighboring Belizean Q'eqchi' Maya.



The Mopan agricultural system is well adapted to the tropical environment of Belize in which complementary strategies are employed which combine shifting cycle crops (like corn and beans) with perennial tree crops such as cacao. In this complex system, permanent agriculture (arboriculture) forms an environmental and symbolic complement to shifting agriculture. The pairing of shifting and perennial crops minimizes ecological risk and enriches the Maya dietary sustainability of the household, rather than privileging absolute yields or profit maximization (Wilk 1997 Page 103). The agricultural system is a cultural adaptation to local environmental conditions, allowing most Belizean Maya households to meet most of their nutritional needs through domestic production (Emch 113; Osborn 1982; Toledo Maya Cultural Council (TMCC) 1997; Wilk 1997).

The agricultural sector in southern Belize is dominated (~80%) by small scale Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya peasant farmers, who primarily practice swidden/"milpa" agriculture (Emch 2003 p 111-112). Short cycle shifting cultivation, known as "milpa" (*kol*) agriculture, is employed primarily to produce crops such as corn and beans as the main consumption staples. These are supplemented by a variety of other fast growing plants such as squash, root crops, okra, and peppers (Wainwright 2008 Page 69-70). The average Mopan milpa is comprised of three to four acres in which various species of

productive plants are intercropped (Thompson 1930 p 41). <sup>21</sup> The planting of multiple species together creates synergy between the species so that beans in the corn field shade out the weeds from around the corn, even as old corn stalks provide a structure/lattice for beans to grow up on.

In addition to shifting milpa fields/farms, Belizean Maya farmers also plant permanent orchards which take many years before they begin to bear fruit. Stands of perennials such as cacao and citrus are grown to provide fruit for domestic use and even surplus for opportunistic sales. Unlike the shifting land use patterns of the short rotation milpa system, tree crops continue to grow for decades in the same plot. While milpa crops require large inputs of labor for repeated cycles of felling forests, burning, planting and harvesting every season, long cycle crops spread out labor requirements/inputs over years. They also require less direct attention than short cycle crops, with only minimal maintenance (such as occasional weeding) undertaken.

Many of the plants cultivated by the Mopan are thought to not only nourish the body, but the considered sacred. Traditionally, the valorization of certain foods over those of a similar class speaks to the food's cosmological significance, its local origins and its desirability. In this cosmology, sacred foods are valued and seen as more deserving of respect (*tzik*) and more prestigious than profane ones (see chapter 3). Sacred foods not only are valued as an end in themselves, but also are a means to show respect to others through the giving of prestigious goods in order to create long term social relations of kinship and *compadrazgo* (see Wilk 1997). Through the giving and receiving of food, the short term exchanges of individual activities are transformed into long term exchanges which allow for "the reproduction of the social and cosmic order" within society (Parry and Bloch 1989: P 2).

The division between sacred and profane is distinct from the division between short and long cycle crops and cross cuts these categories. Corn is the most sacred plant in Mopan agricultural *Kustumbre*, so much so that Maya refer to themselves as "people of the corn" (Tedlock 1996). In San Jose, corn is central role in dietary cosmology (see chapter 3) and is referred to by many as a "God food" (*Santo Hanal*) and "our mother" (*na*). As such, corn products (such as tortillas) are a more prestigious carbohydrate than rice, which is both an introduced crop that is seen as profane. Along with corn, cacao, wild foods/game and chickens are also considered sacred and emblematic foods of *Kutumbre*. In Mopan food cosmology, the cacao drink is considered sacred and more prestigious than profane coffee. The products of sacred foods, such as cacao drink, corn tortillas, and the blood of chickens are the most common offerings of sacrifice made to the divine in rituals and the object of myth (Wilk 1997 p 139).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> According to Thompson, "a milpa may consist of two, three, or even four *manzanas*, a *manzana* consisting of sixteen *mecates*, each twenty-four yards square; that is roughly an acre and a third. The word *mecate* is derived from the Aztec *mecatl* ("string") with which the milpa was measured. (Thompson 1930 p 41)

In contrast to these sacred foods, foods such as pigs, rice, roots, citrus and vegetables are largely "profane" without strong spiritual associations, seen as more peripheral to the core of Mopan cuisine. This is especially true of imported crops without deep histories of cultural use. These profane crops are not used as implements of ritual sacrifice and are largely outside of the realm of respect (*tzik*). The distinction between sacred and profane/modern is an indigenous taxonomy which is consciously maintained through ritual and social practice. Despite this prestige associated with sacred foods, profane foods are also important in Mopan nutritional and economic life. As a profane food, pig has traditionally provided both one of the primary sources of meat and a ready source of cash income. In recent years, pig's dual role has been largely replaced in San Jose with cattle, which fill this same role as a profane animal suitable for consumption and sale. Other profane foods such as vegetables and root crops are also important staples that not only provide variety to the Mopan diet, but also serve as a "starvation food" in times of famine.

Just as Mopan agriculture is organized to provide both sacred and the profane crops, it also straddles the domains of local consumption and the market economy. The family farm serves as both the primary means of production and the source of household consumption (Wolf 1966: p 13, Shanin 1990: p 25). Within the Maya agricultural system, crops exist on a continuum between those grown primarily for domestic consumption and those cultivated for sale (Emch 2003 111-112; Wilk 1997). While some staple products find their way to market in order to be converted into cash, the majority of yearly harvest are consumed within the household. In the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, most agricultural products cultivated in Maya peasant communities were consumed by the local group. Foods such as corn, "bush foods" such as root crops, wild game and plants gathered from the forest were consumed primarily for domestic consumption.

In addition to producing for home consumption, Mopan farmers have traditionally devoted a small portion of their milpas and orchards to the production of cash crops (Emch 2003; Osborn 1982; TMCC 1997). At various times throughout the 20th century, the Belizean Maya have been cultivating products such as cacao, corn, pigs, bananas, rice, annatto, honey and beans for sale into the cash economy of the regional or even global system (Danziger 2001 18; Emch 2003 115-6; Wainwright 2008 Page 69-70; Wilk and Chapin 1990). Older cacao farmers remember before the coming of the global market, when cacao was sold locally, saying...

I remember in the old times, some of them used to sell a little bit of their cacao to their neighbors in the village who didn't have any trees of their own. Not much though. Just one or two pounds for drinking. Because at that time everyone drank cocoa. (Marcelo)

This small influx of cash from sales of crops subsidized the self-sufficiency of the peasant household. Another farmer remembers how the sale of even small amounts of cacao provided families the ability to purchase goods from beyond the farmstead.

When they used to sell the cacao locally, the price was only50 cents for a pound. But everything was cheap in those days. If you have extra cacao, you might be able to sell five pounds or ten pounds of cacao to your neighbors, but not much more. But the thing is you could buy anything you want in the shop with that money, because back then everything was cheap back in those days. (Lucas)

Rather than purely commodities, each of these products exhibit a "dual nature," existing for either the market or domestic consumption," which can be allocated into either category based on the immediate needs of the household" (Wilk 1997 p 119). For example, in the early 20th century, before the advent of cacao development projects, most of the cacao grown by the Belizean Maya was produced for consumption by the local community, with a small portion sold for cash to traveling *cobaneros* (peddlers) (Wilk 1997 p 119).

Despite their involvement in small scale commercial agriculture, Belizean Maya farmers have been able to engage this system largely on their own terms "due to the abundance of land, the independence provided by a secure nonmonetarized subsistence system, and low levels of demand for consumer goods and service that must be bought with cash" (Wilk 1997 p 158). Because of their positions as both producers and consumers, peasant households foster long-term stability through their emphasis on direct consumption of their crops (Shanin 1990: p 24). <sup>22</sup> This orientation towards household reproduction has done much to insulate the Belizean Maya from the periodic cycles of market boom and bust that has been prevalent throughout the history of Belize (Wilk 1997 p 119). In recent decades, this self-sufficiency has become increasingly precarious with increased dependence on the profits of commercial agriculture and wages earned outside of the local village (See chapter 8).

# Part 4 – A History of Cacao Cultivation in Southern Belize

22

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Sacred food has a central place in the cultural life of the community, so that "the values associated with corn production and consumption (and with the consumption of a whole range of other homegrown food and forest products) are a stable core that provides an alternative to the values of the marketplace" (Wilk 1997 p 141).

#### The Ancient Maya and their Cacao

The story of cacao among the Maya begins long ago in a small corner of South America. The cacao tree evolved as an understory tree in the darkness of the Amazonian basin. Hunting and gathering under the canopy, native South American people of the Amazon Basin discovered the delicious fruit and stimulating seeds inside the cacao pods. Although cacao was initially gathered from wild trees, these groups domesticated cacao trees 2500 years ago (McNeil 2006a:p 9). While at the time cacao was unique to a small corner of the Amazon, its desirable qualities made it a valued object of trade. Cacao rapidly expanded out of the Amazon as people began trading cacao seeds in regional systems. These traded cacao seeds were both the raw material for consumption (for chocolate beverages) but also the means of production. Rather than being eaten, some of these seeds were planted in new regions and quickly expanded the area of cacao production much more rapidly than non-human seed dispersal could have. By 600-400 B.C., cacao had spread out from the Amazon and plantation began to dot fertile valleys throughout Mesoamerica (McNeil 2006a:p 9; Ogata, Gomez-Pompa and Taube 2006:p 83).<sup>23</sup>

It is in ancient Mesoamerica in which *Theobroma cacao* first earned its familiar name. The word "cacao" derives from \*kakawa of the proto Mije-Sokean languages spoken by the Olmecs from the Gulf Coast of Mexico (Campbell and Kaufman 1976; Kaufman and Justeson 2006:p 118-124). By 400 AD, \*kakaw(a) was borrowed by the lowland Maya languages and replaced the older term \*pe:q, now used in K'ichean to mean "uncultivated cacao" (*Theobroma bicolor*) (Kaufman and Justeson 2006:p 134, 136). Kaufman and Justeson argue that the word "chocolate" is a Spanish word that is a mangling of a Nawa term for "water, liquid" or drink (2006:p 118).

Over the past 3000 years, cacao has played a central role in the "religious, commercial, and gastronomical life of the Maya" (Thompson 1956 p 185). Drawing on archaeological artifacts, colonial documents and ethnographic reports, it is possible to reconstruct the importance of cacao within the wider context of Maya social life during both the pre-contact and colonial eras. Cacao's importance in ancient Maya spirituality is represented in the archaeological record by a variety of artifact types including ceremonial cacao drinking vessels, carved and painted scenes depicting cacao, hieroglyphic

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> The debate over the domestication and means of dispersal of cacao into Mesoamerica has been a lively one over the past century with authors such as Cheesman (1944), Motamayor et al. (2002), and Schultes (1984) arguing that humans were the principal means of its diffusion while others such as Cuatrecasas (1964), Gomez-Pompa *et als*. (2003), Flores and Aliphat-Fernandez (1990), and Pittier (1935) contend that Mesoamerica is part of the plant's natural range.

inscriptions and ceramic figurines. Many of these artifacts not only depict the social uses of cacao, but often juxtaposed it with other images within Maya symbolism.

The Maya have a long and storied history in Mesoamerica. Beginning in the Pre-Classic era (1800 BC – 250 AD), stratified agricultural villages began to emerge throughout the region and toward the end of this period, massive pyramids began to be erected in the lowlands of Guatemala and Mexico (Coe 2006:p 76-82). During the Classic (250-925 AD) and Post-Classic (925 AD until the Spanish conquest in 1530 AD) eras of Maya civilization, massive cities with hieroglyphic writing, advanced astronomy, mathematics, art and a complex cosmology vied for dominance (Schele and Freidel 1990).

During this era, cacao circulated within a complex web of social exchanges, moving through the interconnected realms of tribute, trade and money. As a desirable item in these spheres of exchange cacao could transcend these spheres to play a prominent role in multiple economic systems so that what may be a bulk item of trade in one instance can become a sacred gift in another (Bohannan 1955, 1959).

In the pre-Columbian Mayan world system, one of the most prominent uses of cacao was as tribute by lesser rulers to their paramounts. Archeologists have uncovered numerous cacao drinking vessels from the Classic era. These ceramic vases were used by rulers to consume cacao drink on special ritual occasions. Cacao drinking vessels are often painted with elaborate scenes depicting the ruler receiving large quantities of cacao at their feet as tribute from vassals and subjugated lords. (Reents-Buder 2006:p 221; Stuart 2006:p 191). Translations of the accompanying hieroglyphics on the vases recount these tribute events.



Cacao drinking vessel K676 with image of cacao paid as tribute (Reents-Budet 2006)

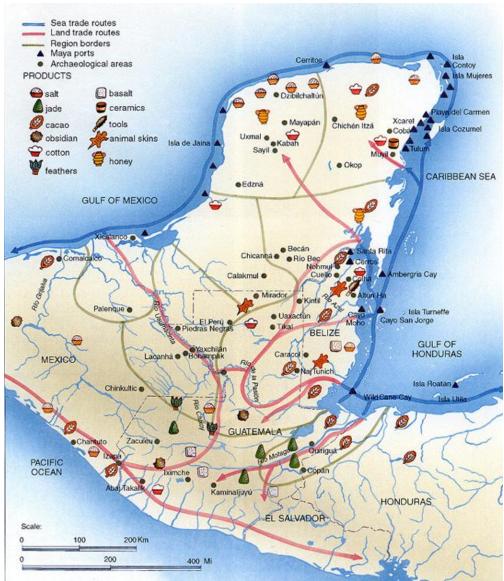
Colonial records also document the use of cacao as a form of tribute between Maya kingdoms. Spanish chroniclers report that the rulers of Mayapan, the last major Maya city in the Yucatan, received cacao as part of the tribute payments made from areas under its control (Lopez de Cogolludo 1957 [1688]). Similarly, the ancestors of the Cakchiquel paid tribute to their ancestral homeland of Tulan in the form of cacao (Brinton 1885:p 48; Thompson 1956).

Cacao's role in the ancient Maya tribute was because it embodied the giving of respect in personal relationships between superiors and their subordinates, embodying relationships of hierarchical difference. When cacao was presented as a gift of tribute to a paramount it was a social statement about a particular relationship between hierarchically different parties, mediated through cacao. Even as cacao flowed "upwards" in the social hierarchy through tribute, it was also redistributed among the wider population through large feasting events. During these large events commemorating military victories, calendric occasions and building construction, large amounts of prestigious foods such as cacao drink, meat and corn were given to the masses by the rulers. The feasting on these occasions created an atmosphere of social holism between all stratums of society as everyone from kings to peasants partook together. In both tribute and feasting events, the giving of cacao allows it to become endowed with human characteristics as an extension of the giver.

In addition to cacao's role in gift giving and tribute, it was also a major item of long distance trade. During the late pre-Columbian era, cacao was distributed from South America, throughout the

Maya areas of Mesoamerica and into the lowlands of tropical Mexico (Cuatrecasas 1964). Recognized as an important economic crop by various colonial empires, cacao was planted widely throughout the tropics and now has a widespread distribution around the world. Despite this purposeful expansion, the range of cacao remained limited by geographic factors. The ecology and climate of much of Mesoamerica, including many areas of Classic Mesoamerican civilization such as the Yucatan, the Guatemalan highlands and the Mexican Plateau, is generally unsuitable for the large scale cultivation of cacao. The relative scarcity of the geographic areas where cacao could be produced combined with its desirability, created conditions in which cacao was a highly valued product which traveled over long distance in the Pre-Columbian New World (Thompson 1956:p 96; see Landa 1941 Ch 22). As the product of trade, cacao was grown in micro climates with the right combination of elevation, moisture and temperature and then exported to areas which could not produce their own. Extensive long distance trade in cacao by land and sea routes was conducted by the ancient Maya as "considerable quantities" of cacao were traded from modern day Tabasco, Honduras and Belize to the Yucatan (Thompson 1956 185; see Landa 1941[1566]:p 94-95; Oviedo y Valdes 1851-1855:p 235; Roys 1943:p 52; Torquemada 1723:p 335). This movement of raw materials from the system's periphery to the rich core presages cacao's later role in the world system of global capitalism.

As an item of pre-Columbian trade, cacao was grown in peripheral areas and traded. In the classic era, Maya traded cacao for a wide range of items such as salt, obsidian, cotton, hides, feathers, and jade. Each of these items is produced in surplus in particular environmental microregions which were traded far and wide across a patchwork of city states and villages. Even as countless rulers and cities rose and fell, cacao remained at the center of the pre-Columbian economy of Mesoamerica.



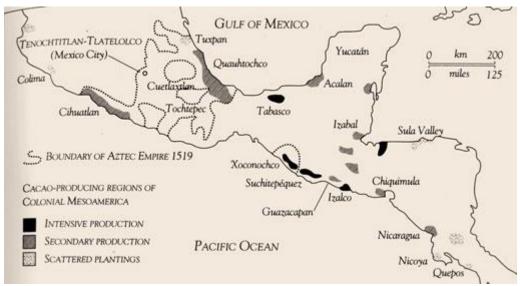
Map of Pre-Columbian Trade Routes 24

In addition to its role as a valuable trade good, cacao was also used as a form of general money (Berdan et al. 2003:p 102). Cacao as money could be used to directly purchase items such as salt, cloth and slaves at regular exchange rates (Landa 1941[1566]:p 95). Cacao beans made an ideal medium of exchange because of their small size, high value and durability (Million 1955). Because of its role as both money and a trade good, cacao circulated widely throughout Mesoamerica passing from remote farms to trader middlemen and eventually reaching the core cities of the Classic Maya. Based on its association with currency and money, the ancient Maya believed that cacao was under the patronage of Ekchuah, the God of Merchants (Thompson 1956 p 185).

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 $<sup>{\</sup>color{red}^{24}}\ \underline{www.latinamerican studies.org/maya-maps.htm}$ 

After the Spanish Conquest of the Maya world in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, cacao remained an important economic item. Despite the social upheaval of conquest, the use of cacao as a form of currency continued throughout the colonial era and into modern times. In colonial Yucatan, cacao beans continued to be used as currency and Spanish friars issued fines for "backsliding into heathen customs" in cacao beans (Landa 1941[1566]:p 80). In more recent times, cacao beans "still served as the general currency of the district" until late in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Thompson 1930:p 185-186). For the Ch'orti' of Eastern Guatemala, cacao was used as medium of exchange in marketplaces until the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Wisdom 1940:p 34). Among the Mopan Maya of Belize, cacao was exchanged with *cobaneros* (traveling merchants from the Alta Verapaz region of Guatemala) for woven mats and *huipiles* (embroidered women's dresses) until the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (McAnany and Murata 2006:p 432). In addition to its continued (though diminishing) role as money, cacao also remained an item of tribute, though now to the distant Spanish and British rather than local Maya lords. Although cacao played an important role as a prestigious tribute item filling the coffers and enriching the nobility of Spain, this role was quickly overshadowed by its role as a global commodity.



Map of Colonial Cacao Cultivation. From (McNeil 2006a).

While the cultivation of cacao was originally confined to the Spanish and Portuguese areas of the New World, cacao was traded widely and plantations were quickly established throughout the old world. The English, French and Dutch each obtained cacao seeds and soon began to establish cacao plantations in colonial outposts stretching from the Caribbean to Africa to India and the East Indies. Recognized as an important economic crop by various colonial empires, cacao was planted widely

throughout the tropics and now has a widespread distribution around the world. Colonial enterprises invested heavily in these new areas of cacao cultivation creating giant monoculture plantations design to meet the growing demand in the global core. As cacao production expanded to new areas around the globe, older areas of small scale cacao production, including southern British Honduras, were relegated to the periphery of colonial capitalism until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As colonial enterprises overlooked Toledo in favor of more attractive cacao producing areas, commercial cacao production in the area ceased and the Maya once again returned to cultivating cacao in miniscule quantities for home use and local trade, from feral groves and kitchen gardens.

# Cacao Production in Toledo during the Colonial Era

The development of the modern Belizean cacao industry began in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when the hinterland of southern British Honduras was first established as a frontier of colonial capitalism. Within the larger world-economy, areas such as the southernmost district of Toledo in British Honduras (today Belize) exist on the periphery of the world-economy, supplying the colonial core with raw materials (Mintz 1985; Wallerstein 1974: p100). Throughout its colonial history, Toledo has been the site of cyclical "peripheral investment enterprises" such as resource extraction and agriculture which have exported the bounty of the country without upward mobility within capital world system (Wilk 1997 Page 66; see Ashcraft 1973; Bolland 1977, 1981).

During the colonial era, the cacao industry of British Honduras went through a series of boom and bust linked to larger cycles of expansion and retrenchment on the frontier of the capitalist world system. During the 1890s, Bernard Crammer, a German expatriate, established one of the Crammer Estate as the first commercial cacao farm in Toledo when he purchased several exhausted colonial logging concessions and transformed it into a plantation for agricultural exports (Wainwright 2008 p48). For more than 40 years until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, the plantation produced shade-grown cacao and coffee, rubber, plantains and bananas and spices such as nutmeg, mace, allspice and achiote for export (Romney 1959: p 118). Although the plantation focused on a diverse array of crops, cacao was its major success with a peak export of 42,800 pounds in 1906 (Wilk 1997 Page 61). Other export plantations soon sprung up in Toledo during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, producing a variety of tropical agricultural exports including chicle, cacao, and cohune for export to the United States. The Crammer Estate

recruited Ke'kchi Maya labor to work on the plantation and the villages of Dolores and San Pedro Sarstoon sprung up around the plantation (Wainwright 2008 p 48). <sup>25</sup>

At the same time that the Q'eqchi' Maya were being employed to work in Crammer Estate, the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century also saw the expansion of commercial opportunities for both Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya to sell their own cacao. The price of cacao grew in the 1910s and 20s and many in rural Maya communities began to experiment with commercial cacao during this period with 25,000 pounds of cacao exported in 1913 (Wainwright 2008). Much of this cacao was sold to peddlers known as *cobaneros* who traveled the countryside by foot buying small quantities of "cacao, coffee, chicle and copal incense" from Belize in exchange for commodity goods from the Guatemalan highlands (Wilk 1997 Page 69). Even as markets have changed and Maya villages increasingly have permanent shops, *cobaneros* remain an important part of the economic network connecting Maya communities to the global economic system.

Despite the prosperity that cacao brought to these villages during the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, its impact was short lived. With the coming of the Great Depression "export prices crashed," plummeting from 50 cents per pound in 1928 to a mere 4 cents in 1930 (Wainwright 2008 p 48). With the decline of the Crammer's estate experimentation with cacao export, the commercial industry for Belizean cacao all but disappeared for 50 years.

The collapse of the Crammer Estate is an example of cyclical frontier capitalism that defined the colonial era of Toledo. Despite centuries as a territory of extractive capitalism, until the 1960s Southern Belize lacked basic infrastructure. Although Toledo was the site of numerous timber and agricultural ventures during the colonial era, this capitalist mode of production was extractive and left little behind in the way of profits, tax revenue, capital accumulation or investment in basic infrastructure (Wainwright 2008 48; Wilk 1997 Page 48, 66). According to Wilk, the colonial landscape southern British Honduras had "been so thoroughly and efficiently exploited by capitalist ventures that nothing has been left behind, except the workers themselves" (Wilk 1997 Page 66). Capitalist exploitation of the Toledo frontier has practiced a type of "shifting cultivation" with historical cycles of boom and bust, so that by analogy, "often the area looks like primeval forest, when it is actually a fallowed area within a larger system of exploitation" (Wilk 1997 Page 66).

<sup>21</sup> 

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>25</sup> This arrangement was similar to the *finca* (plantation) agriculture of Guatemala where the Q'eqchi' had previously immigrated from. Unlike the Q'eqchi', the Mopan "have never been plantation laborers" and Mopan culture/social organization reflects their "long history" as independent peasant farmers (see Gregory 1972, 1975, 1976; Wilk 1997 Page 59).

After the collapse of the export market during the 1930s, an organized market for cacao in Belize lay dormant until the era of decolonization, when Belizean cacao once again has taken on additional economic significance as a commercial crop destine for the world market (Ausdal 2008; Emch 2003, McAnany and Murata 2006; Wilk 1997). Indigenous communities survived this economic crash when export plantations folded because the Belizean Maya "were not overcommitted" to any commercial crop and so they "did not migrate, and they did not starve" (Wilk 1997 140; see Wainwright 2008 Page 64). Rather, they remained largely peasant farmers with their agricultural production oriented toward household subsistence and reproduction, avoiding being caught in cycles of capitalist "crunches." Oriented towards the local production, Mopan peasants continued to cultivate cacao for their own home use and occasionally sold some to passing cobaneros, until the return of commercial cacao markets in the era of decolonization.

## Historical and Ethnographic Setting

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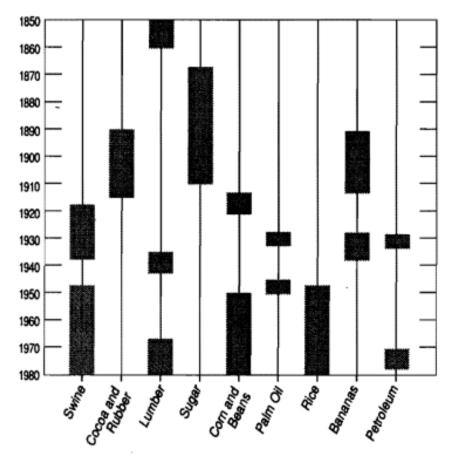


FIGURE 4.3 Production for Export in Toledo, 1850-1980

(Wilk 1997 p 67)

# **Decolonization and Development**

The development of the modern cacao industry in post-colonial Belize has its roots in the upheaval of the transition from British Honduras as part of the global British Empire, to a marginal post-colonial state. Efforts to create cacao as an export commodity has been part of a larger national project in Belize to commercialize other agricultural products such as sugar and citrus during the era of decolonization. Like many new nations, independence for Belize meant the replacement of colonial domination with more subtle forms of intervention through development (Escobar 1995; Esteva 1992). In the period following independence from Great Britain in 1981, the new nation of Belize was faced with the loss of the colonial money and expertise, which had flowed into the colony. In 1983, the Belizean government was forced to seek debt relief from the IMF (International Monetary Fund) and World Bank in order to cope with the loss of British financing (Thomson 2004). As part of the neoliberal conditions of their bailout loan, the Belizean government was forced to enact major neo-liberal<sup>26</sup> reforms, which dominated the political climate of the day.

In Belize, the consequences of neo-liberalism were severe. The new government was pushed to divest themselves of "non-essential" services which could be better handled more by the private sector. Utilities were privatized, while government services were outsourced and markets were liberalized. These policies hit the agricultural sector especially hard as the government was forced to scale back extension and support services while at the same time disbanding the national agricultural marketing board which subsidize small farmer production (Moberg 1992). As the Belizean government resources for agricultural development have been scaled back in recent years due to "Structural Adjustment Programs" (SAP's), the void left by the Belizean government has been filled by corporations, NGO's, international development initiatives and corporations who have become central agents in the reorganization of the "everyday lives" of the Maya (Piot 2010 page 5, 133).

One of the most prominent examples of this neoliberal convergence of corporate and non-governmental development synergy has played out in more than three decades of development projects aimed at modernizing cacao production in Belize as a means of creating economic opportunities for the marginal Maya populations. One Maya farmer recalled his early experience with commercial cacao...

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>26</sup> Cloaked in claims of scientific neutrality, neoliberalism proposed salvation from recession and poverty through the reorganization of international capitalism by emphasizing deregulation, market exchange and unbridled individualism as a means to achieve market efficiency (Harvey 2005 p 13,19,57).

It all started in the later part of the seventy and early eighties when the commercialization of cocoa was being promoted by the government of Belize through the ministry of agriculture, along with project called TAMP VITA. TAMP VITA is the Toledo Agriculture marketing project, which is a US aid funded project by the US government from 1984 to 1989. When the project started with the commercialization of cocoa, Hershey established their branch at Hummingbird Hershey and was buying cocoa there. I was one of those farmers who planted then at the time. And that's the reason why now you see a lot of cocoa in the village because of what happened in the 1980s. (Justino)

The modern cacao industry in Belize began in 1977 when Hershey Foods Corporation established a 500 acre cacao farm, post-harvest processing facility and research station at "Hummingbird Hershey" in the Cayo district of Belize. During this same year, Hershey's signed an agreement with the government to purchase the colony's entire production of fermented and dried cacao at world market price (Emch 2003). In addition to the cacao produce on the model farm at Hummingbird Hershey, the company's strategy also included acting as a purchasing center for the small amounts of cacao produced on Maya household farms. In their analysis of these commercialization plans, agronomists argued that Maya agricultural production "peasant" and inefficient; hindering the establishment of a modern cacao industry (Wainwright 2008; see Osborn 1982). It was determined that in order to make the Hummingbird Hershey venture profitable would require Maya cacao producers to employ agronomic techniques with individual land tenure (see chapter 9). In order to transform the peasant agriculture of the Belizean Maya into a component of the global chocolate industry, a whole range of development NGO sprung up to solve the "problems" impeding progress.

As colonial resources for agricultural extension officers and technical assistance dried up with decolonization, cacao development in Toledo became led by an alphabet soup of non-governmental development agencies funded by a variety of international donors.<sup>27</sup> Over the past 30 years, one of the most visible NGO's in southern Belize was the Toledo Cacao Growers Association (TCGA). Although Hummingbird Hershey's was established to promote "small-scale cacao farming in Belize," it was the only purchasing depot in the country and the Maya were responsible for selling their cacao to Cayo, two districts away from their home villages. Since most cacao farmers lacked vehicles of their own, they had to either take their cacao beans on the twice weekly bus or to charter a private pickup truck to deliver their product, although this practice was costly and ate into their already slim profit margin (Emch 2003

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>27</sup> The rise of NGO's has been seen by some scholars as a 'quiet revolution" that has challenged/transformed the relations between the state and their citizens/marginal populations and reconstituting the terrain of the biopolitical (Piot 2010 page 133). They see it as part of a larger "unbundling" of sovereignty from the inefficient nation state and instead conduct "grassroots" development rooted in local needs and participation (Piot 2010 page 139; cf. Ferguson 2001).

124). The difficulties in transporting cacao for sale led to local efforts to organize cacao producers for their mutual benefit. In 1985, the Maya of ten villages (with assistance from Peace Corp volunteers) formed the Toledo Cacao Growers Association (TCGA) as a way to coordinate marketing, provide credit, purchase improved seedlings, and expand cacao production onto the indigenous reservations in the district (Wilk 1997). Today, the TCGA has grown into a central actor not only in agricultural development, but as a forum for indigenous voices on the national and international stage.

When Hummingbird Hershey first began purchasing cacao, the market for cacao was initially good, with the price stable at  $\sim 1.70$  BZ. per pound throughout the 1980s. But despite the seeming promise of the cacao industry in the 1980s, once again the boom did not last. In 1991, the world market price for cacao plummeted again and the price paid to Maya farmers by Hershey's fell from \$1.20 BZ per pound of cacao to \$0.35 BZ cents per pound for cacao (Emch 2003 p 124). The drop in price made Belize's cacao uncompetitive with the global market and caused Hershey, the sole purchaser of Belizean cacao, to cease purchasing the cacao. Without a market outlet, many farmers cut down cacao groves for shifting/*milpa* agriculture while other discouraged farmers "began pursuing different cash crops and jobs in other Belizean Districts" (Emch 2003 p 128).

In the aftermath of Hummingbird Hershey's collapse, the production of cacao in Toledo was nearly abandoned until the TCGA found a new purchaser for local cacao from a British candy company named "Green and Black's" who agreed to be the exclusive purchaser of TCGA chocolate for a locally sourced "Maya Gold" chocolate line (Emch 2003 p 128; TMCC 1997). Neil La Croix, the head of supply chains for Green and Blacks, recalls how the company first came to Belize...

Green & Black's has been involved in Belize since 1991. When the founders of Green & Black's were in Belize on holiday and were put in contact with a group called the TCGA, which is the Toledo Cacao Growers Association. The TCGA had planted organic cacao trees at the request of another chocolate company which soon afterward left Belize, leaving the farmers with a very good crop but no where to sell it, and the founders were very impressed with the quality of the cocoa or the cacao as the Mayans call it, and decided that this would be ideal to source as our organic cacao in the future. <sup>29</sup>

At first, the amount of chocolate produced for Green and Black's was small and only \$10,000 worth of cacao was purchased the first year. But soon the product grew in popularity and production rose to more than tenfold by the end of the decade (Sams 1998). While many Maya famers had abandoned their cacao after the earlier market crash that caused Hershey's to withdraw, the return of a

http://www.greenandblacks.com/assets/media/transcripts/The%20TCGA%20doc%20-%20video%20transcript.pdf

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>28</sup> Now an independent subsidiary of Kraft/Cadbury Schweppes.

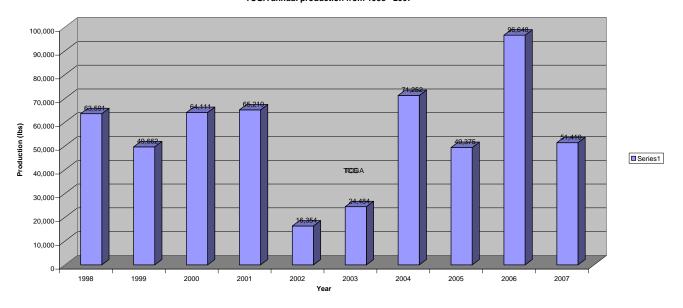
stable, well-paying market for cacao soon lured even many skeptical farmers back into commercial cacao production (Ausdal 2008 p 588; Emch 2003 p 128). Old farms were rehabilitated and with development funding, hundreds of new acres of cacao were planted. In a short time, Belizean cacao was back and bigger than ever, surpassing the heyday of Hershey's chocolate by more than 60% (Emch 2003 p 128).

Although the past decade has seen a major increase in total commercial cacao production in Belize, the country remains a minor producer of cocoa for the world market. 30 The demand for Green and Black's chocolate outstrips the current supply available in Toledo and has created a new unlimited market for cacao the (Steinberg 2002). Despite a rebound in the 1990s and beyond, the periodic overextension and collapse of commercial cacao is always a specter looming, built into the very heart of the development project. Some farmers worry that the current expansion of cacao in Southern Belize could follow the same cycle/pattern of boom and bust that has plagued the region as part of the global periphery. While Green and Blacks wants increased their purchases up to 1,000,000 lbs of cacao, production has been flat or even declining for the last couple of years around 100,000 or less (10% of their goal). The inability to increase production has been in large part due to the expansion of cacao diseases such as "Monillia", "Witch's Broom" and "Black Pod." In response to the rise of these agricultural diseases, NGOs have initiated a number of large scale development projects to increase production (see chapter 9). Another devastating blow to cacao production occurred in 2001 when hurricane Iris hit Toledo district and destroyed 85% of the district's cacao trees (Emch 2003). Since this time, cacao production in Toledo has slowly returned to pre-hurricane levels, growing from 16,354 lbs in 2002 to a peak of 100,677 lbs in 2008. The rebound of the Belizean cacao industry has been helped in part by a £225,000 grant awarded by the United Kingdom Department for International Development which was matched by Green and Black's for redevelopment of the cacao industry (Green and Black's 2008). This grant funded the "Maya Gold" project which has replanted cacao trees lost to the storm and rehabilitated damaged groves.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>30</sup> Currently, the ten largest cacao producers are (in order of production) Cote D'Ivoire, Ghana, Indonesia, Nigeria, Brazil, Cameroon, Ecuador, Columbia, Mexico and Papua New Guinea (FAO 2005). Belize currently produces .0015% of world cacao production.

TCGA annual production from 1998 - 2007



(TCGA 2008)

Today, there are commercial 725 cacao farms in Belize, 96% of which are Mopan or Q'eqchi' Maya family farms. These farms compose nearly 515,765 cacao trees with over 1,720 acres planted. <sup>31</sup> But individually, these farms are small and only average farm is 1 hectare (2.5 acres). Despite the large number of individual farms, production in many farms is sporadic. For example, in 2009, only 258 out of 725 inspected cacao farms actually sold any cacao commercially at all, creating inequality both within and between communities (see chapter 8). Within this total, more than 90% of the cacao purchased by the TCGA was sold to Green and Black's chocolate, based in the UK. The rest of the cacao was sold to four small-scale chocolate manufactures located within Belize. These include Cotton Tree Chocolate in Punta Gorda (Toledo, Goss chocolate in Seine Bight (Stann Creek), Cyrilla's/Ixcacao chocolate in San Felipe (Toledo), and Kakaw in San Pedro (Belize City district). Recently, a new chocolate purchaser, Moho River Cacao, has begun to purchase small quantities of cacao as well, signally the growing demand for Belizean chocolate among consumers.

#### Conclusion

This chapter has provided the background material necessary to contextualized cacao's prominent role in Mopan social, symbolic and religious life. Throughout the remainder of my dissertation, I apply this study of the Mopan Maya and their cacao as a means to talk about the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> In southern Belize, an acre of cacao averages 300 trees based on conditions such as sunlight, rainfall, and the topography on which the trees are planted.

profound changes that have been initiated with the introduction of Protestantism and agricultural development.

I began this discussion by giving a brief history of Mopan Maya migration and the establishment of Mopan communities in the Maya mountains of what is today southern Belize. I then describe the role played in the traditional Mopan agricultural system. This indigenous system is informed by an underlying logic of bringing together agricultural assemblages that encompass complementary oppositions of sacred/profane, shifting/perennial and market/domestic use plants. Within these agricultural dualities, cacao as a perennial tree is contrasted to the shifting maize cultivation. At the same time, cacao is considered a sacred plant that can be used in ritual offerings or to sanctify important social gatherings, unlike profane citrus drinks or coffee drinks which merely quench the thirst. Cacao has an important history bridging the market/domestic continuum as both the object of home use and as a cyclical commodity for the global market. Despite this dual nature, it was primarily used for domestically consumption and religious use while local trade was secondary.

Cacao has a long history as a culturally important plant among the Belizean Maya. For the ancient Maya, cacao was a special plant that was central in a variety of domains including feasting, trade, tribute, and sacred offerings. Despite the upheavals of the colonial era, cacao remained important for social drinking and local trade. As the ancestors of the Mopan migrated to the highlands of Toledo, they began to once again cultivate cacao in the same hills and valleys where their ancestors had done so centuries before from kitchen gardens around the family compound, or from scattered groves growing feral in the forest.

In addition to indigenous home use, Belizean cacao has also become enmeshed in networks of global capitalism as an agricultural commodity. For more than a century, the commercial cacao industry in colonial British Honduras and post-independence Belize has gone through cycles of boom and bust as a peripheral exporter of cacao. Early attempts at Crammer's Estate experimented with a plantation economy involving Q'eqchi' Maya as hired labor, but export production was short lived and failed to make long term changes to Maya cacao production. Commercial cacao production in the region was then dormant for the next fifty years. In the aftermath of early development's failure, Maya households continued to produce cacao almost entirely for domestic consumption, ritual use and local trade. Only after the introduction of large scale development projects on the eve of Belizean independence, did cacao shift to the largely commercial crop that is today.

The modern commercial cacao industry in Toledo began to reemerge in the late 1970s, on the verge of Belizean independence in 1981. The decade that followed Belizean Independence was a time

of rapid expansion as hundred of Maya peasant farmers expanded a few scattered groves of cacao into one of the largest industries in the region. Rather than a single plantation, production was aggregated from of hundreds of indigenous peasant farms into a viable export commodity. Unlike earlier plantation enterprises, commercial cacao was envisioned not only for profits, but also to help create industry for the new nation and instill modern capitalist values in Maya peasants (see chapter 9). But once again, the boom did not last. Within a decade, Hershey's had closed its doors and peasant farmers were left without a market for their crops.

In the wake of Hershey's demise, the commercial cacao market once again was re-envisioned in the 1990s within the paradigm of "moral capitalism." Rather than a bulk commodity, cacao was repackages as the "Maya Gold" chocolate bar within the high-end, Fair Trade/organics market segment. Under "Maya Gold" brand, the last twenty years has seen tremendous gains in production and acreage. During this same time, it has also suffered devastating losses from hurricane Iris in 2001 and the spread of the cacao fungus Monilia. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the Belizean cacao industry sits precariously between promise and peril, always seemingly on the verge of break through or complete collapse. While these oscillations reflect local conditions, they are also manifestations of larger cycles of expansion and contraction in global economic networks.

The following chapter continues this exploration of cacao's place in the Maya cultural imagination by investigating the social uses of cacao as a sacred drink of conviviality.

## **Chapter 3 - The Sociality of Drinking Cacao**

### Introduction

This chapter forefronts the ways that cacao creates convivial relations between different members of Mopan society. I begin by describing the variety of chocolate recipes prepared for daily meals and also used in ritual feasting. I then discuss cacao's role in the domestic sphere of household consumption and explore how the parts of the Mopan meal fit within a symbolic grammar of culturally specific culinary values of sacred/profane and hot/cold.

While cacao drink was a central part of the traditional Mopan meal, this role is magnified during large scale social events. Life cycle events such as birth, baptism and marriage are all opportunities for the creation of relationality and eating together cements the bonds of sociality between participants. Beyond these important milestones, cacao drink also plays an important role during social activities such as religious fiestas and following collective labor, and serves to bind the participants together. I argue that the act of sharing chocolate beverage creates conviviality between people who eat together, strengthening ties between kin and compadres. The social drinking of cacao mediates between hierarchically unequal parties in the society through respectful acts of hospitality.

# Part 1 - Mopan Culinary Culture

# Andrea Making the Cacao Drink (story)

I had just returned from the farm when our next door neighbor, Andrea, stopped by to invite my wife Michelle and myself to come next door to visit. "Maybe you want to see me make the *käkäh* (cacao)?" she asked. We had just arrived in San Jose a few weeks before and had rented a small pink house from Andrea, a single woman in the village who made ends meet renting out an extra house on the family compound. The walls of our two houses were only five feet apart and we saw her frequently throughout the days. She was amused by our ethnographic questions and had taken an interest in teaching us about the "old ways" of traditional Mopan life. While Michelle and I had been offered cacao drink a few times, we had yet to see how the drink was made, so we were both excited to see the process for ourselves.

The process of making the cacao drink actually began shortly after we arrived. Over the past two weeks, we had seen Andrea harvest a few cacao pods from her yard to make chocolate drinks. With the help of her primary school aged son, Sepharino, they broke the pods in half by hitting them with sticks and then pulling out the chains of sticky, white fruit from the pod's hollowed out center. A little

while later, Andrea had gone down to the creek to wash the cacao in order to remove the white pulp from the seeds. When she came back up the hill, she had about 2lbs of washed seeds which she spread out on a tarp in the front yard to dry in the sun.<sup>32</sup> Every afternoon for the next week, Andrea would send Sepharino to fetch the drying cacao to keep it from getting too moist in the cool of the night. Then every morning before school, he would replace the cacao for another day in the sun.

As we ducked inside Andrea's thatched house, the smell of roasting cacao wafted through the air. The cook fire cackled and flickered in dim light as cacao beans browned on the cast iron comal (xämäch) – the metal cooking griddle that sits atop the three stone hearth – traditionally this was done on a small pottery comal called a "sok"). After five minutes of cooking, Andrea scooped the cacao off the comal into a plastic bowl. As the beans cooled, the rapid temperature change cracked the skin of the seeds. Using her fingers, Andrea removed the burnt chaff from the cacao beans. Once most of the beans had been de-skinned, she took the bowl outside and began to shake it in a circular pattern toward herself so that the heavier beans would stay in the bowl while the lighter trash scattered out of the bowl and were carried away on the breeze.

Once the cacao was hulled, Andrea poured the cacao into the top of the hand cranked *molina* (corn grinder). As she turned the handle, the teeth inside the machine crushed the cacao and a thick oily paste of ground nibs and cocoa fat came out the other side. As she worked, Andrea said that although the *molina* made it easier to make the cacao, the machine wasn't perfect because it lost too much of its *manteca* (cacao fat - literally "lard"). She said that her grandmother refused to use the *molina* and still ground the cacao by hand using the stone mortar and pestle known as the *mano* (*ka'*) and *metate* because it makes a richer, fattier drink. Andrea said that while she liked the taste of the stone ground cacao better, it was hard work. "I am lazy to move it," she joked and we all laughed. In our short time living in San Jose, we had come to realize that even with the introduction of simple machinery, there was nothing lazy about the up-before-dawn peasant life there.

When Andrea finished grinding the cacao, she took the bowl of chocolate paste and began to knead it with her hands. "Just like the *masa* (tortilla dough)," she said. After a few minutes, the cacao was starting to take shape. Now that the chocolate base was finished, it was time for the spices. While some Mopan season their cacao drink with hot chile peppers, Andrea preferred the bitter flavor of black pepper. Andrea added a packet of store-bought black pepper to the mix, along with two big handfuls of brown sugar. Once the spices were added, she continued to knead the chocolate mixture into small

 $<sup>^{32}</sup>$  In the early  $20^{th}$  century, the bark of the Moho or Pointe tree was used to dry the beans rather than a tarp – (Thompson 1930 p 98).

one-inch balls and then laid them out on table. Each one of these was enough cacao to make a *luuch*, otherwise known as a bottle gourd or calabash worth of cacao. While most of these chocolate balls would be dried and saved for later, Andrea took a couple of the balls and added them to a pot of water. As she stirred the pot, the chocolate dissolved into a rich brown liquid. An oily sheen appeared on the surface of the liquid as the cocoa butter began to separate from the crushed nibs. With the drink finally complete, Sepharino fetched his mother the *luuches* hanging on the wall. Andrea scooped the wooden bowls into the pot and filled each of the calabashes with cacao drink. We sat at the table and she served us both before making two more *luuches* for herself and Sepharino. "*Uk'ik* (drink it)," she said and we all lifted the bowls to our lips for a taste.

The difference between farm fresh chocolate and industrial cocoa was striking. Unlike the sweet hot chocolate from back home, the Mopan chocolate drink was bitter with a hint of smokiness. Coarse grains of ground cacao were suspended in the beverage before eventually settling to the bottom. But despite my unfamiliarity, the flavor was earthy, savory and unmistakably chocolate. In the past two weeks, the cacao had gone from a pod hanging on a tree to a beverage in our cups. When we finished, Andrea asked "Ki wa a käkäh? (Is the cacao drink good?)" and we both replied "top ki" (very good). Ki inw ool she said. (I am happy in my heart).

#### **Cacao Food and Drink**

Among the Mopan of southern Belize, the traditional chocolate drink is known as "käkäh" (cacao) is one of the exemplary "culture foods" of the Mopan Maya. Cacao drinks are widely made throughout the Maya region with many regional variations of the recipes including atole de cacao, atole de sapuyul, atole de zuchile, chilate, panecita, pinole, pazol, saka', and tiste (McNeil 2006b). The giving of cacao drinks has been an important part of Mopan sociality for centuries. Mopan women still prepare cacao drinks for home use in a traditional manner similar to the manner used at the time of the Spanish conquest. Although metal comals have replaced ceramic ones, and drying is now done on tarps or concrete slabs rather than tree bark, the core of the preparation process remains remarkably similar. A cacao farmer from San Jose explained this process...

When the ladies make the chocolate drink, they put it on the comal, they roast it, and then after they crack it, and all the skin cracked and then just cacao seed now and then they mash it with the grind stone to make the drink. (Lucas)

In addition to the raw cacao beans, chocolate drinks are also flavored with a variety of spices. Lucas went on to explain the importance of these flavors ....

The old generation makes the cacao with the black pepper, then they put vanilla, and then after that they put the sugar. It is sweet tasting, makes you want more. The old generation knew how to fix the cacao in the proper way, especially when they mix it with the love. (Lucas)

Black pepper was and remains the most popular ingredient added, and is probably a "modern substitute for the 'delicate spices' used" at the time of conquest (Thompson 1930 185-6; see Landa 1941). Additionally, other flavors such as sugar, vanilla, chili peppers and cinnamon are also commonly used in San Jose with each family brewing a slightly different recipe that give each household a unique flavor, so that the process of producing and consuming cacao drink serves to differentiate families groups within the larger society.

## The Mopan Meal (Food and Drink)

As an important locus of conviviality, the preparation and consumption of food is a fruitful site for the investigation of value among the Mopan. Food is more than the sum of its ingredients. The foods that we eat, the way they are prepared and with whom we eat are all outward expression of the internal constellation of cultural values that we each hold dear. At the same time, meals are not isolated occurrences in which random foods are cobbled together haphazardly. Rather they depend on the proper assemblage of items within larger categories of symbolic meaning. "The meaning of a meal is found in a system of repeated analogies. Each meal caries something of the meaning of the other meals; each meal is a structured social event which structures others in its own image" (Douglas 1972 p 44). Following Douglas, I argue the Mopan meal is a microcosm of local indigenous culinary cosmology. In this section, I propose that an anthropological investigation into food will provide a lens which speaks to larger meanings embedded within the meal, as well as the ways in which changes in the habitus of eating can transform the underlying models.

The Mopan meal is a combination of food elements which are combined within the framework of a cultural food logic. This indigenous logic ranks different types of food according to a hierarchical scale of prestige. The prestige that a particular class of food possesses can be seen as an expression of its value in comparison to other categories of food. Ceremonial meals have "a fixed and rigid grammar that allows no substitutions" (Wilk 1997 Page 241). If the proper ingredients are not available from the family farm, the family is obligated to buy the necessary corn or meat out of scarce cash resources.

The traditional Mopan meal is a dish of caldo (red soup with chicken and "ground-food"/root crops served with a large stack of fresh tortillas. Sweet drinks are also provided, either box ha uk'ul (black water drinks such as chocolate or coffee), fruit juice, or corn gruel (atole, or laab'). In addition, fruits, vegetables and tubers are picked from the garden and served, as are "bush foods" from the forest (see Thompson 1930: p 100-101). While wild foods are an important supplement in the Mopan diet, in recent years this contribution has more symbolic or for flavoring and variety as the game in the forests surrounding San Jose has dwindled and few hunters now range far enough to find large game. But not all wild plants and animals are seen as "food" and the distinction between those considered edible (peccary, gibnut, armadillo) and inedible (jaguar, opossum, snake), are cultural, rather than nutritional, distinctions (Fink 1987 411; see Leach 1964). Despite their marginal role in the Mopan diet, these wild foods remain an important source of emergency food "in rare periods of crop failure and famine" (Wilk 1997 p 150). In addition, the local subsistence base is increasingly supplemented or even replaced with foods purchased at shops or in the regional market.

There are four main classes of food items which are the basic elements in the Mopan culinary cosmology. The highest class of food (A) is composed of various several meats (bäk') including several preparations of chicken, beef, pork, fish and game meat. The lowest form of A class of foods are beans, especially when they are cooked in lard. Beans often function as a complement to other meats or as a meat substitute when none is available. Meat is a valuable item in Mopan community and the object of considerable labor and planning. The raising of animals for meat transforms plants (often inedible by humans) into animal protein, a culturally important site for the conversion and storage of value.

Meat is often scarce in Mopan communities and so as a prestige item, it is often reserved for special occasions, guests or to repay social obligations. Because of its prestige, meat is always included in the ritual meals which follows collective labor exchanges, weddings, baptisms, or special religious services (see Schackt 1986 Page 41). While in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the "average (Mopan) Maya household eats meat about three times a week" (Thompson 1930 p 100-101), the consumption of meat has increased in recent decades with the coming of the road to San Jose, the availability of shop goods, wage labor and a decrease in wild game in the forests surrounding Belizean Maya communities. Chicken is by far the most commonly consumed meat in San Jose, followed by beef. Although pork is a culturally important food and people enjoy the taste of it, the consumption of pork in San Jose has decreased markedly since the 1990s when the village council banned the raising of unfenced swine within the village boundaries. The development project to fence pigs in San Jose has transformed the landscape of San Jose, the diet of its inhabitants and social relations. Because of the high price of pig feed, most

people were forced to get rid of their pigs altogether when they were no longer allowed to roam free. Today, almost no one in San Jose raises their own pigs and most purchase live pigs in the neighboring village of Santa Cruz and brings them live back over the mountains for slaughter. Ecologically, the village ban on roaming pigs has increased the number of vegetable garden, cacao orchards, and fenced cow pastures close to San Jose. Socially, the ban on roaming pigs has decreased social tensions within the community over pigs causing damage to neighboring farms. In terms of diet, pig is now less common in the San Jose diet and is replaced increasingly by beef, which can be grown in fenced in pastures on leased land. Economically, cacao has replaced pigs in San Jose as a main agricultural source of transforming the landscape into cash.

Below this category are carbohydrates (**B**) such as tortillas (*wah*), rice, and *pooch* (corn tamales). These starches compose the bulk of the Mopan caloric intake. Drinks or *uk'ul* (**C**) compose a third type and include a variety of hot and cold prepared beverages such as cacao drink, corn *laab'*, coffee, tea and juice. Despite the variety of forms, all of the drinks in this category share a common feature of being prepared beverages, rather than raw beverages like water. Despite this commonality, the type of drink served marks an event as sacred or profane. Spiritually potent beverages such as cacao and alcohol corn beer or rum) were traditionally served during ritual or religious events, while juice or tea marked secular ones. The ritual connection between cacao and alcohol is explored further below in the section titled "Hot/Cold Food Classifications."

Finally, produce (**D**) such as fruits and vegetable make up the last class. These items are either eaten with minimal preparation or served as additions to more complex recipes. With the growing influx of imported "shop food" in San Jose, small packets of chips and cookies have increasingly become incorporated into food class **D** because, like many produce, they can be eaten with little to no preparation.

**Food Class** 

Α	Meat
В	Carbohydrate
С	Drink
D	Produce/ Snack

In addition to the relative values *between* classes, foods are also ranked hierarchically *within* the categories as subclasses. Within the category of drinks, *Box ha* (literally "black water") which includes cacao and coffee is valorized more than tea or juice. Meat (A) can be divided into higher value game meat in contrast to more common domesticated animals. Similarly, carbohydrates are differentiated between corn products (such as tortillas and pooch) which are more prestigious than those which are

made from rice or wheat. Corn is considered a sacred plant given from God that is essential for human life and the basis of what the Maya consider true food - tortillas.<sup>33</sup> As one farmer explained to me the association of corn as basic food saying ...

Cacao drink is always paired with our food, which is corn.

The association with corn as true food is central to the Mopan food cosmology. The minimal grammar of the traditional Mopan meal is corn tortilla and salt (*u taab'il*), which can be eaten in times of scarcity (Danziger personal communication). I saw this minimal grammar in action when I went on a hunting trip with a number of Mopan men. Before heading out into the woods for days, the only food from home they packed were copious amounts of tortillas their wives had made and a shaker of salt, knowing that the forest can provide a variety of supplemental the game and plants, such as heart of palm, needed to make a meal. Throughout our trip, we never went hungry and even though we ate tortillas every meal, we never finished the large stack they had brought with them.

Although corn is the dietary staple and symbolic heart of Mopan culinary practice, in recent years corn's place in this system has been challenged by large scale changes to Mopan society brought by outside interventions. Development project including the growing of rice, government subsidies for white rice and flour, and the opening of new roads and shops in the region have transformed the Mopan meal. Today, rice and beans can be served as a meal, even without tortillas, since rice is thought to fulfill a similar starch function. Despite this similarity in function, rice and corn tortillas carry different symbolic values as corn tortillas have come to represent *Kustumbre* and traditional culinary practices while the serving of rice has "modern" connotations. Mopan hosts use this knowledge of the different symbolic meanings of corn and rice to make culinary statements to their visitors through the types of food served. At public events, the use of rice and other non-local "shop" goods mark the event as modern, secular or Belizean, while the use of tortillas, along with cacao and local game and vegetables are used to mark events as distinctly Mopan. The tension between foods of *Kutumbre* and those representing modernity mirror the trend towards the replacement of cacao as the drink of *Kustumbre* with "modern" drinks bought at shops such as instant coffee and tea.

These food elements are the building blocks of the Mopan meal which are combined and rearranged within specific cultural formulas for the creation of ranked "food events". One notable

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Corn kernels are believed to not grow without human intervention. Among other Yucatean Maya groups, corn is thought to be "a cultural product par excellence" which symbolizes the necessary intertwined of nature/culture/supernatural in environmental cosmology (Faust 1999 Page 101).

aspect of Mopan culinary grammar (that also holds true for other Maya groups across Mesoamerica) is that unlike the Euro-American system in which there are different food expectations for different meals (such as the different types of food served as breakfast vs. lunch), Mopan culinary system does not make this rigid distinction. Rather, available foods are served for the current meal, without much modification to make them distinctly morning or afternoon foods.

**Types of Mopan Meals** 

Meal Type	Formula
Full Meal	A+B+C+D*
Small Meal	B+C+D*
Drink	C (+D)
Simple Snack	D

The most basic of these food events is the simple <u>Snack</u> (**D**) (*k'uxuk'*) which can consist of raw fruit, vegetables or some type of imported chips/cookies. This food event is not considered a "real" meal and is mainly eaten by children between meals or when traveling. More prestigious than the snack is the <u>Drink</u> (*uk'ul*) which includes a prepared beverage (**C**) and can sometimes be accompanied by a snack (**D**). Unlike the simple snack, the drink is a valued activity in maintaining relationships. "Visiting" (*sut*) friends and family members is a major activity in the renewal of Mopan social relations. When receiving guests, the host is expected to provide at minimum a prepared beverage as well as an optional snack. The type of drink served is an expression of the relative respect given from host to visitor, with a high prestige beverage such as cacao showing greater respect than Nescafe instant coffee or powdered juice packets. In slightly more prestigious social events, the host may offer their guests a <u>Small Meal</u> that includes a carbohydrate (**B**) such as tortillas or rice, a drink (**C**) along with a processed side item (**D\***), most commonly stewed beans.

These small meals are served for more formal visits or for less prestigious meals, such as breakfast and dinner, which are usually attended only by family or close friends. Because a Small Meal lacks meat (A), it is less prestigious than the <u>Full Meal</u>. While a <u>Small Meal</u> can stand in for a <u>Full Meal</u> when a family is lacking meat, it is not socially desirable to offer a guest a <u>Full Meal</u> without meat. When a host is unable to provide a proper meal, they will apologize profusely for their poverty because they were not able to meet the cultural expectations for their guest. At the top of the food hierarchy, the <u>Full Meal</u> is the most important Mopan food event which combines meat (A), carbohydrates (B), a drink (C) and a prepared side or soup (D). Full meals are served for the noontime lunch when the men/labor group return from the farm in the heat of the day, and at special social events such as weddings, collective labor or religious feasting (see Thompson 1930 p 100). The exemplary Mopan Full

Meal is a thin red soup called *caldo* with meat, vegetables and spices (most importantly *ricado*), accompanied by mountains of fresh tortillas and hot *box ha* to drink.

Within the hierarchy of Mopan food cosmology, there is an inverse relation between the intimacy of a meal event and its prestige. Snacks are the most intimate because they often involve only oneself or small children in one's care, and so these food events carry the least social prestige. On the other end of the scale, major social events, such as weddings and fiestas, are huge gatherings where the host is expected to provide prestigious food to all of their guests. As the circle of participants is expanded beyond the self and immediate family, the relative prestige of a meal increases. This increase in prestige includes not only the type of meal served (Full Meal > Small Meal), but also the relative prestige of the individual food elements served at the event (beef > chicken; cacao > juice).

#### **Hot/Cold Food Classification**

For the Mopan Maya, "the relationship between nutrition and wellbeing is predicated on the transference" of the power/essence from food to the person (Fink 1987 p 409). When consuming a meal, a person ingests not only the nutritional value of the food they eat, but also the spiritual essence of the plants and animals that make it up. Through consumption, humans incorporate the spiritual vitality of the constituent parts of the meal into their essence (located in the blood).

As part of the culinary "grammar" which allows different classes of foodstuffs to be combined into a culturally appropriate meal, Mopan conceptions of food are intimately tied to the balancing of opposing forces within the body and "all foodstuffs are classified within a continuum between "hot" and "cold" (Fink 1987 p 401-402). Rather than a strict dichotomy, hot and cold exist as a spectrum in which both foods, as well as medicinal plants and herbs each have different "degrees of intensity" in their effects on the body. This hot and cold distinction is not merely limited to food, but is part of a larger duality in Maya cosmology including gender, sickness, and plants.

Although the "heat" of an object is thought to be ultimately derived from the sun (Vogt 1976 p 34), the opposition between hot and cold foods is not based on temperature or spiciness as is often the case in the west.<sup>34</sup> Instead, heat and cold are thought of as inherent qualities expressed by the body's reaction to ingesting it. Hot foods are thought to excite the body and generate inner heat (such as

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>34</sup> Despite this difference, it also considered important to consider the temperatures of food as serving cold drinks after being in the hot sun is seen as dangerous – (Fink 1987 p 402)

anything with caffeine), making the blood strong. In contrast, cold foods (exemplified by cacao) calm the body and create a sense of relaxation and tranquility in the person, filling the belly while weakening the body. While hot foods are often considered more prestigious, they should not be consumed excessively and instead a proper balance between hot and cold must be maintained. "The maintenance of humoral balance" between the forces of hot and cold is essential to the maintenance to Mopan conceptions of health throughout an individual's lifespan (Fink 1987 p 402, 409).

Within the cultural dichotomy of "hot/cold, cacao is regarded by the Mopan as a "cool" plant." Cacao's unique botanical and ecological qualities "unites the characteristics of preference for shade and humidity and an anthropomorphic structure with the rare quality of having dark seeds, which reflect the darkness of caves, the night, the shade under a canopy and the rainy season when the sun is hidden away by a heavy layer of rain clouds" (Kufer and Heinrich 2006:p 405). This cultural association is collaborated by one Ch'orti Maya ritual specialist who claims "there is hardly a cooler thing than cacao" (Kufer and Heinrich 2006:p 403). This attribution of cacao as an exemplar of "coolness" remains salient among contemporary Mopan today and is contrasted with the "heat" of coffee (the other "box ha" — black water drink) or alcohol. As a quintessential cool food, cacao drink is often used in Mopan social and ritual life to balance drinks which produce excess "heat" in the blood, especially from alcohol. While alcohol heats the passions in the blood with potentially dangerous consequences, cacao cools tempers and creates harmony in society. The use of cacao in religious fiestas was thought to temper the passions and excitement brought about by ritual alcohol consumption and thereby allow for social reincorporation following the conclusion of the ritual act.

Because cacao is considered a "holy" and "cool" drink in Maya food cosmology, it was also used as a ritually appropriate drink when other liquids are prohibited. When planting certain root crops, Mopan elder believe that hot food and drink such as chili, black pepper and liquor must be abstained from. Instead, "only cocoa and sugar without the addition of the usual black pepper" should consumed (Thompson 1930 p 56). If these taboos are not followed, the gods will withhold their blessing and the plant will not produce.

The pairing of symbolic opposites is the central underlying principle throughout Mesoamerica cosmology (Miller and Taube 1997) and is the dynamic force that animates the cosmos, both past and present (Carmack et al. 1996:p 316). In this symbolic complex, cacao is opposed to maize within a structure of complementary oppositions that extends outward to other associations with gender, the human body, the natural world, food, celestial bodies, direction and colors (Carlsen and Pretchel 1994:p 84; Earle 1986; Faust 1988:p 94, 160-178, 1998:p 633; Fink 1987:p 401-404, 411; Redfield and Villa

1934:p 161; Schackt 1986 Page 62-63; Tedlock 1982; Vogt 1976 p 32, 59). Within this logic, dualities of male/female, outside/inside, light/dark, nature/culture, full/empty, hot/cold, short/long cycle crops, sacred/profane and countless others are interlinked domains. Balance of these complementary principles is seen as essential to the maintenance of human health, social harmony and order in the Mopan cosmos (Fink 1987:p 401-403). Masculine, "hot" foods such as corn/chicken blood are combined with "cool" feminine plants, most notably cacao, bringing together the central structural dualism at the heart of the symbolic universe. The chart below shows the opposition between complementary principles and the associations of different attributes within the larger symbolic system.

**Complementary Oppositions within Maya Symbolic Thought** 

Male	Female
Flesh/Seed	Blood
Strength	Weakness
Growth	Fertility
Right Hand/Side	Left Hand/Side
Age, Elder	Youth, Junior
Order	Creative Chaos
Waking	Dreaming
North/Up, East (shaman, la k'in)	South/down, West (nojol, chi'k'in)
White/green	Red/Black
. 0	
Celestial World	Underworld
Sun (K'in)	Moon (uh)
Jesus / the young corn God	The Virgin / "our Mother"
Day	Night
Hot	Cold
Dry	Wet
Rain (water from the sky)	Groundwater (water from caves and cenotes)
Forests, Fields	House, Yard
Highlands	Lowlands
Outside	Inside
Corn, Peppers, Pig, Wild Game, Poultry, Eggs, Snails, Fish, Honey, Coffee, Beef, Garlic	Cacao, Beans, Peccary, Wild Turkey, Rice, Boiled Eggs, Papaya, Squash, Lard, Rice, Plantains, Cassava

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>35</sup> Despite the need for a balance between both sides of oppositions, these principles are not considered equal with things associated with the left side and women are considered "dangerous and delicate" (Carlsen and Pretchel 1994:p 96).

## Food, Eating and the Creation of Sociality

Mopan concerns for the continued renewal of conviviality are commonly expressed through metaphors of social eating and time apart is conceptualized as an absence of this foundational reciprocity. As my fieldwork drew to a close, I was flooded with requests from my Mopan friends to eat together one last time before I left San Jose. When we ate our final meal together, they would reliably inquire, "So, you will miss the tortilla?" Others would say, "When you go back to the States, maybe you will forget about the caldo." During these occasions, there was also a pressing concern that I remember the Mopan "culture food," and by extension, the Mopan themselves. Asking whether I would miss these food items was a metaphorical inquiry as to whether I would miss the social relations, which were embedded within the food we shared together. At the same time, these questions expressed their underlying anxieties about the renewal of conviviality in the face of my impending departure. These concerns were not unique to my departure. Rather, they are common reoccurring themes in Mopan life to express the fragile nature of social bonds that are in danger of falling into disrepair when not constantly renewed through the shared act of eating together.

Mopan societal stability rests upon the continued maintenance of interpersonal relationships. The principles of sociality which underlie the sentiment of *ki uy ool* requires the bond between people to be reinforced in the giving, receiving, and ingesting of desirable food substances. While the Mopan peasant households of San Jose are often "cash poor" (Netting 1974; 1993), they are nearly always rich in food. San Jose lies in one of the most fertile areas of the region with rich soil, consistent rainfall and good drainage. The area is a breadbasket (corn bushel) for the urban centers in southern Belize and increasingly for international export. Out of this land, Mopan peasant households grow a wide variety of food crops including corn, beans, rice, fruits (such as cacao), root crops, and livestock. Out of this bounty, the Mopan create "culture foods" such as tortillas, caldo and cacao-drink. By investing these agricultural products with human effort, the Mopan fashion the "raw" of the environment into the "cooked" of culture.

The meal provides the social space in which men and women's labor are mutually valorized and bring into existence the conditions of fulfilling the social roles of a "good" husband or wife. <sup>36</sup> Men cultivate food from the farm and the forest while women produce food from the garden and process the raw materials harvested from nature into a form of culturally meaningful food to be consumed (see Wilk 1997 Page 184). Food embodies this mutual dependency between men and women in providing for a family, each cannot exist without the labor of the other. The complementary duality of feeding remains

salient through the life cycle and is one of the most salient reminders of the "social interdependency" between men and women as well as the interdependence of household beyond the nuclear family (Faust 1999 Page 94).<sup>37</sup> One old cacao farmer explained this truth to me by saying that if his wife ever died, he would probably starve to death even though his farm would be full of food because he couldn't cook (especially make tortillas) for himself.

For the Mopan, cooking and eating is not merely a vehicle to provide subsistence for nourishing the body, but also the means of enacting and legitimizing social relations.<sup>38</sup> Through the producing, preparing, and consuming of food, harmonious relations in the community are confirmed publicly and privately. The giving and receiving of culturally important foods sustains these relationships, strengthening them over years of habitual practice. One prominent cacao farmer explained the importance of habitual cacao consumption for the household by saying...

A family cannot be complete without the käkäh drink, even once a week. (Justino)

Everyday rituals of 'drinking and eating' embody "in microcosm the quintessential principles" of Mopan life, providing – as elsewhere in the Maya world -- both "models of and models for the building blocks of the social system" (Vogt 1976 Page 42). In contrast, a lack of food exchange and social relations can not only be socially dangerous, but also the cause of disease and illness.

Sometimes when visitor come, people don't want to give something to drink, because we don't wanna share. When we don't wanna share something to drink or to eat, so that's when the sickness comes. If some parents don't share, then maybe the baby will get sick. That's what they say, that's what they believe. (Felipe)

The ongoing renewal of Mopan conviviality depends on the circulation of desirable substances (such as cacao drink) to mediate the differences in human subjectivity. Through acts of giving and receiving (and ingesting), the Mopan literally internalize the social relations of production. In both formal and informal settings, the consumption of food encourages positive relations through conversation, laughter and social harmony. Daily meals are an occasion for the family to come together and share the collective fruits of the peasant household.

The role of food plays in Mopan sociality is part of a wider pattern found throughout the lowland Maya (Redfield 1941, 1955; Lewis 1960).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>37</sup> While children are "born and nursed by mothers' bodies," they only become full human beings/maturation "by the cultural work of men and women in growing, preparing, and serving food" (Faust 1999 Page 156).

With the almost daily exchange of food between households, the giving and receiving of food not only facilitates the continued maintenance of social relations but also the "important indicators of current allegiance and alliance" (see Fink 1987 p 401). For example, the processing of food and the preparation of the meal bring women together both within the immediate household as well as through extended social relations. Collective labor activities of planting and house building are always followed with a meal provided by the sponsor of the event. Similarly, fiestas and religious celebrations provide a venue in which large groups of people (both within the community and beyond) eat and drink together as a collective expression of group solidarity. Created through the preparing and eating of daily meals, kinship is magnified in special occasions of feasting, which bring together larger social networks.

# Part 2 - Social Rituals Involving Cacao

Part 2 of this chapter examines the use of cacao during important events in Mopan social life. The creation and maintenance of ritually-created kinship through marriage and compadrazgo ("coparent") relations is the focus of complex value metamorphoses in which food and drink are transformed into lasting interpersonal relationships (see Uzendoski 2004; Bohannan 1955; Levi-Strauss 1949 p 63-68; Damon 1980 p 270). <sup>39</sup>

These transformations take place on a variety of scales, from the household to the entire community and beyond. In my examination of this process, I first explore how the consumption of cacao beverages is central in the consecration of major life events such as engagement for marriage, the birth of a child, the creation of *compadrazgo* relations. I then describe instances in which cacao is used to bind extra-kin social groups together to undertake collective labor and for community feasting. In each of these instances, cacao plays an important role as a "sacred" and "cold" food, producing social harmony among the participants and marking the occasion as spiritually charged.

### Cacao & Marriage

Cacao's most prominent association with life cycle events among the Mopan are linked to rituals surrounding engagement and marriage. The ritual drinking of cacao during these occasions is organized within an indigenous cultural logic which values the conversion of food and materials into social relations. These kinship rituals not only create relationships of alliance between specific

<sup>39</sup> These transformations are not unique to Maya and rather are a manifestation of a widespread Amerindian "ethnotheory of value that is simultaneously intersubjective, gendered, reproductive, and cosmological" (Descola 1996; Lorrain 2000; Turner 1995; Uzendoski 2004).

people/groups/houses/lineages but also produce new social pathways to solidify kinship in the future such as "reciprocal exchanges of labor, the sharing of food and gifts," as well as the possibility of creating new compadrazgo relationships, and future marriages (Uzendoski 2004). Both of these kinship building rituals are punctuated by a stream of "lower level exchanges," like the giving of cacao drink, and are situated within "the larger context of a total system of circulation" (Uzendoski 2004; Damon 1980; 2002).

Among the Belizean Maya, marriage is "the most important ritual" in the creation of the nuclear household as the basis of economic organization and the foundation of tzik/respect relations between affines (Schackt 1986 Page 65). <sup>40</sup> Marriage allows for the creation of social relations with in-laws as well as the hope for children in the future.

In San Jose, marriage is typically initiated by a period of "engagement." This process begins when the parents of a teenage boy inquire about the eligibility of a girl through a series of visitations with her family. Most commonly, cacao beverages are part of a gift of symbolically important goods given to the parents of a woman when a man requests her hand in marriage. When I asked about the old marriage customs in San Jose, one old Mopan elder reminisced that about the old practice of giving cacao on the occasion of an engagement. He said...

When they go to make an engagement, they use the cacao drink. The second time to ask for the girl's hand in marriage, the boy's parents bring the luuch (calabash) with the cocoa drink to the girl's house when they go visit. (Felipe)

This pattern of giving cacao drinks and beans on the occasion of engagement is widespread throughout the Maya region since at least the colonial era (Bunzel 1952; Tozzer 1913:p 507; Wagley 1949:p 129). For example, the Yucatec Maya follow a similar custom in which a boy's parents give presents of cacao, bread and other small accessories to the parents of a potential spouse as an opening part of the marriage negotiations (Redfield and Villa 1934:p 193). Cacao is also part of the formal gift, known as *muhul*, that serves as the bride price given between the boy's parents and the girl's (Redfield and Villa 1934:p 193).

Once a marriage proposal is accepted among the Mopan Maya, the suitor pays for a large feast which includes "a hog, a gallon of rum, tortillas, and cocoa, and in addition gives the girl presents of

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>40</sup> Unlike socially sanctioned sexual relation in the institution of marriage, adultery and incest represent a "negative reciprocity of sexual exchanges," (Mentore 2005: p 100) outside of the end contrary to the "moral logic" of *tzik* (respect) (Danziger 2001).

clothing and hair-oil" (Thompson 1930:p 80). The cacao and other consumables provided by the suitor's family are used to serve the guests at the wedding feast (Danziger 2001; see Schackt 1986 Page 67).

### **Cacao and Birth**

In traditional Mopan society, cacao consumption was also linked to life cycle rituals surrounding the birth of a child. The consumption of chocolate drink, which was strongly associated with female potency (See chapter 5), and was thought to bring the breast milk needed to give the baby strength. A community member of San Jose remembered this practice by saying...

From way back, the Maya gave cacao drink to pregnant women. Mothers drank cacao with black pepper during pregnancy, and after delivery to help mothers produce milk. The black pepper is to give the body the heat. The chocolate is given to induce milk, so the mother that is giving breast milk to the young baby. (Justino)

Just as in San Jose, women from across the Maya region often consume cacao as part of a specialized diet following the birth of a child (Kufer 2005; McNeil 2006b; Nash 1970; Oakes 1951; Popenoe 1919; Reina 1966). Cacao is closely linked with the production of breast milk, probably because of the milky white flesh covering the seeds within the pod, as well as its association with women more generally. Cacao is used as a galactagogue (an inducer of milk production) and consuming cacao beverages is said to "bring down the milk of the mother" in order to ensure a large supply of breast milk for the child (McNeil 2006b; Popenoe 1919).

In addition to the ritual consumption of cacao drink by new mothers, cacao itself is also described as a "mother" to humans throughout their lives. As one cacao farmer told me...

They call plants like cacao and corn a "mother." This is because these plants feed us and provide us nourishment, just like a mother with a child at her breast. That is why it is like a mother to us. (Pablo)

The association of cacao as a mother comes from the way that the plant feeds the people and provides for their well-being, highlighting the importance of habitual feeding, rather than blood or genes, in the creation of Mopan kinship.

#### **Baptism and Compadrazgo**

Before the advent of Protestantism in Maya communities, the Catholic institution of compadrazgo (god-parenthood) was a central expression of ritual kinship in Mopan society which united

villagers together beyond the household.<sup>41</sup> Ritual kinships relations of *compadrazgo* "are acquired through the intermedium of the Catholic Church" and are imbued with a sacred quality beyond the merely social (Schackt 1986 p 110) Godparent relationship are considered one of "the most important (acts of) community service" a person undertakes in their life time and is the most prominent extrakinship tie throughout Latin America (Danziger 2001; McCluskyp 2001 41-42). Godparents build relationships based on a lifetime of respect and service to their fellow *compadres* (Danziger 2001 p 20; Madsen 1967; McClusky 2001 p 41-42).

One of the most prominent social occasions for the creation of new *compadrazgo* relations is to celebrate a child's baptism. Once the new baby is born, it must be brought into the social world of the Mopan community throughout the Catholic ritual of Baptism. Even more importantly than the relationship between child and godparent, is the *compadrazgo* (godparent) relationship created between the two couples (Schackt 1986 Page 65). Thereafter, formalized greeting of "Dios *Compadre* / Dios *Comadre*" are used between *compadres* are reciprocal and egalitarian, so as to ameliorate differences of hierarchy and asymmetrical authority (Danziger 2001; Schackt 1986 Page 65).

After the Catholic mass, a ritual meal follows at the home of the baby's parents. At the meal, cacao drinks are consumed and gifts are exchanged to cement the new relationship between the godparents (*compadres*). The exchanges are the beginnings of a lifelong series of interrelations that ultimately serve to create new bonds of sociality and relatedness, embodied through the sharing of sacred cacao drink. Through the sharing of hospitality, food, drinks and presents, these objects are "converted" from the mundane sphere to the higher domain of kinship between the initiate, their parents and "godparents."

Compadrazgo emphasizes the interdependence between families, creating ties of fictive kinship between couples which can crosscut kinship and locality. Parents will often use Compadrazgo as occasion to strengthen social ties within the village, or extend social networks on a regional level.

Among the Belizean Maya, the possibility of establishing extra-local relationships is one of the most desirable benefits of compadrazgo and it is common for households will choose their compadres to build strategic alliances in villages with access to geographically uneven resources such as roads, market, or forest resources (see Schackt 1986 p 65; Wilk 1997 p 169, 222) or social resources such as access to a

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> The study of Mesoamerican Kinship has been historically problematic for anthropologists. Anthropologists have traditionally dismissed Maya kinship relations as "derivative of Spanish bilateral patterns imposed during the conquest (in other words, it is not traditional enough for them)" (Wilk 1997 Page 223). Rather, they have been focused on extrakin relationship such as "civil-religious hierarchy and *compadrazgo*" as important institutions of social solidarity (Wilk 1997 Page 223).

residence in town for schooling purposes (see Danziger 2001). Over the course of a lifetime, couples accumulate a dense network of *compadrazgo* ties which can be called upon for aid. By the time a couple has reached old age, they may have 10 or more sets of ritual kin/*compadres* scattered throughout the region as well as in their own village, forming an importance base of social, economic and political allies.

## **Cacao and Collective Labor**

In addition to creating kinship through life cycle events, cacao also is a key material component in collective labor exchanges. These exchanges draw on social relations beyond the immediate household by drawing on either formalized membership (such as the mandatory participation of every male villager in the *fagina* (semi-annual village labor parties) or informally for smaller gatherings according to ties of kinship, *compadrazgo* and friendship. The exchange of labor is the most "common form of balanced reciprocity in Mopan society" and an important "part of the village political economy" (Gregory 1975; see Wilk 1997 p 201). Labor sharing groups are outside of the world of monetary transactions<sup>42</sup> and "are most common with subsistence, non-commodity production (especially corn)" (Wainwright 2008 p 255). The exchange of labor is commonly done for large tasks which demand more labor than the immediate household can provide (Danziger 2001 p 19) including planting and clearing of agricultural fields, building/rebuilding a thatch house or preparing food for a feast.<sup>43</sup>

Whenever a work group is called, it is obligatory for the host to provide a ritually proscribed "meal after the day's work has been completed" (Schackt 1986 Page 101). While the men work outside, the women hold their own work group to prepare the feast which includes chicken *caldo* (soup), generous supplies of tortillas and a drink such as cacao. One farmer in San Jose described the important role that cacao plays in these exchanges by saying...

They use cacao drink to show appreciation for the farmers when they help with the planting. (Thomas)

If the job requires a full day of work, the women will often bring out a lunchtime meal or snack to the men at the worksite. For the more common half-day labor exchanges, after a morning of work the group retires to the home of the host where all the participants are feasted in appreciation for their

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>42</sup> Rather than a vestige of some primordial egalitarian ethic, Maya collective labor sharing is a historical adaptation during the early colonial period to predatory capitalism (Faust 1999 Page 136; Wilk 1997 Page 202; see Landa 1941: 38-39). Labor sharing allowed pioneering Maya communities to establish new villages in British Honduras beyond the reach of Guatemalan colonial authorities (Wilk 1997 Page 202).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>43</sup> In recent years this pattern has extended to Protestant church raisings as well though this is a decidedly new application since each village only used to have one Catholic Church.

help. The consumption of cacao drink shows appreciation for the donations of labor and seals the future promise of labor exchange within a sacred meal.

Labor exchange embodies an inherent tension between hierarchy and egalitarianism in Mopan society. On one hand, labor exchange is built on egalitarian ethos of labor equivalence and "custom says that any person's work on a particular job is the same as any other's" (Wilk 1997 Page 201). In Mopan society, every person who comes to help in a work part must be repaid in equal number of days worked by the sponsor when requested (Danziger 2001 19; Gregory 1972). This equality makes it difficult for one party to exploit their workers (in contrast to capitalist wage labor) (Wilk 1997 201). This seeming equivalence masks more subtle inequalities of "age, gender, and length of residence" in the village, which help determine the ability of a person to mobilize support for their task (Wilk 1997 201). The consumption of cacao and other foods in meals following collective labor helped to ameliorate these differences and inequalities between members of society through the sharing of sacred substances.

Despite this prominent role in Mopan social life, in recent years the consumption of cacao following the completion of collective labor exchanges has fallen dramatically due in part to the influx of consumer goods and Protestant theology. The replacement of cacao with store bought alternatives is explored in more detail in chapter 8.

#### **Cacao and Fiestas**

In addition to its important role in sanctifying collective labor exchanges, the drinking of cacao is also a major part of religious fiestas as well. Religious brotherhoods (known as  $cargos^{44}$ ) helped stage the elaborate religious ceremonies/processions to honor the saint that included costumed dances, games, music and feasting (Cancian 1956; Fink 1987 p 401; Nash 1970; Vogt 1976). A cacao farmer connected the use of cacao during the fiesta for the San Jose to the tribute practices of the ancient Maya by saying....

In those days, cocoa drink was used as a special drink during different ceremonies and celebrations within the Mayan society, such as the fiesta for the patron saint, San Jose. It is just like how they used to make the dark chocolate drink and serve it to the chiefs in their classic period of the Mayan civilization. (Justino)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>44</sup> While men participated publically in *cargos*, the office/position was considered to be shared by the husband and his wife (an expression of symbolic dualism/ complementary opposition), so that a single man or woman could not progress very far in this system (Gregory 1972; see Vogt 1976). As a rule, each couple progressed through the village's civil-religious hierarchy throughout their life, alternating between responsibilities in each sphere as they moved up the ladder of respect (sacred and profane) (Schackt 1986 p 78).

In San Jose, cacao was ceremoniously drunk during fiestas for important religious holidays such as Christmas, Easter, San Jose Day, the fiesta for *San Juan Babtista* (John the Baptist). These celebrations draw people from across the region to participate in the events, creating regional social relations beyond the village. The serving of cacao drink at fiestas was common among across the Maya region, especially before the introduction of commercial alternatives (Bunzel 1952:p 217; McNeil 2006 p 357). Even as the *cargos* have declined in recent decades and most have now disappeared from San Jose due to Protestant conversion, the *fiesta* remains a prominent, all be it now secular, social institution. (see chapter 6)

One of the most central events of the fiesta is the multi-day performance of masked dances. Dance troops (of 15 of more dancers) perform elaborate choreographed displays which can occur over multiple days. Before the dances, offerings of cacao are presented to the saints and dancer's masks to create social relations with the spirits, which animate them. Many people in San Jose still remembered how the participants in the fiestas used to feed cacao drink to the masks...

Every year they would offer food and drink for the saints and the spirits of the masks. When they make the offering, everyone marches around the statue praying, while the leader makes the smoke of the copal incense. (Thomas)

These offerings are constructed as "feeding" the saints and this process parallels the patterns of feeding and eating which animate Mopan social relations. In parallel to the offering of cacao to saints and spirits of the masks, cacao drink is also shared by community members and visitors alike, bringing the participants together in celebration. During these performances, spectators are served beverages, preferably cacao drink, "which will have been prepared by the wives of the dancers" (Schackt 1986 Page 79). As one farmer reminisced...

If a village had a feast, they would drink the cacao. The most important thing for them was to share it with all the visitors, so everyone could drink together. That was the way of the old Maya culture. (Lucas)

The sharing of the cacao drink between dancers and the spectators incorporates audience as the ritual participants through the imbibing of shared holy substance and produces good intersubjective feelings which are the basis of social relationships. In Mopan ritual symbolism, the drinking of cacao in fiestas is positioned as a counterbalance to the consumption of alcohol. All traditional Maya fiestas are marked by the consumption of large amounts of alcohol (rum or *chicha / balche* – corn wine) in which holy intoxication can easily lead to mass drunkenness (Fink 1997 p 401). These alcoholic drinks are considered very "hot," heating up the blood and the heat of alcohol can lead to violence and excess. To

counterbalance this dangerous state, the excess heat of the alcohol is counterbalanced through the consumption of "cool" drinks such as cacao, which is thought to calm the body and create sedate good feelings. The proper balance of these forces is essential to the efficacy of the fiesta to create morally shared relations between people and the supernatural as well as other members of society.

### **Conclusion**

This chapter has explored the unique role of cacao for mediating interpersonal relations in Mopan society. Cacao is an important ingredient in the Maya culinary repertoire, primarily used in the making of the bitter *käkäh* drink. *Käkäh* drink is deeply embedded in Maya social life and signifies respect for the guest within the cultural grammar of the Maya meal. As a sacred "cool" food, cacao is thought to calm to body, in contrast to the heat of alcohol. This tranquility brought is a key mechanism in the creation of *ki uy ool* (social harmony) between those who share cacao drink.

The sharing of cacao drink is a powerful force for generating conviviality between families and community members, mediating difference and promoting social holism. Giving and receiving of hospitality is a daily enactment of prestige and hierarchy within the shifting allegiances of village life. Mopan food practices are structured around the expression of social hierarchy, while also ameliorating difference through the promotion of social holism. This grammar of food prescribes the degree of formality in the types of foods employed to honor the occasion and guest respectfully. The serving of different portions and classes of food denotes relative status, though these displays are always accompanied by communal dishes that create shared happiness in the social heart regardless of rank. The giving and receiving of cacao drink creates social holism (*ki uy ool*) that mediates differences in respect (*tzik*) between members of society. The maintenance of these relations depends on the continual renewal of interpersonal interactions through the sharing of sacred substances like cacao drink. To participate in these exchanges is to be part of social life. To shun the hospitality of another is tantamount to the willful rejection of friendship.

Within the social values of *Kustumbre*, small-scale exchanges of ritual substances like cacao drink can lay the foundation for "conversions" into kinship relations, including affines through marriage, co-parents through the religious institution of the Catholic Church, and through biological reproduction. Before the advent of store bought alternatives, cacao drink was used prominently in all of the major life events in Mopan life. The collective drinking of cacao is central in Maya symbolic cosmologies of biological and social reproduction. Mopan mothers were given chocolate drink to induce breast-feeding after the birth of a child, as an embodiment of the conversion of agricultural produce into new

human life. When this child is baptized, cacao drink was shared between the parents and "co-parents", cementing the important social bond of *compadrazgo* through shared substance. Similarly, cacao was one of the customary given by a suitor's parents to their future inlaws when their children are arranged to be married. Within a few years, the new couple will ideally have their own children, beginning the cycle of social and biological reproduction anew.

In addition to these life cycle rituals, cacao drink was similarly shared in social activities which extend networks of relations beyond biological or ritual kin. The sharing of labor for activities such as planting corn, clearing land and house building requires the mobilization of a large number of workers from beyond the immediate kin network. Through the "exchange of days," the obligation to repay the labor debt is sealed with the ritual meal that everyone partakes in after the completion of the task. The drinking of cacao and eating of Maya "culture foods," sanctifies the occasion by drawing the participants together. Gifts of cacao drink seal collective labor exchanges, binding participants together in the promise of future obligations. Through giving a meal, the host "pays" the helpers for their labor and also affirms their own moral obligation to repay the debt to their neighbors in the future.

Cacao drink also was an important component of community wide feasting on the occasion of religious fiestas. Fiestas and other feasts provided opportunities for the sharing of cacao with the whole community, drawing all participants together in the creation of convivial relations. During fiestas celebrating Christmas and Easter and the patron saint of the village; religious brotherhoods (or *cargos*) supplied large quantities of food and drink for all visitors. In Mopan food classification, cacao is one of the quintessential sacred "cool" substances, thought to cool the body and the temper, a necessary counterbalance to hot beverages such as rum or corn beer. The "coolness" of cacao beverage made it a necessary component in feasts because its ability to calm the tempers of those drunk on "hot" rum. In this way, cacao creates balance within the human body and harmony/non-violence between community members. The public sharing of chocolate drink on each of these occasions of kinship creation acts as both a public pronouncement of social solidarity as well as a literal embodiment of shared social harmony (*ki uy ool*).

The social drinking of cacao is not merely limited to the realm of humans, but extends to the divine as well. Just as cacao drink was shared between humans during fiestas, it was also used as a ritual offering to "feed" the saints, spirits and masks honored during the celebration. Similarly, the spirits of fields and farms, and the soul of the dead were once commonly held occurrences among the Mopan before the coming of Protestantism. In the following two chapters, I examine how cacao's role in creating interpersonal relations is extrapolated as the framework for ritual offerings. By conceiving of

ritual offerings as "feeding the spirits," the qualitative difference in respect between humans and the divine is mediated through the social holism brought by the sharing of sacred cacao drink.

#### Chapter 4 - The Relational Ecology of Mopan Kustumbre

#### Introduction

In this chapter, I investigate traditional Mopan understanding of cacao within a cosmology of nature as both spiritual and social. As sacred plant, feral cacao is thought to have a spirit owner (yum), known as the Cheil ("those of the forest") who must be respectfully petitioned with ritual sacrifices before harvesting their fruit. The relationship between the Mopan, the Cheil and cacao speaks more broadly to the intersection between humans, the supernatural and the landscape in the environmental cosmology of Kustumbre. I explore key elements from the narrative of the Cheil to speak to more broadly about the environmental relationality of Mopan Kustumbre. I begin by giving a historical overview of Maya environmental knowledge. Over hundreds of years of colonialism, indigenous conceptions of spiritual nature have become fused with the imposed Catholic trappings. Out of this conjunction, Mopan environmental Kustumbre posits a supernatural landscape that is alive with the yum. The yum combine Pre-Columbian deities within Catholic iconography. These syncretic deities act as local intermediates between humanity and a distant God (Dyos), making them the most proximal and commonly interacted with supernatural forces in Mopan cosmology. These syncretic spirits are capricious spirits who must be "fed" in order to ensure continued environmental benevolence. Furthermore, Mopan Kustumbre posits a spiritual landscape that is alive with social beings organized along familiar principles of respect, exchange and kinship. In this way, Mopan environmental ethics privilege relationality with the owner of nature, rather than the dominion over nature which is common in Euro-American thought.

# The Story of the Wild Cacao Farm

There is an old story about the wild cacao and its owners, the *Cheil*. The old people say that... *Le'ek a Käkäh a Kuxtab'i ich Nukche'* 

Hunp'eel k'ini b'inoo' ti ximb'al ich nuckche' a oxtuul ti winiki. Tanoo' ub'el ti naach ich nukche'. Taniloo' ub'ele uhentaantahoo' a hunpeet ti käkäh.

A käkäh ab'e'e täk'an uwich. Kahoo' uyuxu' uwich etel kahoo' uhante. Aleeb'e uyad'ahoo ti ub'ahil ti'i ka' uch'a'oo ichil uyotoch b'oon atäk'ana. Ulah uxahoo' b'oon a täk'an käkä utz'ahoo' ichil ub'a'ay. Usk'ahoo' eteloo' ukäkäh. Ma' lik b'inoo' ti käx b'a'alche'e.

Ma' naachakoo' ti kahoo' ti ch'inb'il. Hak'oo' uyool. Ma' ki' uyilikoo' k'u tan uch'inikoo'. Yanahoo' up'ätikoo' a käkäh te'i, b'aaloo' ti pätb'oo ch'inb'il. Te'i utuklahoo' ti yan uyumil a käkäh ichil nukche'e.

Ti ud'oo' ich naha utzolahoo' k'u a mani ti'ihoo'.

"The Wild Cacao Farm"

One day three hunters went into the jungle. They went far into the jungle. On their way, they came across a cacao farm.

The cacao trees had ripe fruit. So the three men began to pull and harvest the ripe cacao. They ate what they could and decided to take back home what they couldn't eat. They pulled all the ripe fruits, filled their bags and started to head for home.

Not far on their way back something or someone began to stone them. The men got scared as they couldn't see what or who it was. They had to empty their bags and leave behind all the cacao fruits they were carrying. After that they were left alone. Then they knew that the wild cacao farm had an owner.

When they got home, they told their families the story of what happened to them in the jungle. (Tumul K'in 2009)

#### The *Cheil* – Lords of the Wild Cacao

I heard the story of the "wild cacao farm" from numerous people during my stay in San Jose . When I first began inquiring about the feral cacao growing in the bush, one old farmer told me...

That wild cacao is for the people born in the jungle, the Cheil. They say that the Cheil are unbaptized. When the Spanish came, most of the people were baptized and came to live in the village. But some of them were the serious people and went into the jungle instead. That's why they were never baptized. (Marcelo)

And his story was not alone. Many who spent time in the high forest told stories about their encounters with the spirit masters of the wild cacao, the *Cheil* ("those of the forest"). Even those who had never spent much time in the jungle knew about the tales of the *Cheil*, even if they claim to have never seen them in person. The *Cheil* are one of the most common "ghost stories" heard in Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya villages throughout southern Belize and people tell of catching a fleeting glimpse moving under the canopy (Schackt 1981; Wilk and Cab 1987). Sitting beside cook fires or resting beneath the shade of cacao plantation, farmers would tell stories...

The wild cacao has a master before; in Maya they call them Cheil. If you go into the forest, beyond the high hills, then sometimes you can find the wild cacao. Those fields are owned by the Cheil. They are like people but different. If you go and touch the cacao without asking, they can chase you or worse. (Lucas)

For generations, hunters and other travelers in the forest who have come across groves of cacao (kuchil käkäh) have given respect to the Cheil in exchange for the right to harvest the feral fruit. The cacao trees that grow feral in the forests of southern Belize are descended from the groves of the ancient Maya. Among the Mopan, feral cacao groves are thought of as haunted (sab'entzil) by many in the older generation and are only entered after saying prayers and making ritual offerings of rum

(Steinberg 2002:p 60). When harvesting this cacao, proper respect (*tzik*) must be given the *Cheil* to avoid angering these powerful spirits. Because the trees were thought to have spiritual owners (*yum*), humans were merely visitors in those places with no rights of ownership. If humans wish to harvest wild cacao, they must do so with displays of deference and desirable offerings. Encounters with the *Cheil* are risky endeavors fraught with peril. Those who respectfully petition the *Cheil* with offerings such as rum can be rewarded with a bounty of ripe cacao. If, on the other hand, wild cacao is harvested improperly, the *Cheil* can chase or even kill the trespasser by draining the salt from their bodies. These morally charged exchanges created relationships of respect between the *Cheil* as *yum* of the wild cacao and those who harvested the fruit. Repeated interactions of respect forged bonds of sociality/conviviality between humans and spirit owners. Relational gifts and reciprocal punishment for not respecting relations structure Mopan notions of living in the natural world.

The Mopan have many theories about exactly who and what the *Cheil* are. Some of the Mopan say the *Cheil* are said to be an ancient people (*uchb'en winik*) that speak an archaic form of the Maya language that existed before the division between Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya. Others equate the *Cheil* with the original Manche Chol Maya who inhabited the land of southern Belize centuries before the British conquest (Thompson 1930; Wilk 1987; Verbeeck 1998). Still others describe the *Cheil* as the ghosts of their ancient Maya ancestors who haunt the old growth forests and still practice the old rituals. They are said to still practice the old ways, make the proper sacrifices and have access to the magic of spiritually vibrant and dangerous cosmology of the pre-Christian pagan religion. Because of their strong faith and commitment to the old ways, the *Cheil* are said to have great magical powers, which they can use to do *obia / pulyah* (black magic) to curse people who offend, disturb or disrespect them. Still others call them the "unbaptized Maya" (non-Christian) who never bowed to the forceful conversion of Catholic missionaries and instead escaped into the deep jungle.

The *Cheil* not only inhabit the forest of Mopan stories but also leave physical evidence of their presence on the landscape. The Mopan say that it is the *Cheil* who built the ruins that covers the landscape, appearing as small hills rising out of farms and jungles. They are also said to be the origin of the wide variety of artifacts such as broken pottery, figurines, stone points and (more rarely) jade which litter the floors of caves or are found when agricultural land is turned over in planting. In contrast to the scientific view of western archaeologists who see the pyramids and the broken pieces of ancient

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>45</sup> This belief about the spiritual exchange of cacao for salt may be a cultural reference to the ancient trade between the people of the hills who cultivated cacao with those of the coast who produced salt (see Schackt 1981, Wilk and Cab 1987).

ceramics that litter southern Belize as the evidence of ancient civilizations vanished from the landscape, the Mopan believe that debris prove that the unbaptized still live on, somewhere out on the margins.

Once when I was interviewing a farmer about his cacao farm and our conversation turned to wild cacao and the *Cheil*, I asked him if he had *ever* seen a *Cheil*. He laughed and said that he saw one all the time, would I want to see it as well? Of course I was excited to see the *Cheil*, and as the farmer went into the house, I waited under the rain soaked thatch with anticipation. When he came out again, he was carrying a large fragment of ancient Mayan pottery, which despite its age, was nearly half of the pot in relatively good condition. He explained how he had found the pottery a few years ago right in front of his house when the government had re-graded the dirt road. When he looked closer at the pottery fragment, he recognized the clay figure as *Cheil* and had kept the pottery all these years, as part of his personal collection of artifacts. As he turned the pottery over and placed it in my hands, I clearly saw an anthropomorphic creature with a body like a human with animal-like face and paws (hands/feet). (See picture below). It was an amazing piece of pottery. As I studied the artifact, he told me how the figure not only depicted a *Cheil*, but also was in fact a self-representation made by the *Cheil* themselves. He explained that while the Mopan people no longer made pottery like this (instead buying cheap cobaneros plastic containers), that the *Cheil* still made the old earthen pottery and even marked their handiwork with images of themselves.



Ancient Maya pottery said to depict the Cheil

On another occasion, I was spending the afternoon visiting with another Mopan family after a morning of working with them in their cacao. Earlier that day, I had asked them questions about the *Cheil* and they had obliged me with tales of the owners of wild cacao. Later, we swung in hammocks that afternoon and the family gathered around the TV to watch a bootleg DVD of Mel Gibson's Yucatec Maya language movie "Apocalypto." Some of the people present had never seen the movie before and were excited to have a movie that they could understand in their home language. As the screen filled with images of the hero's band of pre-colonial Maya living and hunting under the forest canopy, speaking in a Maya language unchanged by Spanish or English influences, one of men present turned to me and said, "See, these are the *Cheil*. The old time Maya people of the forest"



Apocalypto (2006)

The Mopan not only know a good deal about whom the *Cheil* are, but also how they live. A cacao farmer in Crique Jute told me about how the strange ways of the *Cheil*.

"The Cheil don't like to see people and stay hidden. It is hard to find the Cheil, but sometimes you can see the signs.

When you go far in the bush, you can hear the Cheil drumming in the caves at night. And sometimes you might see the bones of a freshly killed animal, but nobody is living there. This is because the Cheil don't like to cook their meat, they just eat it raw. They don't make plantation but sometimes you could find their cacao in the bush.

Even if you see the Cheil, you cannot go and stay with them. This is because they live inside the caves where it is too cold for you to follow them. "

In many regards, the *Cheil* function as grotesque reversals of Mopan perceptions of themselves, a construction of spiritual beings who share the same respect for the ways of Kustumbre, who are yet somehow not Mopan. Unlike the Mopan, the *Cheil* do not live in villages. Instead, the *Cheil* are said to live in the limestone caves and sinkholes (*cenotes*) that dot the karsts limestone geography of southern Belize. Even from far away, people say that if you spend the night in the jungle, you might see their fires dimly illuminating the mouths of caves.<sup>46</sup> Living in these deep caves, the *Cheil* can be heard playing

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>46</sup> Traditional Maya cosmology understood these caves as the gateways to the underworlds and the places where even today some Mopan still make sacrifices to the old gods.

drums, the sounds of which roll through the jungles at night.<sup>47</sup> The *Cheil* don't plant corn or conduct other agricultural activities like most Mopan peasants. Nor do they cook their food. Instead the *Cheil* eat raw game meat and plants which they harvest from the forest.

The Mopan regard the *Cheil* as social beings because they enact a distinctly "Maya" social life. Despite being supernatural beings with extraordinary power, the *Cheil* still work/live socially like Mopan. The *Cheil* understand and participate in the collective labor, and the requisite meal afterwards (which while not balancing social accounts, create sociality for future social transactions). The sharing of work (breaking cacao) and food, allows these low level conveyances to be used towards a higher sphere of exchange, namely the creation of kinship through marriage between humans and spirits. In the following story, the *Cheil* are socially close enough to be considered marriage partners (like compadres in a very distant village) but in the end, too alien.

#### The Story of the Wild Indians

"The wild Indians live far in the bush. Sometimes, as if they were travelers. If you give them a place to sleep and a little food, they will stay another day and help you do your work. But they work fast, so fast you can hardly see them. Their hairs, heads, and arms blur together in a whirl of motion. Then the work is done. When they eat, they keep their heads down and they use their hands. Again, their hands, head, and hair blur together. The food is gone within seconds.

When it is time for the wild Indians to leave, your son might tell you he wants to marry their daughter. She works hard and she is beautiful. And it is true; you can see that the girl can work. You decide it is good to ask them if your son can marry her. When you ask, they think, they talk, and eventually they say yes. They agree to the marriage. However, they insist that the boy, your son, must come with them, to live in the bush. They won't allow their daughter to stay with your family. Your son is too frightened to leave his family and go with these strangers. He reneges on his proposal. After the wild Indians leave, you see their footprints in the mud. But not far from your house the footprints change to the pawmarks of jaguars." (McClusky 2001 Page 140-141)

Despite the commonality between the Mopan and the *Cheil* which allows for the creation of social relations, they remain separated by their otherness. In order for the son to marry the daughter of the wild Indians, he would have to leave his natal people to go with the spirits (interspiritual exogamy). Finally at the end of the story, after the possibility of kinship through marriage has been rejected, the *Cheil* leave the human village for the forest, changing back into jaguars. This transformation is an

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>47</sup> On interesting thing about the Cheil is the wide insistence on drumming as a significant symbol of the Cheil in contrast to the Mopan whose traditional instruments are marimba, harp, and various other stringed instruments. Drums are exclusively the context of the Caribs and the Garifuna.

example of the perspectival<sup>48</sup> quality of Mopan environmental relations, as the outer form of the *Cheil* is merely clothing that can be changed while the inner essence remains the same.

Contrasts between Mopan and Cheil

Humans (Mopan)	Cheil
Village (nucleated)	Caves in the Forest (dispersed)
Cooked Food	Raw Food
Primarily Milpa (shifting)	Cacao as permanent arboriculture (No Milpa)
Marimba, Harp	Drums
Human Body	Shape Shifter, Magical
Marriageable	Social Difference is Too Great for Marriage
Syncretism of Maya Catholicism	Unbaptized (Pre-Columbian Animism)

The *Cheil* exist in a liminal space as the social other, at once ancient yet still lurking on the margins of Mopan daily life. The *Cheil* let the Mopan play on their fears and their imagination to create this strange reflection of themselves as Maya. Yet despite their strange otherness, the Mopan and Q'eqchi' recognize the *Cheil* as having a shared indigenous humanity, (unlike indigenous perceptions of other races in Belize which aren't quite as human as true Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya). The *Cheil*'s humanity is rooted in their appreciation and adherence to *tzik*/respect and their recognition of a social cosmology, which mediates difference through the giving of respectful offerings.

# The Environmental Cosmology of Kustumbre

Mopan understandings of the *Cheil* and their role as owners of the wild cacao are grounded in an indigenous environmental cosmology which stretches back centuries to the pre-Columbian era. Mopan understandings of the spiritual landscape have survived through more than five centuries of conquest and conversion attempts. Even with the decimation that followed colonization, indigenous cosmologies of the environment remained integral to Mopan habitus. For the Mopan like other lowland Yucatean Maya populations, the sacred landscape "is a comprehensive model of the locally observable universe" and has deep roots in the pre-Columbian era (Faust 1999 Page 153). By examining diverse sources including archaeological artifacts, hieroglyphic inscriptions, detailed art and iconography, a few

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>48</sup> Within a perspectival cosmology, other beings not only see themselves as persons, but often this humanity can be a literal transformations, in which the outer form is merely an outer covering which "conceals an internal human form," which is usually "only visible to the eyes of the particular species", though this true form can also be manifested through ritual/shamanic revelation (Viveiros de Castro 1998: p 470).

surviving codex books and early ethnographic and colonial documents, a vivid picture of Maya understandings of nature can be reconstructed that spans thousands of years.

The ancient Maya had a complex religious tradition in which gods, spirits, heroes and monsters controlled manifestations of the cosmos. Maya cosmology is constructed on a unified vision of reality in which spacial orientation, time, astronomy, deities and color are organized in what Leon-Portilla has termed 'chronovision' (Leon-Portilla 1973:112; Schackt 1986 Page 56). This understanding of the universe is based on sacred directionality within a divinely organized four-cornered world that is bisected daily by the path of the sun (Vogt 1976 Page 34). Cycles of time were also mapped onto divine topography so that in this indigenous model of time and space, "death (sunset, autumn equinox, west) is followed by decay and degeneration (darkness, underworld, sun's nadir, midnight), eventual rebirth (sunrise, spring equinox, east), and a new period of growth and maturity (upper world, sun's zenith, noon)" (Faust 1999 Page 100). Across Mesoamerica, the circular motion of the sun is tied to larger cycles of time and this symbolic association is often enacted in ritual as circular motions so that the landscape was divinely ordered and recapitulated in ritual practice (see Faust 1999 Page 122, 153; Hunt 1977: 72; Gossen 1984: 35-53; Sosa 1985: 260; Hanks 1990: 388)."

Within this divine landscape, Maya people have conducted ritual sacrifices to spirits of nature for thousands of years. In the pre-Columbian era, ancient Maya of every social status participated in rituals of sacrifice in which the Gods were "fed" sacred substances as a means to create social relations with the divine. Visceral sensations of taste and smell were used to woo capricious deities to positively influence uncertain human endeavors. At the top of the social hierarchy, Maya royalty preformed ceremonial offerings of sacred foods such as cacao, copal incense and bloodletting of self and others to appease the forces of the cosmos (Schele and Miller 1986; Schele and Friedel 1990). These offerings to the gods were accompanied by large-scale public feastings, which mirrored this relationship of feeding the divine in the wider society. Ritual sacrifice was not just reserved only for the upper class.

Commoners also made sacrifices to consecrate new houses, to bury the dead and to commemorate life events. Regardless of the status of the participants, these rituals all sought to influence the divine through prestations of holy substances, such as blood and cacao (Coe 2006; McNeil 2006; Schele and Miller 1986). Sacrifice was important because Maya religion depended on the performance of rituals (orthopraxy) more than the adherence to specific religious doctrine (orthodoxy), despite being a literate society with a highly developed hieroglyphic script.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>49</sup> While the modern Mopan continue to organize their environmental rituals in terms of circles and cycles, knowledge of these cardinal directions and their names has been lost among the Belizean Mopan (Danziger 1996)

Following the conquest of the Maya by the Spaniards beginning in 16<sup>th</sup> century, indigenous Maya religion was violently suppressed by the Catholic authorities (Hanks 2010). Holy books were burned with only a handful of surviving "codices." <sup>50</sup> Temples were destroyed and rebuilt as cathedrals. Maya priests were tortured and killed and much of their knowledge of the sacred calendar was lost. With the religious hierarchy decapitated, Maya peasants were forcibly converted to Catholicism by Spanish priests. While the Spanish conquistadors violently suppressed indigenous orthodoxy, many vestiges of these pre-Columbian beliefs have survived in the *Kustumbre* (Maya folk religion) preformed by lay gerontocracy and shamans (see Thompson 1930 p 65). As the 'high priests' of Maya folk religion, the elders act as "ritual intercessors" to nature spirits (*yum* and other divine forces) for the livelihoods of the community (Schackt 1986 Page 86-87). The Catholic calendar of Saints Days and Fiestas was overlaid on the indigenous calendars to become an important model of agricultural time (Faust 1999; Schackt 1986 Page 74)

Over hundreds of years of colonial domination, this hybrid cosmology had stabilized into the form appearing in classic ethnographic descriptions of indigenous spirituality that constitute the "Old Ways" of Mopan *Kustumbre* that was often referenced by my informants (see Redfield 1934; Vogt 1976; Tedlock 1982, Tax 1949; Bunzel 1952). As a local form of Folk Catholicism, the religious life of *Kustumbre* emphasizes social relations with "divinities associated with locality" (see Carrasco 1961; Cancian 1967; Schackt 1986). In San Jose, like many indigenous communities throughout Mesoamerica, the patron saint of the village is given a place of honor in the village religious pantheon that is not always important regionally. (see Schackt 1986 Page 113; Faust 1999 Page 153). But even the community invokes a Catholic Saint as its namesake, Mopan landscapes were understood through indigenous environmental paradigms.

As an indigenous expression of Catholicism, *Kustumbre* synthesized a vocabulary of Christian symbols on top of a pre-Columbian religious grammar. Mopan Catholicism maintained an existing indigenous worldview within the forced conversion of colonization to create "a definite fusion of the two religions, paganism and Christianity, has taken place resulting in a form of polytheism." (Thompson 1930 p 57). This hybridity can be clearly seen in an examination of Mopan ritual terms listed in the chart below which employ a mixture of indigenous and imported religious vocabularies.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>50</sup> Only three of these accordion folded manuscripts survive to the present day – the Paris, Madrid and Dresden Codices – named after the cities that they were rediscovered in colonial libraries. (Coe 2006; Thompson 1930)

		C
English meaning	Mopan term püsük'al	Spanish origin
soul soul of the dead	pixan	
angel	anhel	X
devil	kisin	and the same
Lord, Owner	Yum, u Yumil	
Virgin Mary	Ix Kodebil, Na'	
Jesus Christ	Jesus, Kristo, Seño	r X
	Yum	
God	Dyos	X
	Tat, Noochil	
saint	saanto	X

(Verbeeck 1998)

### The Syncretic Pantheon

In the reinterpretation of the supernatural, ritual objects from the natural world were repositioned in the Maya-Catholicism based on their symbolic associations within the pre-Columbian religion. For example, because of cacao's associations with rebirth in Pre-Columbian Maya rituals, offerings of cacao became a central component of Catholic Easter, especially among the Guatemalan Maya (Bunzel 1952; Thompson 1956; Pretchel 1999). In a similar manner, the sacred ceiba tree (*yaax che*) which was seen by the pre-Columbian Maya as the *axis mundi* uniting heaven and earth became the green cross that linked heaven and earth through Jesus' death. Likewise, the use of copal (*pom*) as sacred incense in the old Maya ritual use continued post-conversion as a prominent ritual component of Catholic mass and personal offerings (Schele and Friedel 1990; Thompson 1930; Wisdom 1940).

Similarly, the indigenous pantheon was re-identified with Catholic saints who became the object of ritual offerings similar to those made to the ancient gods (Faust 1999). While the names of the deities now came from Catholicism, they retained strong symbolic associations with indigenous cosmology. Additionally, the gender symbolism in Maya origin myths "complements the Catholic Christian concepts of the Holy Family" (Schackt 1986 Page 59). *Kustumbre's* incorporation of indigenous religious symbols into a synergistic ritual praxis allowed for new deities to be incorporated into older ritual practices while also creating a venue for subaltern resistance to colonial hegemony.

In Belizean Maya polytheism, the familiar Catholic pantheon of God, Mary and the devil are expressed as the sun, moon and stars in the heaven (Schackt 1986 Page 62). In this hybrid religion, "Dyos" combines Catholic understandings of as God the Father with pre-Columbian indigenous beliefs of distant supreme deities such as the sun (K'in). Dyos (god) lies at the apex of the Mopan Maya-Catholic pantheon "in terms of power and ultimate authority" (Gregory 1972; Thompson 1930 p 57). Both Dyos / the sun are as seen as benevolent, extremely powerful, though dangerous 1930, and removed from the day-to-day concerns of humans (Verbeeck 1998 p 48; Thompson 1930 p 64-5; see Tozzer 1907 p. 98). Both the Dyos and K'in are gendered male and associated with social order (Earle 1986; Faust 1999 Page 100; Gossen 1984, 1986). The sun and Dyos are born anew each day as "the old sun dies and travels through the underworld to be reborn as the infant sun" (Faust 1999 Page 156). As the tangible manifestation of Dyos, the daily position of the sun is a key marker of ritual time, "with noon and midnight, sunrise and sunset, as critical points" (Faust 1999 Page 156).

While *Dyos*/God is occasionally the object of prayers, most often the Mopan seek supernatural intersession from more personal supernatural manifestations such as "Christ, Mary, and the various saints" which are reinterpreted within local supernatural imagery (Gregory 1972). For example, in colonial era iconography and ritual practice, the death and rebirth of the "Young Corn God" becomes juxtaposed with Catholic Easter (McNeil 2006). Just as *Dyos* is associated with the sun, the Moon is merged with the Virgin Mary who is known locally as *Nohoch Na* (Great Mother). <sup>53</sup> Like the Virgin, the moon (*uh*) is personified as female and the object of women's prayers (Thompson 1930 p 64). <sup>54</sup> This association of the moon as a female deity is strengthened by the connection between the lunar calendar, female menstrual cycle and natural cycles of weather and fertility (Faust 1999 Page 156).

While Mopan environmental *Kustumbre* was created out of a hybrid of indigenous animism and colonial Christianity, I argue that there is an inherent tension in Mopan environmental *Kustumbre* between these two systems which is represented by the *Cheil*. While Mopan *Kustumbre* presents a hybridization of Catholicism and animism, this mixture has not been without loss. Mopan claim that while modern people have lost much of the ancient Maya's spiritual power, the *Cheil* are thought to still

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> The sun is life giving but also can destroy crops. In a tropical environment like southern Belize, there is seldom cause to pray for more sunshine. The sun is feared and dreaded because it is thought that if people were to pray for more sun, the crops would be burnt up by his fierce rays. (Thompson 1930 p 64)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>52</sup> This concept of a distant god has parallels with "*Hunabku*," the remote creator god among the pre-Columbian Maya (Thompson 1930 p 57).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>53</sup> Thompson claims that the worship of the moon among the Mopan is a relatively recent introduction (late 19<sup>th</sup> century) from neighboring Q'eqchi' Maya who revere the female moon as "po" (Thompson 1930 p 64).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>54</sup> Like other Mesoamericans such as the Aztecs, the Mopan believe that there is a rabbit or a woman seated in the moon (Thompson 1930 p 64).

remember the ancient magics because they keep faith with the old gods alone. With these powers, the Cheil are thought to have spiritual power to change their bodies into jaguars or to kill those who disrespect them with their magic. In many ways, the Cheil are a Mopan self narrative of a Maya identity unconstrained by colonialism and Christianity.

### **Sacred Landscape**

Mopan environmental cosmology unites the visible world of nature with the invisible supernatural (Fink 1987; Gregory 1972). Mopan environmental cosmologies are "animistic" in which the universe is alive with a host of agentive beings, each with their own agendas. Mopan *Kustumbre* posits an animistic universe in which the "invisible aspect of the world is enmeshed/saturated with the visible world of humans, animals and plants (Fink 1987). In such a cosmology, "the unseen is the very essence of the causal chain") and humans must be respectful of these spirits in order to gain their favor and influence successful environmental outcomes (Fink 1987; see P. Riviére 1987:473).

As with other Yucatecan Maya groups, Mopan ritual symbolism is grounded in the geography and weather of the area, with its rolling hills, limestone caves and alternating wet/dry season (Faust 1999 p 153). At the same time, rituals and folklore preserve and encode models of environmental behavior attuned to local variations of "seasons, temperatures, rainfall patterns, soils, subsoils, and topography" (Faust 1999 Page 153). The environmental knowledge of *Kustumbre* is broad and engaged with a variety of traditional practices including agriculture, hunting, fishing and curing linked through underlying values about humans relationships to the sacred/natural world (see Faust 1988: p 334-384.)

Rather than merely undifferentiated resources or objective geographies, the Mopan landscape is a varied topography of moral concerns. These landscapes are "symbolic environments created by human acts of conferring meaning to nature and the environment... through a special filter of beliefs and values" that help to define the scope of "proper and improper relationships " between humans and a supernatural landscape (see Greider and Garkovich 1994; p 2). Within this complex web of interconnection, a person's life force can be effected by the unseen essence of another animate/agentive force, whether it is "stone, hill, tree, plant, stars, sun, moon, rain, river, animal or human" (Fink 1987 p 411). Each of these essences in the landscape is animated by a *piixan* or lifeforce which animates the different corporeal form with the same essence. Through their conscious actions

Like other many other Amerindian people, Mopan environmental-spiritual cosmology is premised on a broad definition of agentive and relational beings which includes not only humans (*Homo sapiens*) but also animals, "gods, spirits, the dead, inhabitants of other cosmic levels, meteorological phenomena, plants, and occasionally even objects each of whom see themselves as persons" (see Viveiros de Castro 1998 p 470).

upon the landscape, the Mopan create a sense of "place" that leaves a distinct cultural imprint on the social activities that occur there.

Mopan environmental cosmologies construct the landscape as filled with centers of power qualitatively different from each other, rather than the quantification prevalent in modern capitalist environmental ethics. Features of the landscape were thought to radiate a power which could be both dangerous and spiritually powerful. For example, caves and cenotes as places of power and sacrifice which the Mopan have traveled to for centuries to make sacrifices and offerings to the gods, but must be respected to avoid the wrath of the nature spirits (see chapter 5). In the forests surrounding San Jose, unique landscape features, like the boulders deep in the forest known as *kan tunich* (snake rock), were thought to be places of power which should not be debased with sexual liaisons. Others places are believed to be cursed or haunted by dangerous spirits. Mopan Elders tell how the feral cacao groves (*kuchil käkäh*) are sacred and the haunted spaces (*sab'entzil*) are haunted by the *Cheil*. Each of these unique places in the landscape were alive with spiritual power and people entering them are subject to whims of the place's "spirit owner" (*yum*).

### The Yum - Masters of the Landscape

In Mopan environmental cosmology, "everything in the natural world has an unseen, but nevertheless very real" soul (*piixan*) which is intimately tied to everything else in a sacred landscape (Fink 1987 p 411). Collectively the forces of nature are personified as spirit masters known as the *yum* (Verbeeck 1998 Page 48). These supernatural beings are believed to be the masters ("owners" of both the land and the animals who "directly control the natural resources upon which the Mopan depend for their livelihood" (Gregory 1972; Schackt 1986Page 60).

The *Cheil* from the opening vignette are examples of this pattern of environmental relationality. Unlike "universal" religions which presume a universal religious experience among all believers everywhere, in the "old ways" of *Kustumbre* allowed people to make intimate connections with "collective representations" of their local landscape (Schackt 1986 page 2). The Mopan believed that the spirit world is filled with a hierarchy of supernatural beings ("great chain of being") intimately connected with the local landscape that can be petitioned for assistance. In the pantheon of environmental spirits, the power of the deity is often inversely correlated with the proximity/potential relationality. Because *Dyos/k'in* and the other celestial deities are regarded as socially distant, the Mopan believe there is a whole host of spirits masters inhabiting the natural world to mediate between

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>56</sup> Spanish - dueño

supreme divinity and humanity. In this cosmology, nature is the domain of a range of guardian spirits who "own" a specific feature on the landscape, such as a particular river, a family's house lot or farm, or a type of wild animal. For example, the *Cheil* are thought of as the literal owners of the cacao, tending them in the same way that Mopan farmers care for their farms. These masters of nature embody and animate a specific domain of nature and allow humans to enter into intersubjective relations with nature," even where empirical animals are not spiritualized" (see Viveiros de Castro 1998 p 471).

The spirits in Mopan environmental cosmology enact proper social roles by observing relationships of hierarchy, deference and respect. As the owners/masters of a particular realm of nature, the *yum* must be given the respect (*tzik*) due to them (Anderson 1996). The respect/*tzik* given to the *yum* is an extension of Mopan paramount value of respect (see Danziger 2001). The same principle of respect which organizes Mopan social relationships between hierarchically unequal humans is extended to include spiritual nature of the *yum*. For example, the *Cheil* were thought to be worthy of respect as the rightful owners of the wild cacao. Respectful harvesting of feral cacao sought to mediate the difference between Mopan and *Cheil* by providing gifts of salt for cacao. If the *Cheil* feel slighted by disrespected harvesting, they are thought to be able to leech the salt from a victim's body and leave them for dead.

The *Cheil's* ambivalence towards humans is a common theme in Mopan stories about the *yum*. The *yum* are believed to be powerful and often capricious beings with their own agendas. Nature spirits "cannot be counted on to respond in a consistently benevolent manner to human appeals" (Gregory 1972 p 171). While the *yum* can grant bountiful yields and supernatural protection if they are given the proper respect, they can withhold their blessing, or even cause direct harm to those who have disrespected them (Anderson, Newton, Tzuc and Chale 2005; Faust 1998; Faust et al. 2004, Thompson 1930). There is a strong belief in Yucatecan Maya environmental cosmology that lack of proper respect for the farm, rain, and corn can lead to environmental disaster, famine or crop loss which could threaten human life (Faust 1999 Page 113). Therefore, nature spirits must be appealed to both give and not to destroy human society with environmental calamities (Schackt 1986 Page 60, 86-87).

Like the world of Mopan humans, the spirits of nature are hierarchically ranked in terms of their potential power. The greater the deities' domain, the more distant they resided in the world of social relations. In contrast, local spirits of the water and woods and farms, while not as powerful, were more

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Animistic eco-cosmologies are characterized "by at least three dominant types of relation" between humans and nonhuman/spiritual nature: "predation, reciprocity and protection" (Descola 1996:94). Although all three of these types are present in Mopan worldviews, relationships of reciprocity with agricultural spirit owners are prominent, while relations of predation are backgrounded / minimized.

concerned with the people and land of that particular locality, making it easier to enter into ritual relations with these spirits.

In the environmental cosmology of Mopan *Kustumbre*, the farms and forests that surround Mopan villages are thought to be alive with a menagerie of *yum* who both personify elements of the natural world and act as masters/guardians over natural resources. The most powerful *yum* in Mopan cosmology are the *Mam*, known as the "Grandfathers of the Land" or the "Hill Gods" who are considered "gods of the mountains, the plains, the underworld, thunder and lightning" (Verbeeck 1998 p 48)." The *Mam* are thought of as "God's manifestations in nature, and so are worshiped in the hills" where they are thought to reside (Schackt 1986 Page 62). Similarly, the *Chaakoob* (which appear in chapter 6) are believed to be the lords of lightning, thunder, rain, wind and the patrons of milpa agriculture. Because "bad breezes" (*k'ak'as ik*: literally - very bad wind) are thought to be the cause of fevers in Mopan disease cosmologies, the *Chaakoob* at one time were probably considered the "Lords of Fevers" as well (Thompson 1930 p 62). As bringers of both life giving rain as well as sickness, the *Chaakoob* exemplify the duality and uncertainty in Mopan environmental relations.

Below these paramount spirits, the Mopan was inhabited by a menagerie of lesser *yum* each presiding over a specific domain of nature. In addition to the *Cheil* who are seen as the lords of the wild cacao, other powerful owners of nature include "winds" (*ik'*), the *Chaak* rain Gods/Thunderers, Gods of the flat lands (*Santo Witz*) and hills (*Santo Hook*), "Lord of the Forests" (*yumil k'aax*), "Lords of the Animals" for each important species (*yumil ba'alch'oob*) (see Thompson 1930). The "Lords of the Milpa (plantation)" are known as *Kuh*, are also seen as a manifestation or agent of the more powerful and distant *Mam* (Thompson 1930 p 65). Mopan farmers would make offerings to these spirits to ensure a good harvest and to pray for protection against snake bites and other occupational hazards (Thompson 1930 p 65). Hunters also invoke *Kuh* when praying before hunting in the corn fields.

In addition to active deities, Mopan environmental pantheon also includes lesser nature spirits that operate under the authority of more powerful deities. Passive spirits of the corn (*ixi'im*) and the forest (*che*) animate vegetation operate under the supervision of more powerful gods such as the *Mams* and the Morning Star (Thompson 1930 p 65). Similarly, water (*ha*) is also thought of as the personification of rain, ground water and the lord of crocodiles, under the dominion of the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>58</sup> The kinship term *Mam* conveys both a sense of great respect and history, creator gods who have existed since before the world (Thompson 1930 p 62). But despite the literal translation of a gendered "grandfather," the Mams are thought of as having a dual nature, encompassing both the male/female as well as the creative and destructive potential of nature (Thompson 1930 p 61).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>59</sup> The *Chaakoob'* are said to be of great size and their lightning bolts are thought of as stone axes so that "when lightning strikes a tree, the *Chaakoob'* are said to have cut it with their stone axes " (Thompson 1930 p 62).

Chaakoob'/Mam and elders remember how fishermen used to pray to ha for success in their endeavors. Ranked beneath the personified nature spirits, the Mopan nature pantheon also includes a wide variety of "disembodied spirits who roam the forests on the outskirts of the villages" (Thompson 1930 p 65). This supernatural menagerie includes the feared half woman-half snake who lures unwary men in the forest to their deaths (Xtabai), the shaggy, bigfoot-like Sisimito (Mahanamatz/Mahanamao) with backwards feet, the bad spirits of dead witches/sorcerers (chel) that blow around as strong winds. (Thompson 1930 p 65-67).

## **Social Spirits of Nature**

Populated by this collection of agentive *yum,* I argue that Mopan conceptions of the landscape are not simply 'material,' but rather what we might call 'socio-spiritual.' In this environmental cosmology, notions of society are recapitulated in wider cosmos, so that the spirits and natural world have a familiar social structure. As social entities, the spirits of the Mopan landscape are thought to be endowed with human characteristics such as gender, kinship ties, and a hierarchy among the spirits. Spirits live together in their own villages organized in a similar manner to the Mopan. In Mopan folklore, "male" spirits work together in the Milpa while "female" spirits make tortillas and process cacao. Throughout the Maya region, there is a belief that the masters of nature cultivate their aspect of nature in the same way humans tend their farms (see Vogt 1976 Page 86). The daily transits across the sky by the sun, moon and morning star are thought of as their "*Cargo*" (religious work, service or burden) to serve as the heavenly bodies for the good of humanity (Schackt 1986 Page 58; Thompson 1930 p131-2). The Gods perform Cargos in the heavens in the same way that humans undertake cargos here on earth for the good of the community (see Vogt 1976 Page 27-28). In this way, the social order recapitulates the underlying principles of cosmic order in everyday social practices.

Similarly, In Mopan environmental cosmology nature is thought to be organized along principles of kinship. In Mopan cosmology, the Sun and Moon are imagined as husband and wife (Thompson 1930 p 131-2). The gendered dualism between the Sun and Moon "reflects the important but often problematic relationship between spouses" (Schackt 1986 Page 59). This gendered supernatural is expressed in the everyday religion of humans in which males pray to male deities (such as the sun or lords of the wind) for activities such as agriculture, while women pray to the moon and "Our Mother for aid in childbirth difficulties and in healing the sick" (see Faust 1999 Page 156; Vogt 1976 Page 33). The environmental cosmology of Mopan *Kustumbre* also considers the Morning star is the "older brother" (suku'un) to his younger brother (itz'in) the sun and the youngest, (t'up), is alternately thought of as

Mars/Jupiter/Evening Star. (Thompson 1930 p 119, 131-2). In another myth, the Sun calls the clouds "Older brother" (*Suku'un*) because the clouds can easily blot out the sun's rays/light (Thompson 1930 p 160). <sup>60</sup>

These shared values of kinship and hierarchy emphasize the holographic symmetry and unity between society, nature and the spirit world. It is a social and humanized nature through which matter-of-fact relations to the spiritual are exercised. Mopan environmental cosmology is "perspectival" and sees the beings of the spirit world to have a familiar social structure with villages, habits and forms of culture, despite their different outward forms and powers. Within this perspectivist cosmology, people, plants, and animals share subjectivity but are differentiated by dissimilar physical forms in an "intentioned universe." (see Viveiros de Castros 1998:p 126). In this way, "humanity" is a shared condition based on an inner essence or behavior, rather than in biological notions of Homo sapiens as a species (as it is in Western mono-naturalism) (Descola 1996: 120; Viveiros de Castro 1998: p 470-471).

This shared social framework allows Mopan animism 'treats plants and animals...as proper persons' within a spiritual landscape of canvas of "relationality" where people and spirits interact with each other. The western distinction between the domains of "nature," "society" and the "supernatural" are collapsed in Mopan cosmology so that "natural" occurrences are culturally defined as being but expressions of the deities' behavior" (Gregory 1972). The intersection of the supernatural, social, environmental and personal creates a holistic 'model of reality and behavior' an environmental cosmology in which organizes daily life (Faust Page 1999 p 158; see Geertz 1973;).

Yet despite the sociality of exchanges between the Mopan and the spirits of the land, these relations do not build into long term exchanges of kinship. The difficulty in creating kinship relations with the *yum* is shown in the earlier "Story of the Wild Indians" (McClusky 2001). Despite the sharing of labor and food between the Mopan and *Cheil* in this story, overtures by the *Cheil* to transform these low level exchanges into kinship through marriage were ultimately rejected by the humans because of the fear their son would go off into the forest and leave the world of humans behind. Although the Mopan see the Cheil as sharing the same enacted humanity rooted in respect (*tzik*), the difference in outward form and their alien ways of life are ultimately too different to bridge this gap.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>60</sup> Myths regarding supernatural entities as older/younger brothers with a relationship built on both respect and antagonism is widespread among Amerindians and probably dates to the earliest history of native people in the New World. (Levi-Strauss 1975; Wilk 1997 p 138)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> For this perspective in wider Amerindian animism see Descola 1996; Mentore 2005 p 165

### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have described the sacred ecology of Mopan *Kustumbre*. I begin with the story of the wild cacao farm and its master the *Cheil*. Feral cacao is thought to be owned by these spirits who must be respectfully petitioned before fruit was taken, rather under the domain of human ownership. In many ways, the *Cheil* are seen to be like the Mopan themselves. They live in familiarly organized societies, share a similar domestic lifestyle and speak an archaic Maya. At the same time, the *Cheil* are also thought to be liminal beings and shape shifters with great magical powers. This qualitative difference creates unequal relationships of respect between humans and the Cheil which can only be mediated through respect and sacrifice, but excludes the creation of relationality through marriage. The story of the *Cheil* and the wild cacao speaks to larger patterns of socio-environmental relations between the Mopan, nature and the spirit world.

The *Cheil* are part of a environmental cosmology of Kustumbre which has been created over centuries of hybridization between indigenous animism and colonial Catholicism. These masters of nature (*yum*) are a syncretic mix of Catholic and Pre-Columbian deities who both embody and control the environment, for good or ill. Although the *yum* are powerful sprits, they share a common perspective of "humanity" with the Mopan, thus allowing for the possibility of social relations between humans, nature and the divine. Despite this shared humanity, the different outward origins and forms between Humans and spirits prevent low level exchanges of food, trade and labor from becoming kinship relations.

In this way, I argue that Mopan understandings of nature are an example of an alternative set of environmental values built on relationality. The parallel use of cacao as food for both gods and humans is an expression of Maya understandings of the supernatural as inherently social. Unlike western notions of an "objective" environment devoid from spiritual agency, the Old Ways of syncretic of Maya-Catholicism envisions an animistic and perspectival supernatural cosmos that is manifest in the local landscape. Owners of nature domains (*yum*) act as immediate emissaries for a distant God (*Dyos*). Mopan cosmology believed that the spirits of the land and nature were social beings that must be enticed into relationality through sacrificial offerings. Ritual offerings made to garner the favor of the deities were imagined as "feeding the gods" in a way that mirrors social hospitality between humans. The gods were believed to be of higher social status than humans and so were honored with prestigious gifts, including offerings of blood, cacao and tortillas. By giving the gods food and drink, the Mopan seek to construct intersubjective/personal relations with the divine in the same way that sharing food and drink creates kinship between new affines and *compadres*. In the next chapter, I provide a structural

analysis of how the Mopan create social relations of respect by "feeding" the spirits of nature through sacrifices of cacao and the build up and discharge of k'inam (ritual heat).

#### Chapter 5 – Feeding the Sacred

#### Introduction

This chapter explores the place of cacao in the traditional Mopan ritual process. In the environmental cosmology of Mopan *Kustumbre*, sacrifices are conceived of as "feeding" the spirits. Through ritual offerings of desirable substances like cacao, Mopan petitioners seek to entice the spirits to aid them in risky endeavors and to provide beneficial environmental outcomes. In order to make respectful sacrifices, sexual abstinence is required before and after the ceremony to avoid ritual pollution from "*k'inam*" (the heat of human sexuality). If not properly respected with offerings and proper abstinence, the spirits may withhold their benevolence and bring greater misfortune to the people.

Before the coming of Protestant missionaries to San Jose, a wide range of Mopan rituals involved the use of cacao as a sacrificial offering. These events were widespread on both the family and village level. Offerings of cacao are used to sanctify risky subsistence activities such as planting, burning or hunting. Cacao is also given to the spirits of the land when new houses and villages are built to invoke their supernatural protection. Traditional healers use cacao in rituals to cure a variety of ailments such as "soul loss." Finally, cacao drinks are an important part of meals offered to the ancestors, continuing social relations even after death. Ritual practitioners make offerings of cacao counterpoised with masculine, "hot" foods, bringing together these complementary opposites in the creation of spiritual holism.

# Part 1 - Environmental Ritual and Feeding the Spirits

# **Ritual Offerings to Spirits**

Among the lowland Maya, humans "owe the sacred beings for life itself" and the continued "well-being of humans and of their animals and crops" is dependent on periodic ritual offerings to placate nature spirits who are the owners of the landscape (Faust 1999 156; see Gregory 1984a, 22-25; Thompson 1930 among the Mopan). These syncretic religious practices share a common goal of petitioning the spirit world to intercede favorably in a universe that is all too often filled with misfortune. For the Mopan farmers of San Jose, agriculture is a precarious pursuit and any number of maladies such as drought, floods, hurricanes, fires, pests, can destroy the subsistence base of a family or even a village/region, threatening famine and hunger.

In a society in which the maintenance of life and health are recognized as fragile, continued existence is dependent upon maintaining tzik/respect relationships throughout the community as well as with the supernatural world. In Mopan morality, environmental conditions for the whole community are tied to private morality (Danziger 2001 32; Faust 1999 Page 94, 158). Good weather (and by extension a good harvest) depends on all members of the community to respect the nature spirits, live in peace with their neighbors and exercise self-restraint. In contrast, sexual misconduct and other disrespectful acts such as murder/violence/conflict can result in environmental calamities such as drought, floods<sup>62</sup> or hurricanes (Danziger 2001 32; see Faust 1999 Page 94-5).

In the same way that respect is the foundation for human intersocial interactions, it is also "pivotal in religious ceremonies" and sacrificial offerings to the supernatural world (Danziger 2001 p 32 see also Gregory 1984a). To mitigate the risk of environmental misfortune, the old ways of Mopan *Kustumbre* called for ritual sacrifices of blood, cacao and copal. During the ritual process, the souls (*pixan*) of humans reach out to other non-human spirits including spirits of the land, animals, weather, Catholic saints (*santos*) and, most distantly, God (*Dyos*). In order to ensure success in an uncertain and unforgiving environment, "the Mopan must constantly seek the support, or in some instances the noninterference," of the spiritual owners of nature through ritual sacrifices and offerings (Gregory 1972).

This exchange between humans and the spirit world is at the core of Mopan sacred ecology. In these rituals the spirits are respectfully addressed as a senior party in a way that mirrors respectful social greetings. If they proper respect is not given, the spirits of nature can summons humans to their spiritual abodes in the hills and chastise them/teach them about respect. In the following story the hill god known as the *Mam* teaches the man how to properly respect the gods and make milpa – two of the most basic/fundamental aspects of Mopan humanity. In this indigenous Prometheus myth, the *Mam* are the origin of social humanity and subsistence practices that are major foundations for Mopan self-conceptions as "true human beings."

#### The Story of the Mam

Once there was a man who never burnt copal or prayed to the Mam when he went out hunting. He was a bad shot, and many of the animals at which he shot ran off wounded. Mam was vexed about this, so he sent a boy to summon the man to his presence. The boy found the hunter in the forest and made him shut his eyes.

<sup>62</sup> In the neighboring village of San Antonio, a rash of homicides was seen as an act of disrespect against the

When he opened them again, he found himself in the presence of the Mam. The Mam asked him why he wounded so many of his animals and did not burn copal or pray to him. The man said that he knew no better. As a punishment the Mam made the man live there with him and tend to the sick and wounded animals. Where the Mam lives in the middle of a mountain, there are a number of pens in which the wild animals are kept.

The Mam taught him how to pray and burn copal. First, he must pray to the Morning Star as it comes up above the horizon; for the Morning Star, Xulab, is the owner of all the animals. Further, when the man goes to the forest, he must again pray and burn copal to the Mam; for the Mam look after all the animals for the Morning Star. The Mam taught the man how to work a milpa, for before this the man had not known how. The Mam also taught him how to pray and burn copal so that he might get a good crop.

The man tired of living with the Mam, and wanted to go back to earth and his family. The Mam wanted him to stay, but the man was so anxious to go home that the Mam consented. However, before the man went, the Mam gave him the seed of all the plants he wanted to sow, beans, maize, cassava, and others. When the man got back to earth, he remembered all that the Mam had taught him, and consequently his milpa always yielded abundantly. Whenever he went out to shoot, he always got plenty of game as he knew exactly how to pray and burn copal. (Thompson 1930 p 141-142)<sup>63</sup>

A similar theme is found in the Mopan myth of "<u>The Hunter who had Cursed the Mam</u>" which illustrates how ritual offerings are conceived of as "transactions" with the nature spirits to ensure continued subsistence (see Gregory 1972).

The Mam asked him why he had come to hunt game there on land where he had no right, and further had cursed him. The man replied that he had come there, because his friend always seemed to find plenty of game there. "That is true," replied the Mam. "But your friend buys his animals from me. Look!" And the Mam showed him a big mass of copal, perhaps a hundred pounds in weight. (Thompson 1930 p 140)

The ritual "payments" between humans and the spirits of nature are part of a wider pattern of establishing sociality with the spirit world through offering. Broadly, Maya religion is organized around reciprocal "symbolic transactions between men and gods in intricate rituals" which, both metaphorically and literally, renew the "social and natural universe" (Vogt 1976 Page 1, 56). In this way, ritual offerings are seen to "pay" respect to the spirit owners of nature for utilizing their domain. This type of offering is made throughout the Maya region and is thought to compensate the lords of nature for the utilization of resources and the incursion in their domain.

Until the coming of Protestant missionaries, the Mopan carried out for a variety of environmental rituals whenever humans impose on the domains of the nature spirits including "clearing for new fields, burning dried brush, planting; building a new house, pigsty, or chicken shed; and setting

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>63</sup> Thompson 1930 is out of copyright and available in public domain

out to hunt wild game or poison a stream for fish" (Gregory 1972).<sup>64</sup> Many adults in San Jose, both Catholic and Protestant, remember the prominent/visible ritual displays of feeding the spirit from their youths. Their recollections of ritual sacrifice for agriculture, hunting, healing and for communing with the dead for the basis for part 2 of this chapter. Since the arrival of Protestant missionaries in the village in 1977, these rituals have gone into decline because of their association with the fetishism and idol worship of the old ways of Kustumbre. While some Catholics lament the decline of the old ways, Protestants seek to banish these practices to the past in the creation of an indigenous modernity untainted by superstition (see chapter 6).

### *K'inam*, Abstinence and the Ritual Process

In a situation which human endeavors have uncertain outcomes, a person or a group sponsors a petition of the spirits through ritual sacrifice. Traditional Mopan ceremonies recapitulate the sacred organization of the cosmos through the enactment of ritual practices. These practices share a common ritual process in which humans exercise ritual agency through the build up and dispersal of ritual heat (k'inam) and the "feeding" of the supernatural with desirable substances.<sup>65</sup>

Across a variety of religious practices for agriculture, healing and feeding the dead described in part 2 of this chapter, Mopan rituals follow a common ritual process which is structured as a rite of passage(see Hubert and Mauss 1981; de Heursh 1986; Turner 1967). In this process, the sacrificers first separate themselves sexually to build up the spiritual heat (*k'inam*) necessary to perform the ritual process. Following this separation from the mundane world, the ritual sponsor and their assistants are in a state of liminality in which it is possible to make relations with the spirit world through sacred

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>64</sup> Among the neighboring Yucatec Maya, similar ritual ceremonies in the fields such as the *Ch'a' chaak* ("calling of the rain gods") and the *hamlicol* ("feeding the field") create the same reciprocal obligations between the farmers, spirits and the land (Anderson 1996; Redfield and Tax 1941)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> For the lowland Maya, "sacrifice is a cultural form of death" which is seen as the spiritual analog to "grinding" in the subsistence sphere in a cultural motif of disintegration (Faust 1999 Page 100). In both of these acts, the raw is prepared for consumption with the end goal of creating social relations.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>66</sup> According to Hubert and Mauss, "Sacrifice is a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it or that of certain objects with which he is concerned (Hubert and Mauss 1964: 13). For Hubert and Mauss, "sacrifice is the means, par excellence, of establishing communication between the profane world and the sacred" (de Heusch 1986). Despite the outward variation in "sacrifice" worldwide, all acts of sacrifice unfold within a specific ritual grammar (de Heusch, Hubert and Mauss 1964:50). Mopan ritual process follows a general temporal and structural pattern of a rite of passage, which follows Turner's ritual arc consisting of separation, liminality and reincorporation (see Turner 1969; van Genep 1909). Following the narrative arc, the "sacrificer" ("he who actually performs the rite") ritually offers the "victim" (the object of sacrifice) to some divinity for the benefit of the "sacrifier" (de Heusch 1986). Through this process, the sacrifier is able to absorb some of the sanctity of the ritually destroyed/consumed victim.

offerings. At the conclusion of the ritual, the participants are reincorporated into the mundane world through another period of sexual abstinence designed to dissipate the spiritual heat in the body.

Although some rituals involve only a single person or family, many ceremonies require wider participation to build up sufficient spiritual efficacy. Rituals for planting, harvesting and sickness are collective affairs in which family, *compadres* and neighbors all play a spiritual role through ritual abstinence and feeding. In these cases, the sponsor must utilize their social prestige in order to mobilize networks of kinship, *compadrazgo* and residence. The ritual will try to include all those "who will directly benefit from a favorable response from the deities" so that the *Sacrificer* and the *Sacrifiant* are one and the same (Gregory 1972; see Hubert and Mauss 1981). This human spiritual efficacy must work in conjunction with the other powerful spirits populating the landscape including the spirits of the land, of animals, of the weather, the saints, and more distantly, god (*Dyos*).

The ritual process begins with the identification of a problem or a risky endeavor, which requires supernatural blessing for its success. A ritual sponsor is then chosen to gather the necessary supplies and to recruit other participants to help in the ritual. The ritual sponsor (*sacrificer*) is an adult member of the community, usually male, with the social connections, material resources and personal charisma necessary to successfully put on the ritual.

Once the ritual sponsor has set the date, the separation phase of the ritual begins and the adult men involved in the ritual separate and begin a period of sexual abstinence, which they refer to as "sleeping outside." Among both the Mopan and Q'eqchi' of southern Belize, sexual intercourse both prior to and after planting is considered harmful to the new crop (Danziger 2001 40; Thompson 1930 49-50).

The old people say that you have to separate from your wife when you go to plant because during that time a lot of praying happens to the spirits. You have to not have relations for seven days before and then seven days after the ritual. That's fourteen days. If you are not separated from your wife, then that means you are not respecting your plants or anything. (Thomas)

For the Mopan, sex is a spiritually charged/dangerous act and sexual abstinence confers an attitude of deference and respect that is "profoundly religious in tone" (Danziger 2001 p 41). In contrast, sexual activity is associated with "license, blasphemy, and absence of religious respect," while sexual restraint symbolizes "abstinence, prayer, and respect" (Danziger 2001 p 40). Sexual activity is

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>67</sup> While the sponsorship of these rituals brings prestige to an individual, they do so on behalf of the entire community (Danziger 2001 p 22). Through community ritual, the expression of individualistic values is encompassed within holism, and social cohesion is maintained in a Mopan world otherwise characterized by divisive social potential (Danziger 2001 p 22; Gregory 1975 p 78-79).

thought of as the antithesis of respect (*tzik*) so much so that even husbands and wives cannot use respectful relational greeting terms with each other (Danziger 2001 p 40). <sup>68</sup> Through sexual abstinence, spiritual potency is built up before the ritual and then safely dissipated afterwards. The process of "sleeping outside" in preparation for the ritual not only entails sexual abstinence, but also a general commitment to moral living. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, ritual abstinence was more common than today (Thompson 1930 p 49-50) and the length of the proscribed sexual separation has decreased in recent years (Fink 1987 p 404). The Old Heads of San Jose say that while the Mopan of their grandparents' generation would "sleep outside" for up to two weeks before and after conducting their rituals, today people lack the spiritual fortitude of their ancestors and now only separate themselves for three days. <sup>69</sup> Describing the ritual process, one cacao farmer explained this sentiment by saying...

According to the old people, you have to live a pure life whenever you do these ceremonies. You have to live proper. You must stay with your wife and your kids. Don't go out causing mischief and just do your work. Before and after you plant, you must keep the abstinence. Go to church to pray certain times during the year to keep their life going. You have to keep those things. If you do those bad things instead, then you break the cycle and make it worse. (Justino)

By separating themselves from their wives and living moral lives, both men and women begin to build up their "k'inam" in preparation for the ritual. K'inam is life force which allows people the efficacy to create change in the natural, spiritual and social world. The term k'inam has a variety of meanings in Mopan, all centered around the idea of contagious heat (either physical or spiritual). In the Mopan conception of the landscape, places of spiritual power such as caves or natural wells/cenotes are also said to radiate k'inam. It can also be translated as the "the pain," like the pulsing you feel in a wound. K'inam is said to be located in the blood, and emanates from the surface of the body, especially the tips of the fingers. Humans are not the only sources of k'inam. The internal heat of K'inam is thought of as analogous to the heat of cooking which transforms the natural potential of plants and animals into culturally valuable food and reproduces both the human and social body (Faust 1999; see Mentore 2005 172).

The heat of *k'inam* is the creative force, which animates sexual reproduction and the creation of new life. The spiritual power of *k'inam* makes menstruating women taboo and ritually dangerous (for example, if a menstruating woman does not take precautions while touching plants, she can cause them

<sup>68</sup> See Danziger (2013) for an exception to this taboo when a married couple forges respect greetings in a research context.

<sup>69</sup> Fink (1987) claims that long periods of sexual abstinence among the Mopan can be seen as a cultural form of birth control.

to wilt). *K'inam* is also the spiritual heat of creation which can be channeled toward house construction, healing and magic. The precautions taken as a result of said *k'inam* illustrates the importance of religious ritual to create relationships with the supernatural. The build up of *k'inam* is likened to charging up a battery inside of the body with spiritual heat that can then be employed in the ritual transformation of the natural, spiritual and social world. The build up of *k'inam* makes the ritual participants dangerous (*sab'entzil*) to the mundane world because of their increased spiritual potency.

Through abstinence, *k'inam* is built up and directed towards ritual agency to create positive change in an uncertain world. The proper discharge of *k'inam* is sexuality and reproduction of the family within marriage. The misuse of *k'inam* is dangerous in both ritual and sexuality as well. Failure to adhere to abstinence before or after a ritual is thought to displease the spirits who can send misfortune instead of blessings. The ritual may not only fail to bring about desired change, but can cause even greater misfortune than if no ritual had been attempted. Thomas explained...

If you don't respect the plants, then bad things will happen. Your cacao could take disease very, very fast or the plants will wither. Other times, the ants will eat the center of the plants so it can't grow or birds will come to eat the seeds. You even lose your whole crop. (Thomas)

Similarly, improper sexuality is a sin that threatens social harmony of the family and in the wider community. I argue that the separation (abstinence) and recombination (sexuality) of *k'inam* illustrates one of the central organizing tensions in Mopan social and ritual cosmology.

While abstinence is commonly prescribed for rituals of planting or curing, this is not universal and in some rites of reversal, magical power is drawn from sexual activity for its supernatural efficacy. For example, a magical ritual to promote the growth of beans necessitated sexual relations between husband and wife in the field. During these rites of reversal, sexual activity is condoned and "powers antithetical to those customarily respected in religious observance are called upon (Danziger 2001 p 40-1). While these inverted rituals can be exploited as powerful sources of supernatural efficacy, they are considered less virtuous and potentially more dangerous (Danziger 2001 p 40).

## Feeding the Spirits - Liminality

When they feed the saints and spirits with the offerings, they say, "This is your food and tortilla." (Thomas)

In the day leading up to the ceremony, the ritual sponsor and their family begin to gather the necessary supplies for the ritual including meat, corn for tortillas, rum, cacao, sacrificial animals, candles and/or copal incense. When the day for the ritual has arrived, the sponsor's family is joined by the rest of the ritual participants. Once all the participants have gathered, the women begin to prepare the food which will be offered to the gods and consumed by all the participants at the completion of the ceremony. At the same time, the men go to the ritual site and begin to assemble the ceremonial implements. Mopan rituals take place in a variety of locations such as farms, houses, churches and caves. At each of these ritual sites, the realm of the sacred touches the mundane, allowing for divine intervention.

Once the ritual begins, participants now occupy a liminal space removed from mundane expectations and constraints of everyday life (van Genep 1905; Turner 1967). During the liminal state, the efficacy of *k'inam* is channeled through ritual offerings towards the creation of social relations between humans and the supernatural.

After the proper array of ritual implements at the sacred site, the ritual sponsor or an elder ritual specialist begins to offer prayers to the chosen spirits and begins to petition them for their assistance. These prayers are augmented with the offering of desirable substances to the spirits meant to entice to aid in uncertain human endeavors. Because human beings depend on the supernatural for their subsistence, they must make offerings/sacrifices to ensure their continued benevolences.

When the Mopan make ritual offerings, strong parallels are drawn between sacrifice and food so that ritual offerings are culturally imagined as "feeding the gods." This analogy is widespread across the Maya region and creates an explicit connection between the social world of feeding/hospitality and ritual offerings so that "just as men must be fed with food, so must the gods be ritually fed" (Schackt 1986 Page 60; see Vogt 1976 Page 1). Sacrificial offerings such as cacao, blood, tortillas, copal (pom) incense, and rum are thought to provide sustenance and hospitality to the divine (Danziger 2001; Faust 1999 Page 105, 156; Gregory 1972; Thompson 1930; Wilk 1997; Vogt 1976). To Despite their varied form, each of these offerings fulfills an analogous role in mediating the qualitative difference between humans and the divine through the giving and consumption of symbolic sacred substances. Elements of sacrifice to the spirits "are parallel to the respect and support owed by all adults to those elders who 'gave them life,' both by feeding them when they were children and by bringing them into existence" (Faust 1999 Page 156). By giving the gods food and drink, the Mopan seek to construct

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>70</sup> The intentionality of the sacrificial gift is 'the only thing of consequence' and allows for the 'fundamental principle [of] substitution' to operate appropriately (Mentore 2005 p 336; see Levi-Strauss 1974:p 224).

intersubjective/personal relations with the divine (in the same way that sharing food and drink creates kinship between new affines and *compadres*). This respectful giving of food as offering mediates the hierarchical differences between humans and the supernatural, in the same way that prestations of food and drink can create social harmony and equality between members of society.

These rituals create a sense of reciprocal respect between the spirit masters and humans is based on sacrifice as feeding. The unequal/qualitative difference creates a sense of indebtedness among the human benefactors of nature. The social response to alleviate this indebtedness is through moral obligation to share food/meals with others in the community.

During the central act of the ritual a sacrifice is made to appease the spirits in the form of sacred foods, such as chicken blood, corn tortillas or cacao. As the offering is made, the ritual practitioner says prayers to the spirits, invoking their aid in the risky endeavor. Maya environmental rituals often include a ceremonial sanctification of the perimeter or the four corners (of home, farm, village) with ritual offerings to ritually mark the boundaries of the object being blessed – whether it be house, farm or sick patient. Through ritual activities, sacred boundaries are defined and then metaphorically / ritually encircled with incense and prayers. The "framing" of these boundaries "serves to protect, to keep in and nourish the souls of the houses and fields and to shut out demons, the evil, powerful symbols of disorder" (Vogt 1976 Page 59; see Douglas 1966: 63-64). The encompassment and sanctification of human/cultural structures on the landscape is thought to mirror the "embracing process" at the heart of Maya socialization rituals such as baptism, marriage, and curing (Vogt 1976 p 59).

Following the completion of the offering, the participants eat a meal together (though separated by gender) provided by the sponsor, which signals the end of the central act of the ritual arc. During this meal, the consumption of sacred food and drink binds ritual participants together. By consuming sacred substances together, the Mopan believe that the *k'inam* of all the ritual participants can be focused together and increase the spiritual efficacy of the ceremony. The sharing of a meal by participants helps create a shared sense of conviviality within the liminal space of the ritual. At the same time, the concluding meal mimetically links the ritual participants with the spirits through the common act of consuming sacred substances (see Mentore 2005 p 336).

### **Reincorporation and Renewal**

At the end of the liminal phase of ritual, the participants are considered taboo because of their excess *k'inam* and the contact with the spirit world. In order to be reincorporated with profane society, the sacrificers must undergo another period of ritual abstinence equal in time to the one that initiated the rites of separation. Once this time has passed, the ritual is finally considered complete and now the

participants must wait to see if offerings were effective in enticing spiritual aid. In the days and weeks that follow, the success of the ritual is judged by the outcomes of the ritually blessed endeavor. Patients who undergo curing ceremonies are miraculously cured, while others succumb to their illness. The blessing of new crops can result in either a bountiful harvest or famine. The outcome of ritual offering (whether for good or ill) is seen by members of the community as an indication of the moral character and spiritual power of the participants. Ritual efficacy depends on the unity of the community, so that each person must fulfill public obligations while at the same time, privately keeping moral conduct. Each ritual participant must "have faith in the ceremony" or else the ritual will not be effective (Faust 1999 Page 95). In order to be successful, the ritual must not only be properly preformed, but the participants must also have the sincere faith and intent in their heart (toh inw ool – my heart is straight).

If the desired result is achieved, it is taken as a sign by the community that spirits have found the offerings acceptable and have intervened on the behalf of the petitioners. On the other hand, if the problem continues or grows worse, the ritual is seen to have failed to attract the aid of the supernatural. The rejection of the offering by the spirits can have various causes including the improper performance of the ritual, failure to keep the proper abstinence, mixed mindedness in the intention of the participants or through the direct interference of witchcraft (obia / pulyah).

Even when the rituals are successful, their benefits do not last forever. The socialization of nature requires the periodic renewal of the bonds between the spirits and humans.<sup>71</sup> Rituals need to be consistently renewed in order to remain in force. The power of the ritual declines over time as the relational bonds between humans and the supernatural begin to fray with the passage of time. While it is commonly acknowledged that people are obligated to ritually respect the spirits, often the regular renewal of these rituals can fall by the way side in times of prosperity (Danziger 2001). If neglected for too long, the lowland Maya believe that these social relations between humans and the spirits in nature begin to wither, and the lapse in ritual relations is likened to "ignoring obligations to their kin" (Faust 1999 Page 156).

### Part 2 - The Ritual Use of Cacao

In Mopan rituals, cacao was used as one of the most important offerings made to the spirits.

Cacao drinks were also shared among ritual participants in a common meal which mirrored the offering

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>71</sup> Rituals must be periodically renewed in the same way that the children must continually be taught to conform to the principles of civilized order sanctioned by the ancestral gods (see Vogt 1976 Page 59).

to the gods. Cacao embodies many of the most salient categories in Mopan symbolic universe, making it a prestigious/precious offering in a wide variety of rituals. The Mopan feed the spirits of nature cacao drink to ensure benevolent harvests for agricultural and hunting pursuits. In addition, presentations of cacao are also made to the spirits of the land to receive their protection when consecrating a new house or village. Cacao was also ritually used in curing ceremonies and in communing with the dead. In each of these ritual acts, offerings of cacao are paired with seen as social acts of "feeding" designed to entice powerful spiritual beings to aid in uncertain pursuits.

#### **Rituals for Cacao Tree**

Agricultural rituals "form a conceptual anchor-point" for the enactment of the community religion (Schackt 1986 Page 86-87). As a tree with sacred, economic and social value, the Mopan traditionally preformed rituals for cacao trees to both bless the trees when planting, to increase harvests and to petition the spirits to remove disease. In the past, when cacao trees were planted, prayers were offered to the Lord of the Hills and Valleys (Santo *Witz-Hook*), the Earth Lord and the spirits that inhabit the cacao trees (Thompson 1930:p 54, 185). By making proper offerings to the owners of the new cacao grove, people sought to ensure protection of the spirit owners of nature (*yum*). Similarly, rituals were also done to make cacao more productive and to insure a successful cacao crop. While today many in San Jose are too young to remember the old rituals for blessing the cacao, a few of the old people still remember these rituals from their youth.

When I was young, I helped an old man with his cacao. Whenever that old man or his wife would kill a chicken or pig, they would not waste the blood. They would put it in a bucket for blessing the cacao farm. All around the cocoa, they wet it with the blood and said the prayers. When I saw him again less than two months later, already you could start to see the difference in the plant. The plants had come in very pretty blooms with a lot of bright, lovely, yellow cacao fruits. (Marcelo)

Other farmers described the ritual process for the blessing of the cacao trees known as "feeding the field" to increase the production of fruit.

The old people would go into the middle of the farm to pray. They would ask the heavenly father to help the plants to continue producing and to give them more fruits. Then they would give the spirits a food offering. For the offering, they would take the water with the blood of the chicken and cocoa. Then they would go around the field sprinkling the cacao trees with the mixture, first in the center and at the different corners. When they finished, they would pray and ask the spirits to bless the soil so that it produce abundant fruit. (Thomas and Justino)

Additionally, cacao trees were also the object of rituals to cure them from disease or blight. Another old man in San Jose told me the story of how his grandfather preformed a ritual to cure his cacao field from disease. He said...

The old people had prayers to protect their cacao from disease. One time when I was a boy, my grandfather, made me go with him to do the ceremony for the diseased cacao. He said his prayers, but I couldn't understand what he said.<sup>72</sup> Then he pulled one of the sick fruit at the center of the field and then pulled more from the four corners. He then took them all and threw the disease into the creek. (Lucas)

When cacao trees become infected with agricultural diseases, traditional farmers take it as a sign of imbalance with the spirits. To remedy this imbalance, they conduct ritual sacrifices in the cacao fields with offerings of sacrificed chicken/turkey blood and liquid cacao drink.

Our parents and grandparents knew the secret of fertilizing the cacao produce without having to use chemical fertilizer. They would mix the blood with chocolate liquor. They would then go and sprinkle the blood in the farm, both in the center and at different corners.

Offerings of chicken blood and other sacred substances are a means of showing respect to the spirits of nature who have the power to heal the diseases and increase the bounty of the harvest. In each of these ritual acts, the spirits of nature are "fed" a mixture to bring about beneficial agricultural change. These offerings bring together culturally hot foods (chicken blood) with cold drink (cacao) to unite the complementary oppositions at the heart of Mopan ritual symbolism and thus have greater potency. These offerings are made at the center of the field and the four corners, ritually encircling and consecrating the farm.

# The Use of Cacao in Rituals of Agriculture, Hunting and Fishing

Before the coming of Protestantism to San Jose, Mopan villagers used cacao as a sacred implement in rituals of agriculture, hunting and fishing. Mopan milpa (swidden) agriculture is grounded in an indigenous environmental knowledge which situates patterns of cultivation and fallow/forest regeneration bound up within moral and spiritual imperatives (Emch 2003 p 111-112; Wainwright 2008 Page 69-70). Planting is considered both the most important activity in the agricultural cycle and one fraught with risk. A poor planting can result in crop loss, livelihood insecurity, or even starvation. Although rituals for planting are the most prominent agricultural ritual, other activities such as burning fields also can be the object of offering and vigil as well.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>72</sup> The grandfather was speaking in archaic shamanic vocabulary which incorporates more Q'eqchi' Maya because it is thought of as more "magical" and closer to nature.

Prayers and sacrifices were offered to ensure favorable environmental conditions. Although some older conservatives still conduct vigils for the planting of corn fields, in the past the Mopan also conducted similar ceremonies before other culturally significant crops such as beans, cacao, tobacco were sown (Thompson 1930 p 54). The night before the fields are planted, vigils were held for all the participants in the upcoming planting. One farmer remembered the old vigils and described it to me...

The night before planting, my family and compadres who plant with me would come and spend the night here. We would kill a pig or chickens for everyone who is planting the corn and feed them. And then whole night, nobody sleeps. They stay up and gamble with the corn (play the corn game). Then in the morning everyone would go to mass and pray before the men would leave to go plant. (Marciano)

At the center of these vigils was a ritual meal of corn tortillas, chicken caldo, and cacao drink. During the vigil, the participants seek the gods' blessings for the forthcoming planting. To ensure this blessing, a small portion of the seeds from the coming planting are removed from the planting bags and placed before a shrine topped with the cross and burning candles. The vigils held before agricultural activities can "be characterized as making prestations to the spiritual essence" of the seed and the landscape, ensuring a good crop (Fink 1987 p 410). Although only a small portion of the seeds is offered for the gods' blessing, upon completion of the ritual, these blessed seeds are mixed back into the larger planting bag. "By feeding it and making incantations and waving incense over it," rituals of blessing are thought to literally and physically enhance the life force of the seed and the plants that will be grown from it (Fink 1987 p 410). Through its later reincorporation with the remainder, the sacredness of the newly blessed seeds is transferred to the rest (an example of contagious magic).

Ritual offerings were also made before hunting and fishing. Before setting out on hunting expeditions, Mopan hunters would light candles and offer cacao and chickens blood as "payment" to the owner of the wild animals for the animals under their control to ensure a successful hunt (see the story of "paying the *Mam*" earlier in this chapter). Similar rituals were done until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century whenever the Mopan would communally fish using natural poison. To hunt without making proper payments is said to not only decrease the likelihood of finding game, but more importantly, also anger powerful deities who can bring all manner of environmental calamities.

## Feeding the House and Village

In addition to agricultural rituals, offerings of cacao are also important in the consecration of new houses and villages. Saturday mornings in San Jose are a busy time in the village for building new

houses and rethatching existing ones. At one of these house-building events I attended, an older man described how his grandparents would dedicate newly built houses with offerings of cacao.

The old generation, they would feed the cacao to the house. First they would start at the center of the house and put the animal's blood. Then they would go to corner to corner, like an X. Then they would make small tortillas with meat as an offering. And they used the cincario for the copal incense. After that they would sprinkle the raw cacao both inside and around the outside of house. Then they will use the roasted cacao to make the drink for visitors.

Once they made the offerings, the leader of the ritual would call the spirit in the posts of the house so that they can offer the spirit its food. They tell the spirits that this is the food I give you because I don't want anything to happen to the house, children, the pigpen, or our animals. (Lucas)

House dedication ceremonies feed the spirits of the house to gain its protection. When a house is constructed, the family holds a vigil in which the new home and the surrounding land is ritually sanctified by an *ilmah* (shaman). During the ritual, the *ilmah* "feeds" the house by making offerings and "praising" it. At the same house building, another farmer continued to tell how the old people used to ritually consecrate their buildings by saying...

In the old days, whenever a school or church or home was built, the old people would praise that. They have to pray for at least four or five nights before they go bless the home. They have a special person (ritual specialist) who would bless the house and feed the owner of the land. This come from the Old Ways, where each place had owner who must be respected. So that's why you have to pray and make offerings when you build something there. (Thomas)

In order to consecrate the new building to the spirits of the land, offerings are made first at the four corner posts, then in the center, and finally around the outer perimeter of the structure, reenacting the Maya spacial models of the universe (Vogt 1976 p 52-54). After midnight, once the prayers and blood offerings have been made, the *ilmah* sets up a ritual meal for the Santo *Witz-Hook* (spirit of the mountains and plains) and the spirit of the wood to consume (see Thompson 1930 p 70). The shamans offer these holy substances to the divine in the same way that the women will offer meals to ritual participants. Once the offering has been made, everyone leaves the house for two hours so that the spirits can consume the offering undisturbed. During this time, the ritual participants "retire to a nearby house to consume a ritual meal, which includes a beverage of cacao mixed with ground corn and black pepper" (Thompson 1930:p 70). Despite their different outer forms, both humans and spirits consume the same holy substances – cacao, chicken, tortillas, and the smoke from copal incenses. The offering of food and drink draws the spirits into communion with the human occupants and *displays* proper respect and deference. Each year, families must renew bonds with the spirit world by "feeding the house" and making new offering to the resident spirits to ensure their continued protection.

Although feeding the house was once a common ritual occurrence in Mopan communities, since the introduction of Protestantism these rituals have been in decline for fear of "mixed mindedness" and to avoid accusations of idol worship. The story of the decline of "feeding the house" is explored as an example of the changing of Mopan environmental relations due to religious conversion in chapter 7.

At a larger scale, similar rituals of consecration and renewal were conducted for the entire village. Some of the oldest elders in San Jose still remember how the site of the village was first consecrated with a blood offering in 1955. During this ritual, a pig was sacrificed to the *Dyos* and the spirits of the landscape as a gesture of respect and recognition of hierarchical difference. Once the gods had been "fed," the rest of the village partook in a parallel meal as the pork was eaten along with corn tortillas and cacao drink by all the founding members. Afterwards, the pig's heart was buried in the ground and the people built the Catholic Church on that holy place which became the center of the new village. The Catholic Church central altar stands on that spot and is the spiritual and organizational center of the village. Elders say that the spirits accepted the sacrifice and soon the young village thrived and became the prosperous village of San Jose.

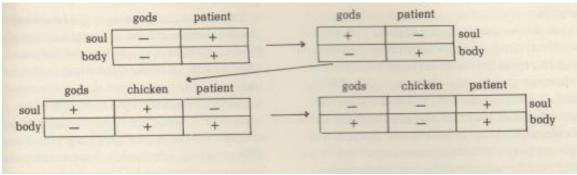
In order to maintain the favor of the guardian spirits of the landscape, the rituals of human-spiritual conviviality had to be periodically renewed. Each year all the villagers would come together and would feed the corner posts of the village lands to appease and satiate the spirits, appealing for their safeguarding for following year. Each year, all the villagers would gather together to walk the boundary of San Jose, praying with copal and making offerings to the spirits of the hills. Elders lament how religious schism has caused this practice to fall into disuse. Today the boundaries of San Jose are marked by surveyor's stones set by the Belizean state, rather than the annual path of blood sacrifice encircling the village.

## **Cacao and Curing**

When I was a boy, there was no doctor or nurse here in the village, just a bush doctor. And the bush doctor used the cacao to make the medicine. They would mash up the seeds of the cacao until it was soft and then give it for you to drink. Just the raw cacao beans, with no sugar. (Lucas)

As a spiritually powerfully plant, cacao is used by shamans ("ilmah" in Mopan or "h-men" in Yucatec Maya) for a number of rituals, both for "good magic" such as consecration and curing rites, as well as in malevolent magic. One of the most prominent uses of cacao in curing is for spiritual sickness related to "soul" or pixan. Pixan is an indigenous conception of life force or "spirit" that is manifested as

"shadow." <sup>73</sup> Problems with the *pixan* are often attributed as "the causes of illness, or other malaise" (Fink 1987 p 407). Although *pixan* can be glossed as a "shadow," it is not permanently attached to the body. Rather, it can go wandering about in the night or be stolen through witchcraft (*obia / pulyah*) to do a person harm. <sup>74</sup> When separation occurs, the *pixan* "must then be found and coaxed back into the body" to prevent this decline and make a full recovery (Fink 1987 p 406). <sup>75</sup>



(Vogt 1976 p 93)

The above chart maps the transference of spiritual essence in Maya healing rituals. When a person in a normal state of body and soul (top left) is afflicted with "soul loss" (*susto*), they are thought to have lost a part of their spiritual essence (top right). To counter this loss, a curing ritual must be held to bring the patient's body and soul back into balance. Rituals for curing involve the killing and eating of chickens or turkey along with the drinking of cacao so that these substances are shared by both human participants and the attendant spirits (Bottom Left). The destruction and consumption of the sacrifices offering bridges the gap between the gods and humans (Bottom Right) (Vogt 1976 p 93).

When the soul becomes detached from the body, shamans use cacao as part of the curing ceremony to restore the patient to health. One cacao farmer recalled how healers used cacao to cure those afflicted with soul loss, saying...

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>73</sup> This concept of the relations between the shadow and soul is familiar concept in the Amerindian literature (Riviére, 1987; Fink 1987 p 407, see Boremanse 1978:359 among the Lacadone).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>74</sup> The detachment of the soul from one's body is widely known as "susto" and is seen as the greatest threat to one's physical and spiritual wellbeing in cultures throughout Mesoamerica (Fink 1987 p 406; Vogt 1976).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>75</sup> While separation from the piixan can occur to anyone, young children are thought to be the most susceptible. Babies are born without heat" (*k'inam*) and so their piixan is not thought to be particularly well attached to the human corporeal body. As they grow older and mature, people acquire more heat so that the soul "becomes more fixed and, therefore, less susceptible to 'frights' and sorceries that may cause soul-loss" (Vogt1976 Page 38).

They used the grains of the cocoa as medicines for very serious illness. Illnesses that not even the modern doctors will be able to cure. For these certain types of illness, the traditional bush doctors would use a few grains of cocoa in a mixture of meat and tortilla to bless the patient. They use it on the forehead, on the arms where you can feel the pulse, and right under both legs. They would pass the meat and cocoa and would use some form of secret prayer. (Justino)

After the conclusion of the ritual, the *ilmah* throws the tortillas into the forest to banish the sickness (Thompson 1930:p 72). Once the *ilmah* has thrown out the tainted offering, the ritual is concluded with a meal and a nightlong vigil of prayers. Again, the offering of foods (cacao drink with a meal of chicken, rice, and chili) to the spirits is again mirrored in the ritual meal partaken by all the participants.

### Feeding the Dead

In the same way that meals are given to create conviviality in Mopan society, the dead spirits of the ancestors also must be fed as well to maintain social relations (Fink 1987 p 410). Among Catholics, Nov 1 (All Saints Day) is celebrated as a time to honor and remember those long dead. On that day, conservative Mopan Catholics traditionally leave out food and drink for their dead ancestors.

The old people would always leave food for the piixan. If your son, or daughter or father is dead, Nov 1 is the time for you to remember them. On that day, they make a big meal for them. Tortilla and ch'uuk wah (Sweet tortilla), ground food (root crops) and the cacao Once night falls, they leave out that food on the table. It's not for living men, but for the person who has been dead for many years. And in the morning when they wake up, they will see the food given to the dead has all been scratch and used. That's how they can see where the piixan come. (Felipe)

These ancestral *pixan* must be honored and fed as a measure of respect in order to maintain harmony between the living and the dead. Offerings of food are also given for the recently deceased, who are seen as spiritually dangerous. Without their physical bodies, these *pixan* are considered dangerous liminal beings not yet at home in either world. For eight days after death, the soul of the dead is thought to be "lonely" and wanders through the community looking for companionship with the piixan of "close relatives, friends and favorite grandchildren" that it can entice away from this world (Fink 1987 p 410). The period following a loved one's death is "considered to be an extremely dangerous time" requiring rituals to ensure the safety of the living and closure for the spirit of the dead (*ibid*). In order to pacify the *pixan* of the dead and to protect the living, social harmony between the living and dead must be reestablished through ritual feeding of the recently deceased.

After dinner, sitting in the hammocks by the dim light of the fire, Thomas told me a ghost story from his youth about feeding the dead that he still remembered to this day...

When I was a boy, I saw them feed the dead. One of my uncles died over in San Antonio and my people said "let's go visit the bush doctor there in San Antonio because he has training how to bring back the dead."

After that, my mother and family went there to prepare food for my dead uncle. They prepared him food - whatever he likes to eat, to smoke, or to drink in this life – and set it on the table. Then they put the ashes from the wood from the fire around the table to see if the man's spirit had stepped in that dust.

After this, the old ladies started praying, calling the dead man's spirit back saying "We have food for you here. Eat with everybody and then go back again."

Then we left the food for him inside on the table and we started to pray outside. We were sitting down there talking and telling stories about him - what he used to do, and what he was like - and then suddenly a bucket came rolling down from the house. And his old rice planting bag came flying out of the house too.

My dead uncle heard us sitting down there talking about him. That's why he's throwing those things on top of us, to see what we're doing. And you could hear him walking in the house, whistling and singing as he went. When I saw and heard those things, I was afraid because I'm still young. But the old people don't fear because they can see and talk to the spirits and they know that it is my uncle.

Still, the dead person cannot stay and they have to go back to the other world. They just come back to talk to the families before they go again.
(Thomas)

Thomas's story of feeding the dead follows a common ritual pattern among Mopan Catholics. On the eighth evening after the person has died, spirit beings are addressed and a feast for dead is prepared containing their favorite foods, including cacao drink is prepared. Ashes are then spread around the table on the floor. Once the feast has been prepared, the house of the deceased is vacated and people retire to a respectful distance so the dead can enjoy the meal without harming the living. While the spirit of the dead consumes this meal, a corresponding meal is "carefully and respectfully consumed by the living" (Faust 1999 Page 119).

The following day, the living return to the house and carefully examine the feast for eaten food and the spread ashes "for evidence of such companionship, i.e. footprints" (Fink 1987 p 410). Offering food to the dead is thought to calm the lonely spirit and allow it to acquire companions in the next life and therefore so as to be not "so threatening to those still alive" (Fink 1987 p 410). If the ritual specialist is satisfied by the results of this inspection, the spirit is thought to be well feasted, and at peace with friends, allowing the family of the deceased to return to the house without spiritual repercussions.

### **Conclusion**

In environmental cosmology of *Kustumbre*, the shared humanity between humans and spiritual nature allows for the ritual "feeding" through sacrifice to create relationships of respect and protection with the spirit masters of nature. In order to ensure desirable environmental outcomes, the Mopan appeal to the shared humanity with nature spirits through sacrificial offerings of sacred/desirable substances, such as cacao, copal, blood and tortillas. The "feeding" of cacao to spirits as a means to tempt their favor mirrors the importance of the social drinking of cacao in Mopan sociality. In both the social and the spiritual world, cacao fulfills the same essential role of creating relationships of respect (*tzik*) within holistic universe.

Offerings of cacao were fed to the spirit owners of the landscape on important occasions including planting of farms, consecration of new houses and villages, in curing ceremonies and for the dead. These offerings are thought of as "feeding" the spirits and payment for to the rightful owners of the various natural elements. In each of these rituals, Mopan offer cacao to the spiritual owners of a specific domain of universe, petitioning them to grant their power (*K'inam*) to human's for creative endeavors. Without the spirit's blessings, crops will not grow, sickness will fester and the dead will haunt the living.

Sacrifice is structured as a rite of passage in which participants undertake a period of ritual abstinence before and after a ritual ("sleeping outside") in order to manage the proper build up and discharge of *K'inam* (ritual heat). The proper build up and dissipation of *K'inam* is an essential part of a respectful attitude toward the power of the spirits over human life. Harmonious social relations based on feeding the supernatural can result in bountiful harvests, plentiful game and health. If sexual abstinence is broken during the consecrated time leading up to and following the ritual offering, social relations with the spirit owners (*yum*) will deteriorate causing them to withhold their favor. The disrespected spirits are thought to visit misfortune on those who fail to show proper respect, causing nature to turn against humanity with floods, hurricanes droughts and plagues.

While the patterns of human/environmental relations of Mopan *Kustumbre* have deep roots, in recent decades these relations have been undermined by the introduction of Protestantism and agricultural development. These changes will be explored in part II and III of my dissertation.

#### Chapter 6- Protestant Conversion and Social Schism

#### Introduction

In the previous two chapters, I have described cacao's important role as an instrument of relationality both within Mopan society as well as between humans and the spirits of nature. The next two chapters explore how this previous cosmology has been destabilized by Protestant conversion over the past 40 years. In chapter 6, I first give an account of the coming of Protestant missionaries to southern Belize, describing the personal, social and material dimensions of conversion. Protestant ideologies challenge the formerly taken for granted authority of *Kustumbre* and has given rise to individualism, social schism, and the disintegration of the civil-religious *cargo* hierarchy. At the same time, religious pluralism has also brought a reinvigoration of religious life and created new arenas for gaining social prestige. In the aftermath of conversion, growing secularization has led to the desacralization of cacao as an implement of sacred sociality, allowing it to become reimagined as a profane commodity.

### The Blessing of Cacao by the Chaako'o

It was getting to be evening when Pablo, the cacao extension officer for San Jose, passed by my house on his way to the neighboring village of Santa Cruz. After I greeted my friend, he asked "Maybe you want to go to Santa Cruz with me this evening?" He continued. "There is an old man there, Don Teul, who knows the story of cacao." Santa Cruz was only a few miles over the next range of low hills, but was a conservative village that contrasted with the self-proclaimed "modernity" of San Jose. Most of the cacao farmers that I had talked to so far in San Jose had forgotten the old stories or had purposely disavowed them as part of their new Protestant faith. So I was eager to finally hear one of the "old heads" who still kept the legends of *uchb'en k'in* (ancient days) alive.

I crowded in the back of the pickup truck with six or seven of Pablo's family members. The small truck shook and rattled over the two miles of rutted out dirt road, charging across washed out culverts as we wound our way to Santa Cruz. Twenty minutes later we arrived at the old man's house, where we found him reclining in his hammock after returning from his work on the farm. The evening rays of the sun passed through the gaps in the thatch house and illuminated the lazy smoke from the cook fire. Don Teul was happy to see his friend Pablo and greeted me warmly as we entered. Although Pablo was both an agricultural extension officer and a Baptist, he still had an uncharacteristic interest in learning about

the old Maya traditions. As we sat by the light of the cook fire, Don Teul told us the story of how the *Chaako'o* (thunder gods) drink cacao during their planting rituals and so blessed cacao as sacred plant.

There is a story my grandmother used to tell us. It is a story that comes from the old generation of Maya. The old people say that the thunderers (Chaako'o) plant their corn in fields in the sky. The thunderers cooperate, all together with "one mind" when they plant the corn in their milpa fields. You can hear the rumbling in the sky at that time. That is the sound that the thunders make when they are burning their milpas and celebrating together. When they burn their fields and finished planting, they will drink cacao to celebrate planting their corn together. That is because cacao drink is always paired with our food, which is corn.

The thunderers drink cacao when they plant together, so they have blessed it as a "God food" (Santo hanal). Cacao is number one god food for the thunderers, more than the balamte. Unlike the other baalam te (Theobroma bicolor) which only bears for the month of October, the cacao tree flowers and bears fruit all year long. Just like it thunders year round.

Because the Thunderers drink the cacao when they come together and plant, that is the reason that we Maya also use it here on Earth when we go to plant the corn. That is the story between the cacao and the thunder.

As the sun set, we thanked Don Teul for his hospitality and started over the hill towards San Jose. As we sat in the truck on the way back, Pablo's teenage son, Juan, reprimanded his father for taking too much interest in Don Teul's stories because the old Maya-Catholic ways were against their new Baptist religion. Although Juan usually idolized his father, he told Pablo that he should be careful not to backslide into the old cosmology because it shows "double mindedness." Pablo laughed at his son and told him not to worry. He was only helping with my project and was trying to be a good anthropologist, just like the *gringo*.

## **Cacao in a Changing Mopan Cosmology – Introduction**

Our trip to meet Don Teul is an entry point to a wider discussion of how the Mopan imagine cacao's place in the spiritual realm, as well as to the profound changes that have unsettled it. At the heart of this tale, Don Teul's story of how the thunderers blessed cacao encapsulates the sacred nature of cacao in traditional cosmology. For the Mopan, cacao was thought of as a sacred food, blessed by the gods as an instrument of sociality both in heaven and on earth. At the same time, both corn and cacao were linked together through the sacred rituals of planting, with cacao drinking at the culmination of collective labor to seal the participants together through shared feasting. As two of the most important foods in Mopan culinary cosmology, cacao and corn were both thought of as "god food." Cacao's status as a god food is given as the reason for both its productivity and for its role in creation of social relations, at the same time explaining why its close cousin *balamte* (*T. bicolor*) is largely ignored. Mopan

elders say that when *chaacs* drink cacao when they go together to make their milpas, they are "all of one mind". Working together and ritually eating and drinking together enacts the nexus of social, natural and supernatural sociality.

On another level, Juan's admonishment of his father's interest in the old myths points to the growing ambivalence among many Mopan about the sacredness of cacao. While Don Teul's story of the Thunderers provides exegesis for the sacred nature of cacao, the story's subtext points to the ways in which the Old Ways are increasingly threatened and contested. The story begins with a trip over the hill to the more "traditional" Mopan village of Santa Cruz where an old man still tells the story of cacao. In contrast, the more "modern" villagers of San Jose have largely disavowed the old beliefs and have resisted passing on these stories to the next generations for fear of appearing "backwards." In addition to the contrast between villages, new divisions have arisen between those Mopan who maintain syncretic Maya-Catholic beliefs and new Protestant converts who reject the old ways as mixed minded idol worship. Finally, the encounter speaks to the growing rift between generations. The "old heads" like Don Teul remember a time when the Mopan were "all of one mind" and Maya-Catholic beliefs were valued as the organizing principles of the cosmos. Pablo represents villagers who came of age in the fractious era of conversion. Although Pablo initiates the adventure to hear the story of cacao, he claims his interest is merely for the purpose of cultural heritage, not one of true "belief." In contrast, young Mopan like Juan are from a generation that grew up in Protestant households and see the old ways as dangerous temptations that should be forgotten in the creation of modernity.

Cacao lies at the nexus of these competing interpretations and meanings. In this chapter, I explore the social impact of Protestant conversion among the Mopan Maya. Since the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century there has been an explosion of Protestant conversion among indigenous people of Central and South America (Martin 1990; Robbins 2004b p 1141; Sexton 1978). This major demographic shift in formerly Catholic populations parallels an increasing interest by the anthropology of religion into broader inquiries into Protestant religious conversion and missionization (see Hefner 1993; Comoraff & Comaroff 1993; Robbins 2004b p 1140). Robbins contends that the anthropological study of Christianity, and Protestantism in particular, had been neglected because of the "seemingly 'ready-at-hand', familiar nature of the religion," creating Protestantism as a liminal subject which is "at once too similar and too different to be easily amenable to study" (Robbins p 2004 1141). An ethnographic examination of indigenous conversion challenges the taken for granted nature of Protestantism by allowing for a critical engagement with the local politics and meanings of conversion.

Throughout this discussion of cacao and Mopan conversion, I explore how Protestantism destabilizes the social and spiritual relations of *Kustumbre*, attempting to replace local cosmologies with those of western modernity. In society, Protestantism creates an individual ethos that sunders the bonds of collectivity organizing village life, creating a major source of tension between members of rival denominations in Southern Belize's Maya communities. In the following chapter, I explore how Protestantism promotes an environmental ethos which disenchants the spiritual nature of the traditional Mopan cosmology as superstitious fetishism. The Protestant demystification of nature ruptures the sociality between people and nature spirits by condemning these practices as idol worship. I argue that Protestantism's emphasis on individualism and the demystification of nature are parallel processes, which have the same effect of rupturing the sociality of cacao within the community and between humans and the gods.

### The Coming of Protestantism to San Jose

When I was a boy, the whole village was in the Catholic Church. That is because in those times, we only had one church, one village, one faith. (Thomas)

Prior to the coming of Protestant missionaries in the 1970s, the people of San Jose say that the community was "all of one mind" together in religious life of indigenous Catholicism. The syncretic religion of the "old ways" combined the high tradition of Catholic Mass with the lay religion which drew on ancient Maya cosmology. Over the last four decades, the Mopan of San Jose have undergone a second religious conversion in the form of Protestant evangelism. My neighbor Thomas recalled how Protestantism had come to the village when he was a boy by saying...

Before 1980 or so, all of my family is Catholic. But then the other religions came. First was the Nazarenes, then the Mennonites, then the Pentecostal and now the Baptist. And now people in the village change every time a new church opens up. For some, they leave their church when they quarrel with the other members. And some just go back and forth, wherever there is something interesting going on so that now they have been baptized in three or four churches. Then some just quit churches all together, and just stay at home on Sunday. (Thomas)

Protestant conversion among the Mopan of Belize is part of a wider Evangelical movement that swept through Maya communities in Guatemala and Mexico in the latter half of the 20th century (Cook 1997: p 127; Stroll 1982; Schackt 1986; Watanabe 1992). Despite the fact that the Mopan identified

themselves as *Kristianos*<sup>76</sup> as their primarily self-identifier, Protestant missionaries felt that the indigenous Catholic beliefs were merely a façade for what they saw as paganism. This supposed fetishism made the Maya ideal targets for conversion. One Bible translator expressed this sentiment, remembering...

The Catholics may have thought the Indians were faithful followers of their church, but the facts are that the people followed Christo-paganism. In other words, they just incorporated their old system with a Catholic facade. I heard once a priest telling the people in a procession that the "saints" they were carrying around were not gods, but the Maya strongly maintained otherwise. Once when I asked one of the men why they used Catholic images as they were obviously practicing their old religion, the man replied. "Oh, we used to have old things to worship, but the Catholic ones are much prettier!" (Ulrich – Personal Communication 2010)

In the late colonial era, Protestant missionaries began to move to British Honduras in large numbers enticed by the relatively stable, accommodating government and its multicultural population (Steinberg 2002; p 96). Although during much of 1970's-80's Latin America was caught in communist upheaval and counterrevolutionary military aggression, Belize underwent a peaceful de-colonization and was known to show generosity towards missionaries in the form of land grants (*ibid*). Additionally, white missionaries could easily integrate with the hodgepodge of Euro-American expats. Furthermore, the English colonial language allowed for missionary activity by lay church members with no foreign language skills. These factors helped make indigenous villages in Toledo an appealing target of conversion by Protestant missionaries of competing sects. The new religious competition between sects has created a sense of choice in a veritable marketplace of churches, as missionaries "empower" villagers to choose their religious affiliations based on individual faith. At the same time, local people exercise agency in conversion by choosing their religious affiliation for local (and often practical) reasons, rather than because of theological differences.

The Protestant missionaries who worked among the Belize Maya were predominantly of US origins and originally associated with the Nazarene church. Nazarene missionaries Rev. Paul and Charlotte Beals made their first forays into southern Belize in 1962. To help convert the Belizean Maya, Nazarene missionaries invited indigenous preachers from Guatemala "to help launch evangelism in the remote villages". Native preachers helped make the foreign concepts of Protestants relevant within a distinctly indigenous cultural context (see Schackt 1986 Page 92-93). They held open-air services in

http://old.engagemagazine.com/Magazine-Content/Articles/June-2011/New-Day-in-Belize.html.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>76</sup> The Mopan commonly identify themselves as *Kristiano* (Christian) even more than the term "Mopan."

<sup>&</sup>quot;Kristiano" literally translates as "Christians" but more accurately "Mopan humans".

remote communities with battery powered phonographs playing audio recordings of the scriptures and distributed Q'eqchi' language Bibles and songbooks.<sup>78</sup> These early forays were followed in 1978 by more sustained missionary expeditions by Reverend Tom Pound<sup>79</sup> and Missionary Bible translators, Matt and Rosemary Ulrich, who first translated the New Testament into Mopan. In our conversations, Rosemary Ulrich described the circumstances that led to their missionary translation work among the Belizean Mopan.

The first time we went to Belize was because we had been invited by the reverend Tom Pound. We had almost finished the entire first draft of the Mopan Maya New Testament in Guatemala by the time we were invited over to Belize. Because of the tremendous interest of the Mopanes of Belize, we delayed publishing the New Testament done in San Luis, Peten to go over the whole thing with informants from Belize.

Protestant missionaries initially found success in the Q'eqchi' Maya villages and within a few years, Protestant revival had spread to Mopan areas of Toledo as well. Rosemary Ulrich described the evangelistic furor, which spread throughout the Mopan communities, saying...

Before we went to Belize there had been a "grass roots" movement among the Q'eqchi' to leave their old ways and become evangelical Christians. The Mopans were quite impressed in that they had left their former drunken lifestyle and seemed ecstatic about being true Christians. Unfortunately, at that time none of the missionaries there had learned Mopan so we were the very first ones to explain what God had in store for them in conversions. They lapped it all up enthusiastically. (Ulrich)

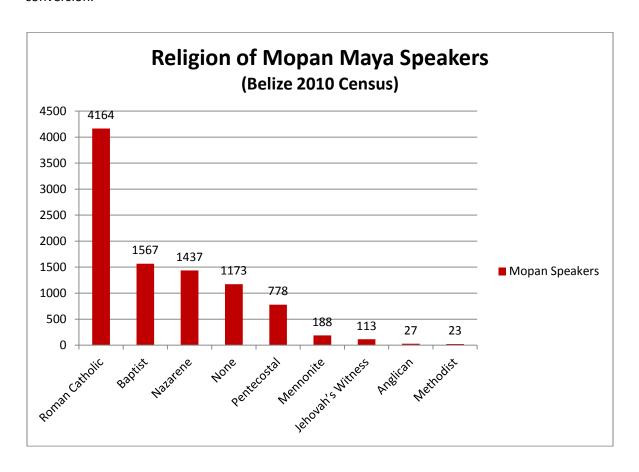
These missionaries were soon joined by a variety of other Protestant denominations and now southern Belize has at least eight missionary denominations who have established churches among the Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya: Southern Baptist, Nazarene, Church of Christ, Jehovah Witness, Pentecostal, Methodists, Mennonites, and Presbyterian. Justino remembered how the number of churches in the village had grown over his lifetime...

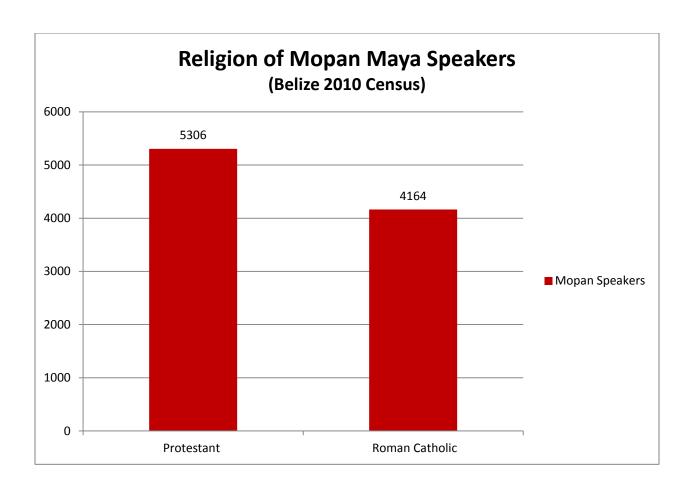
It actually started in the mid 1970s, when I was still in school. Before then, we only had the Catholic Church here in the village. In 1974 the Nazarene church came with the Rev. Tom Pound. They used to have their service and they showed a movie of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ outside the teacher's house at night. Soon after that, they started to build the Nazarene Church. And a lot of families joined that church and so it has gone ever since. Now we have six different churches in San Jose where we only have a population of about 1,000 and only 130/140 families. (Justino)

the Belizean Maya.

The Q'eqchi' of Guatemala had been missionized by Protestants for a number years before the Mopan and Q'eqchi' Guatemalan converts were some of the first indigenous Protestant missionaries in British Honduras.
 Although now retired, Rev. Tom Pound has left a legacy of mission work in Belize with his son Darin elected Nazarene Belize District Superintendent in 2010 and his niece Rebecca engaging in ongoing mission work among

The steady construction of new churches in Belizean Maya communities is a physical testament and daily reminder of the growing religious diversity. And accompanying these new church buildings was a flood of Bibles, religious literature, medicine, trade goods and other material artifacts of conversion.





## The Materiality of Conversion

Protestant missionaries brought the Belizean Maya not only the "Good News," but also brought tangible benefits to those who left behind the old religion and converted. Many Mopan saw missionaries, and the trade goods they brought, as symbols of modernity and progress. Converts to Protestantism gained powerful allies in the foreign missionaries that allowed them to "better their general situations" by providing access to new economic and social opportunities (Schackt 1986 Page4, 165). Missionaries themselves are aware that "converts may have other than purely spiritual reasons for joining a new church or religious movement" (Schackt 1986 Page 4; Saler 1965). Protestant missionary groups were able to make large inroads into Belizean Maya communities not only because of they offered a religious alternative, but also because they could provide goods and services in lieu of the Belizean government in an era of neo-liberal retreat of government services (Steinberg 2002; 96; see Piot 2010). Missionaries were often the primary source of "modern" medical assistance to remote villagers and many converts with health problems are drawn to Protestantism in search of help for physical afflictions (Dow 2005: p 8). This influx of western medicine was accompanied by theology which debased shamans as witch doctors or evil sorcerers and vilified the use of cacao in healing ceremonies.

Along with medicine and trade goods, missionaries also brought with them a large number of religious texts. Protestant ideology emphasizes the importance of text as the final arbitrator of truth, rather than experience or cultural tradition. Protestant missionaries emphasize the importance of written scriptures as a means to liberate unbelievers from their fetishism of the material world (Keane 2007). When I asked one Protestant cacao farmer what had caused him to leave the Catholic Church, he replied that he had been convinced by finally being able to read the Bible for himself. He remembered...

In the Catholic Church, the people don't understand what the Bible really says. That is because the priest used to just come and preach to us in English without translating. That's why the Catholics are easily confused about what they should and should not do. But after that the missionaries came, they started to teach us how to read the Bible in English, so that is how we begin to understand the Truth (Felipe)

While many of the San Jose Mopan lack a high level of literacy, the valorization of text in Protestant ideology has created a demand for religious books in the village which international missionary groups have been eager to fill. Beginning in the 1970s, missionary Bible translators began to produce New Testaments in Mopan. Today the Mopan of San Jose have Bibles in at least five languages: Mopan, Q'eqchi', English, Yucatec and Spanish. In addition, Bibles are joined by countless supplemental writings such as Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya language songbooks as well as English language publications such as the Jehovah's Witness "Watchtower" magazines (in English).

Today, the people of San Jose have been inundated with a flood of non-local religious texts so that these materials can be found in nearly every home in the village, whether Protestant or Catholic. In recent years, Mopan Catholics have now also begun to adopt textual artifacts as a counterargument to Protestant claims of fetishism. The increase in religious books and magazines has led to an increase in literacy in Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya, as often these texts are the first available written materials in the indigenous language. Through the weekly performance of the written scriptures in church, many Belizean Maya have experienced "literature in their own language for the first time" (Schackt 1986 Page 145, 166).

The influx of imported Protestant texts into the community has undermined *Kustumbre* by leading converts to question traditional authority of the Old Ways. Protestant doctrine locates spiritual authority in Biblical text, rather than in appeals to "*Kustumbre*" (tradition) or the holy words of the Catholic priests. The consistency of textual doctrine allows for individual relationships and interpretation of the Word, even as it bureaucratically standardizes faith within its universalist umbrella. In this way, Mopan Protestants affirm individual Truth by reference to universal scriptures, rather than collective experience rooted in local experience.

Mopan Protestants rely not only on the Bible for divine guidance but also as a symbol of modern individual identity. Individuals can now own a personal copy of the Bible in a variety of different translations as a matter of personal preference. Although Protestant ideology seeks to employ universal texts as means to vanquish local fetishism, for the Mopan of San Jose, these texts themselves have become fetishized objects of modernity.

The Protestant valorization of text has been reinforced by factors such as increased education and higher rates of literacy work in Mopan communities which work in concert to undermine the authority of elders and *Kustumbre*. As recently as the 1980s, very few people from San Jose had formal education beyond the village Roman Catholic primary school. In recent years, there been a dramatic increase in the expansion of high school opportunities for Mopan teenagers. The influx of cash into Maya villages from cacao, wage labor and remittances has given entrepreneurial households the means to "invest" in the education of their children (see chapter 8) (Wilk 1997). This increase in economic means has been in conjunction with better road access between remote villages as well as an expansion in the total number of high schools in the district. In high school, literacy and text are also valorized as universal truths, though from academic or scientific authority, rather than spiritual. Teachers (often from other parts of the country or from different ethnic groups) take the place of elders in the transmission of knowledge, replacing the oral tradition of *Kustumbre* with universal textual truth.

## Protestant Habitus, the Creation of a New Identity and the Rise of Individualism

Protestant conversion not only changes material practices, but also seeks to transform perceptions of self and society. The values of western modernity such as individualism, Weberian business ethic as religious morality, bodily comportment, time, and relations to nature are deeply embedded into the morality of Protestantism and converts take on a whole ideological package of a new "way of living." Protestant churches instill ideological "codes of conduct and orientations toward the everyday that provide a virtual blueprint for disciplining" modern subjects/citizens (Piot 2010 page 55).

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>80</sup> Education has also become an increasingly important product of development and "the issue of cheaper and more convenient high school education has also become an important political cause since the mid-1990s" (Ausdal 2008 p 586). With each passing year, school has become less of a luxury and seen as more necessary. Increased educational opportunities at the high school level are a major expense for the Mopan of San Jose and the source of significant out migration by adults seeking wage labor to pay for their children's education (see chapter 8). School expenses such as "tuition, board, clothing, and books" can often take more than half of a family's income (Wilk 1997 p 168). Despite the high cost and the distance from the village, Mopan parents increasingly value high school education so that their children can have "opportunities to gain off-farm employment" in the district capital of Punta Gorda or on one of the tourist resorts on Belize's Cayes (Ausdal 2008 p 586).

For Mopan converts, Protestant conversion is both a marker of a modern self identity as well as a concrete step taken to leave the past behind in the name of progress. Those exposed to the Missionaries' modernizing ideologies blame the 'backwardness' and 'ignorance' of village life "for all the social and economic problems" holding them back from progress (Faust 1999 Page 160). In this value system, the traditions of *Kustumbre* are denigrated as backwards and un-modern while Protestantism is constructed as "materially and culturally progressive, and therefore desirable," (Schackt 1986 Page 5).

One of the strong "pull" factors for Mopan Protestant conversion was the chance to fashion a new modern identity as "born again." This conversion is not only spiritual, but converts believe they have been culturally "born again" as well. Many Mopan use Protestant conversion as a means to escape what they see as a conservative and tradition-laden Catholicism (see Redfield 1964). Many Mopan, especially among the young, find traditional milpa agriculture and the system of Maya-Catholic rituals to be "economically and socially constraining" (Steinberg 2002: p 98). Instead, they turn to Protestantism and find "the message of a new identity that embraces individual prosperity modeled after the United States very appealing" (Steinberg 2002: p 98). These young people believe that by shedding the cultural (religious) baggage of the traditional older generations, "they can enter an economic and social world not accessible to their parents" (*ibid*).

One of the primary ways that Protestant ideology positions itself as "modern" is through the promotion of Western values, most notably in the ideology of religious individualism. In contrast to the communal spirit of Catholic-Maya rituals, both Weber (1905) and Keane (2007) see individual values as deeply embedded in Protestant ideology. For Dumont, Protestantism helps to create individual subjecthood by contextualizing salvation in the relationship between individual sinners and God unmediated by society, priests or hierarchy. The rise of this autonomous soul interrelation with the divine is "the paradigm of 'the independent, autonomous, and thus essentially non-social moral being who carries our [the west's] paramount values'" (Dumont 1986, p. 25; Robbins 2004b p 1147). This nascent/emerging religious individuality in Mopan Protestantism is in marked contrast to the "old ways" of *Kustumbre*, which emphasized the collective rituals of religious solidarity such as fiestas for the saints, the consecration of houses and farms and life cycle rituals. The collective enactment of these social rituals engendered a horizontal spirit of religious *communitas* between members of the community and vertical relations of respect between humans and the supernatural.

Protestant individualism shifts obligations away from social bonds so that the individual's relationship with God takes precedence over obligations to the religious life of the community (see Burridge 1973; Robbins 2004b p 1147-1148). For the Mopan Protestants, their new faith is expressed as

a personal conversion and individual "belief" in the search for spiritual truth. One of the clearest expressions of Protestant individualization is through models of speech which privilege the "individual subject as the moral point of origin of meaning," rather than the collective spiritual health of the religious community (Robbins 2004b p 1147; see Keane 2007). In this atomistic paradigm, individuals are responsible to God alone as the arbiter of sincerity and truth in contrast to Mopan *Kustumbre* which values trust/obedience to the wisdom of the ancestors (see Danziger 2013). Protestantism emphasizes the individual's relationship to Jesus as the basis of salvation, rather than through collective spiritual actions, such as cacao offerings. While Protestant denominations valorize social expressions of religious affiliation such as church attendance, marriage and baptism, the holism of these collective acts is subsumed beneath the ultimate goal of individual salvation.

The rise of an individual ethos in Protestants has transformed Mopan perceptions not only of the self, but of society as well. For Protestants in San Jose, traditional Mopan conceptions of "limited good" have been replaced by a notion of unbounded individual possibility. In the holism of Kustumbre, Mopan society was imagined as a zero-sum universe of both tangible and intangible "goods" in which over-consumption by any part reduced the absolute amount for the whole. The monopolization of culturally scarce resources was disciplined through the fear of *obia / pulyah* (witchcraft), gossip and physical violence ranging from burning some one's house down to murderous vengeance. The introduction of Protestant ideology has upended the holism of traditional society by valorizing individuals as disconnected from the fates of their neighbors. Protestant individualism has inspired a Weberian capitalist ethic among many converts who now desire economic development. (see Annis 1987; Bowen 1996; Britnall 1979; Cavalcanti 1995; Dow 2005 p 833; Gooren 2002; Martin 1990; Sexton 1978).<sup>83</sup> Protestant values advocate market-oriented agriculture and individualism while obstructing collective rituals, positioning the theology of the mountain spirits as antithetical to economic development. I argue that the emergence of Protestant individualism helps set the stage for local

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>81</sup> The emphasis on belief over ritual practice and Protestant theology has been absorbed by classic theories of the anthropology of religion, by privileging the subjective meaning of rituals and internalized representations over somatic experience (Robbins 2004b p 1142; see Asad 1993; Geertz 1973).

While most of the literature on the "anthropology of Protestantism" is concerned with conversion to Protestantism from non-Christian/indigenous religions (often in the Pacific), the conversion of the Mopan offers an alternative context in which the majority of the population has converted the population has converted to Protestantism from the Catholicism brought by the Spanish conquistadors (conversion to Protestantism within Christianity). This difference allows the Mopan case to provide a more focused look at the changes brought about by Protestant conversion, rather than a study of Christian conversion more generally.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> Weberian notions of Protestant individualism have been used to justify colonial paternalism by explaining "the rise of the West by claiming that Westerners (chiefly Protestant Westerners) were possessed by a high need for achievement and rationality" (Chirot and Hall 1982; see McClelland 1967; Hagen 1962).

acceptance of cacao development projects by transforming moral realities about proper social and spiritual relations.

# **Conversion and Social Fragmentation**

While the Catholic Church still occupies the central hilltop of San Jose village, its pews are no longer full like they once were. Protestantism has a strong appeal for many of the Mopan and it seems that each year a few more villagers drift from the orbit of the Catholic Church into various Protestant churches. Many villagers welcomed Protestant missionaries when they arrived and within a decade, most Belizean Maya communities had become religiously divided between Catholic and multiple Protestant churches. While a number of important families in the village still consider themselves Catholic, more than half of the villagers in San Jose now claim allegiance to one of the Protestant denominations and there are now six Protestant churches active in San Jose. Sunday morning in the village is a lively time with music and singing emanating from the open doors and windows, as each congregation attempts to drown out the others in a contest for the souls of San Jose. This trend is not limited to San Jose and Protestant churches now thrive throughout the Maya region of southern Belize.

When Protestant missionaries first arrived in southern Belize, their activities were initially not seen as a threat to the existing system of *Kustumbre* and Folk Catholicism. Rather than the source of a competing ideology, the church services held by missionaries were seen as merely amusing distractions from the repetition of village life. For the villagers, Protestant revivals were a spectacle of fiery preachers, new musical instruments, film projectors and multimedia (Schackt 1986 Page 165). Protestant churches emphasize these religious innovations in their proselyting efforts by distributing imported sectarian literature to non-members and by playing amplified worship music loudly for non-church goers to hear. These tangible implements of American-style Protestantism have come to symbolize modern religion in San Jose and the "newness" and excitement of Protestant church is a major draw for Mopan converts.

While Protestant churches initially drew crowds with their novel style, religious pluralism soon became a major source of contention and strife in Belizean Maya communities. The experience of conversion is often spoken about by anthropologist and natives alike in tropes of rupture from the past and the emergence of the modern individuality (Meyer 1998; Engelke 2006; Keller 2005; Keane 2007; Robbins 2004 p 1144; ). Common narratives/themes in Protestant Christianity such as the incarnation, personal conversion, and the sometimes imminent apocalypse encourages converts to think about their own lives in terms of rupture and discontinuity (see Robbins 2004b p 1144). Protestantism encourages

converts to undergo a 'complete break with the past' and set aside customary forms of social authority and truth (Meyer 1998; Robbins 2004b p 1143). This break with the past upends existing norms of social organization and contributes to decline of existing patterns of divinely sanctioned obligations, altering social relationships in ways that free individuals to participate more fully in emerging in market integration and other institutions of modernity (see Robbins 2004b p 1148-9; Meyer 1998; van Dijk 1998, cf. Annis 1987).

Protestant missionaries and Mopan converts alike claim that there is a fundamental incompatibility between these ideological systems and that the Mopan must reject the superstitions of *Kustumbre* in order to have a new life with Jesus. Protestant ideologies challenge the existing Catholic hierarchy and traditional forms of cultural knowledge embodied in the rule of the gerontocracy, such as ritual offerings of cacao. Protestants accused the Catholic Church of "paganism," because of the set of compromises they had made over the years with local religion (Piot 2010 p 104). Unlike the hybridity of Maya-Catholic *Kustumbre*, Protestantism is less tolerant of difference and more committed to religious and cultural purity (see Piot 2010 page 171).

As Protestant converts began blatantly challenging the received wisdom of *Kustumbre* controversy developed and soon the new churches became "the focus of the major social divisions within the community" (Faust 1999 Page 12; Schackt 1986 Page 94). The shift from religious unity to many competing sects has divided the Mopan both religiously and socially, causing "polarization and community factionalism" (Verbeeck 1998 p 14). Protestant conversion often began first in households at the margins of the community, with those left out of the socio-religious core of the village. This nucleus of Belizean Maya Protestantism thrived because it "could serve the new group as a focus for integration" while also providing "a language for dissatisfied elements" to critique the existing social order (Schackt 1986 Page 5, 165; see Nash 1960). Although early Protestant converts were often marginalized members of the community, soon religious conversion spread and became widespread thought the region. In the span of a few years, religious affiliations quickly cross cut existing social segmentations of lineage and neighborhood and became of "dominant importance over all other formal interpersonal relationships" (Schackt 1986 Page 97).

Conversion most often occurs at the level of the nuclear family, with husbands and wives adhering to the same faith and "any decision about conversion always appeared to entail a change of religious status for whole nuclear family units" (Schackt 1986 Page 97). Beyond the immediate household though, conversion cut across existing social ties in community. In the aftermath of conversion, close kin and compadres ended up estranged on opposite sides of religious fault lines,

shattering the bonds of hospitality and sociality (see Schackt 1986 Page 97, 99). Despite the draw of Protestantism, this spiritual/cultural transformation is risky. Those that convert to Protestantism and shun traditional village hierarchy are in danger of being exiled by Catholic family members and alienated from non-Protestants in the village. As Protestant churches have proliferated across the Maya villages of Belize in recent decades, many Catholics have been left uneasy by the divisions in the community.

For Catholics, religious schism is an affront to Christian unity. Heterodoxy threatens the oneness of God and is "understood as a breach of social solidarity" (Schackt 1986 Page 6-7). Those with positions of traditional authority or prestige are more likely to reject or feel threatened Protestant incursions. They regard religious divisions as indicative of moral decay and consider it as "an anomaly that so many church buildings were to be found in the same community" (Schackt 1986 Page 151). In response to Catholic criticism, Protestants claim that the Catholic Church is "un-Christian" and has been corrupted by the pagan superstition of Kustumbre. Delegitimized of its authority, Protestants reject the authority of the Catholic Church. Instead, they claim that religious affiliation is a personal choice dictated by individual faith and that the different denominations/sects are just different variations of Kristianos (Christians).

# Religious Schism and the Fracturing of Social Life (Collective Labor and *Cargos*)

In the wake of conversion, religious affiliation became the preeminent fault line of widening social factionalism<sup>84</sup> in Mopan communities. Religious schism is expressed in the everyday politics of sociality, with one of the most striking examples being the refusal of hospitality by converts from their Catholic neighbors. Some Protestants also refuse to accept food and drink from their Catholic neighbors. They fear "bodily contagion" and spiritual corruption from literally embodying the Old Ways by ingesting food sacrificed to idols (see Piot 2010 page 58). My Catholic neighbor expressed frustration at the Mopan Jehovah's Witness proselytizers in the village who refused her hospitality...

Sometimes the Jehovah's Witnesses come by to visit so they can talk to you about Jesus, the Devil and heaven. Last time they came to talk to me, I made them food and gave it to them. But the Jehovah told me that he didn't want to eat the food made by other people, only the food that the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> The pattern of community factionalism is widespread in Mesoamerica, with factions appearing along a variety of differences including age, wealth, economic activities, neighborhood, religion and political affiliation (see Foster 1965, Lewis 1960, Re Cruz 1996; Whyte and Alberti 1976). While these intra-group tensions are rooted in local (and often very personal) conflicts, community-based struggles can be tightly intertwined with global sources of monetary and social power, such as competing denominations and missionary organization (Belsky 1999, Castillo Cocom 2005, Moberg 1992; Steinberg 2002).

Jehovah's make. Then I gave them the cacao for drinking. But they said, "Sorry, I don't like that drink." because they don't like to drink the drink made by other people. That is why you see the Jehovah carry their own water.

After that, I get vexed at the Jehovah's for wasting my food. I told them "I just wasted my cacao on you. Suppose I offered you the last of what I had and you refused?

All of the Jehovah's Witness are like that. The Jehovah's don't want share with you! They won't take your food and drink! He's not going give you the drink or the food. That's why I am afraid of those Jehovah's and don't want to see them again. (Andrea)

The refusal of hospitality by the Jehovah's Witness speaks to larger issues of social fragmentation brought about by Protestant Conversion. As community members convert, the social bonds of worshiping together are broken.

On a wider community level, one of the most prominent expressions of factionalism caused by Protestantism has been the disruption of collective labor work groups. The religious pluralism brought by the influx of Protestant churches has proven "incompatible with the traditional socio-political institutions of Maya society" (Schackt 1986). This process has disarticulated the "traditional religious-political institutional frameworks," and leading more generally to the "ultimate deterioration of corporate community structures in this whole area" (Schackt 1986 Page 7). Within this atmosphere of religious schism, traditional patterns of labor exchange and the civil-religious hierarchy of the *cargo* system are "beginning to "come apart at the seams" under the impact of recent changes" (Gregory 1972; Schackt 1986 Page 7, 103).

In many communities, religious affiliation caused a major rift as Catholics and Protestants refused to work together for events such as agriculture and house building. Decades later, many people in San Jose still remembered how religious pluralism soon broke apart the ties of collective labor....

There was a very severe division between the families here when the missionaries came in 1974/75. People became members of the Nazarene church because they believe they are perfect and they don't want to associate with the Catholic anymore. Even if they are brothers, they just completely separate themselves. At that time there was a whole lot of division that took place and people didn't want to talk with each other (between the sects). So the Nazarene's started helping each other in working in planting their farms and building houses (Justino)

The given reason for this schism was that Protestants objected to labor on Sundays as a day of rest, and refused to participate in any labor exchanges on this day (Schackt 1986 Page 95). A missionary recounted her perspective on these events, saying...

As you know, the Mopanes share labor in planting so if a man invited 10 others to help him plant on a certain day, he was obligated to give each of them a day of labor planting when each person to whom he was indebted decided. This worked out very well until some of the men became Evangelical

Christians. The new converts felt it was wrong to work on Sunday or whatever day the believers in his group had decided to meet. He was, however obligated to work on Sunday as before. In Belize this is why there are several villages made up of entirely Evangelical Christians. Now when they help a neighbor, they all know that nobody will oblige them to work on Sunday or whenever they worship. (Ulrich)

This refusal was in direct violation to the obligatory nature of labor repayment. Even as the community has fractured into competing work groups affiliated with different Christian sects, this has not spelled the end of collective work. Rather, collective labor remains a major part of social life, but now exchanges are made primarily between families who attend the same church. The ties of religion now overshadow "personal kinship and compadrazgo networks so that today, Catholics and Protestants almost never worked together" in labor exchanges (Schackt 1986 Page 53, 98).

Just as religious schism has disrupted interpersonal labor exchange, the community-wide Fagina has suffered a similar fate. In the days before the coming of the Protestant missionaries, every man in the community had a common duty to donate his time and labor to the maintenance of the common areas. This obligation was mandatory and refusal to participate was seen as a breach of community solidarity that placed excess burdens on the rest to make up the difference (Schackt 1986 p 94). With the coming of religious differences, Protestants refused to participate in *fagina* (village collective labor) work on Sundays or to help with the upkeep of the Catholic Church. Without full community participation, the institution of the *fagina* was abandoned in many villages throughout the region for many decades. Only in recent years with the emergence of an indigenous "cultural revival" throughout southern Belize has the *fagina* been resurrected. For many the reemerging *fagina* is no longer a sacred obligation, but rather an enactment of ethnic identity and cultural heritage (see chapter 8).

The social schism caused by religious pluralism has not only destabilized patterns of collective labor exchange, but also broke apart the socio-religious *cargo* system as well. Protestant missionaries have often blamed the *cargo* system for the spiritual and economic misery in Maya communities, condemning religious brotherhoods as a source of alcoholic vice and a squandering of economic resources (see Dow 2005 839; Stroll 1982). Protestants condemn the religious consumption of alcohol (such as rum and corn beer – *chicha* or *balche*) during Catholic fiestas, *cargo* brotherhoods and dances. Converts claim that these displays are often an excuse for drunken excess, rather than a means to spiritual enlightenment.

Alcoholism is a prevalent problem and is often seen by outsiders as "undoubtedly the most serious source of degradation, financial and physical, to the modern Maya" (Thompson 1930 p 85). As a powerful "hot" substance, alcohol played an important role in traditional Mopan religious life, so that

"drunkenness is deemed the natural condition of a man during any feast, and not in the slightest degree a cause for shame" (Thompson 1930 p 85). Protestant missionary and Bible translator, Rosemary Ulrich, remembers the displays of drunkenness that accompanied many Mopan fiestas...

When the day came for the fiesta of their particular saint, the male members of each group would gather for a preparatory nine days and then some days afterwards to drink alcoholic beverages. No wonder every single man in San Luis had become an alcoholic because of their old religious practices. They also served wine at weddings and at Christmas, but not too many folks got too drunk at weddings. At Christmas some of the San Luis women would partake of the wine, but they were rarely drunk. This was not so for folks out in the country who made a lot of corn beer. Our house was on one of the main trails and we would often see country folks, both men and women drunk and passed out. (Ulrich)

Despite the acceptance of public intoxication during fiestas, it also was considered socially dangerous as alcohol has the potential to inflame old personal quarrels with the potential to end in violence (Thompson 1930 p 84-85). By the early 1970's, dirt roads had begun to reach remote Mopan villages, bringing in new trade goods which replaced homemade alternatives. This was especially true with the introduction of rum which began to replace homemade corn beer at fiestas. While cacao had previously been used to calm tempers from "hot" alcohol, the introduction of store bought strong liquor (which was much more potent than corn beer), upset this balance. The availability of liquor at fiestas increased incidents of drunkenness and fighting, so that by the 1970s, fiesta sponsors were required to hire policemen to keep order at these religious festivals (Danziger 2001 p 23).

Mopan women complain bitterly about the increase in men's drunkenness as the cause of domestic abuse and poverty (McClusky 2001). Married women suffering from the negative repercussions of their husbands' alcoholism are often inclined to convert to Protestantism in the hope that their husbands will follow suit (see Chesnut 1997; Hallum 2003: 169; Dow 2005:p8). This domestic pressure can be very effective. As Rosemary Ulrich remembered...

It was their spiritual conversion, which freed them from old taboos and left them free to leave the alcoholism associated with their old Cristo-paganism. They no longer have the problems of alcoholism associated with the cofradias (religious brotherhoods or Cargos) where the men involved drank intoxicating beverages for days before and after the day of the particular saint god, which they care for. When so much family resources were no longer eliminated by making or buying alcoholic beverages, the families were much happier, children better fed and all had better clothing. (Ulrich)

Many Mopan women are drawn to Protestantism because it offers a moral critique of men's prestige behavior such as – "drinking, gambling, promiscuity" – as sinful (see Brusco 1993; Mariz & das Dores Campos Machado 1997; Smilde 2007, Robbins 2004b p 1148). Instead, Protestantism directs male time energy and money towards the domestic sphere by condemning "aggression, violence, pride,

and self-indulgence while providing positive reinforcement for peace-seeking, humility, and self-restraint" (Brusco 1993 p 148). Demonstrating control over one's consumption and pleasure becomes paramount to proclamations of faith in which inner salvation is expressed as outward bodily control (see Weber 1905).

Protestant conversion stories often center on a personal encounter with Jesus wherein the newly faithful was persuaded to abandon the sinful ways of vice (See Sexton and Woods 1977). During my time in San Jose, I heard numerous conversion stories from former "drunkie men" who credit a transformative encounter with Protestant Jesus who enabled them to finally break the chains of alcoholism after years of abuse and find a "new life" of sobriety. The "personal calling" that can help a drunk kick the habit after years of alcoholism is indicative of a larger emphasis on individualism in Protestant ideology.

With their conversion to Protestantism, many new converts have come to regard "the social obligation of ritual drinking as burdensome" and immoral (Schackt 1986 p 164). Protestant condemnation of alcoholism, and the drinking of alcohol more generally, has led many converts to boycott fiestas and traditional dances as a source of public drunkenness and immorality. At one fiesta I attended, a Catholic woman expressed her frustration at her Protestant neighbors saying...

The Protestant church people don't want to hear the marimba or harp music, and they don't want to dance. But they should not scold people who like to dance! God made that music! God told man how to make the harp and the marimba. (Andrea)

For many converts, the religious condemnation of ritual drinking is a motivating factor for many in their decision to leave the Catholic Church and "provided an excuse to remove one's resources of time and money" from the economic burdens of the *cargos* (Schackt 1986 p 164; see Dow 2005 p 839; Collier, Farias, Perez, and White 2000:35). In the past, *cargo* members were required to organize fiestas by contributing drinks, food and entertainment. With Protestant rejection of the *cargo* hierarchy, attendance at annual fiestas has declined. Protestantism became "a theology of liberation" for rejecting customary obligations of money and time that come with serving terms in various offices of the *cargos*, such as "*mayordomos* or joining dance groups" (Schackt 1986 p 164). The rejection of socio-religious obligations comes "at a time when a growing market for certain cash crops and new job opportunities made it seem that a person could make better use of his time than making flower decorations for communal religious celebrations" (Schackt 1986 Page 164).

As more villagers converted to Protestantism, many decline to serve in the religious majordomo hierarchy. The majordomo is a job that requires the maintenance of the Catholic Church and the

presentation of ritual offerings of cacao to "feed" the village saints. In contrast to the prestige and obligation previously associated with *cargos*, Protestant converts refused to participate in the "idol worship" of these religious offices, claiming they could "not stand as organizers of the same rituals which their own religion denied as meaningless" (Schackt 1986 p 94). Without the participation of Protestant community members in the sponsorship of fiestas, the remaining Catholics were forced to serve as majordomo or sponsors fiestas more frequently, causing economic hardship at the increasing expense of mounting these events.

At the same time as the religious hierarchy has withered, the civil offices of *cargo* have continued, although with declining authority. Conversion resulted in a separation of the religious hierarchy from the civil, with Protestants only participating in the "secular" community positions, if at all (Schackt 1986 Page 7, 164; Wilk 1997 Page 169). Although many Protestants agree in principle that it is possible to be appointed to serve in the civil hierarchy of the *Alcade* (mayor), in practice, their refusal to conduct the rituals associated with their office made it impossible for them to carry out their duties. While in the past the *Alcade* exercised his authority through the village police, a low level position in the civil hierarchy, their power base has been weakened by the religious schism. Many Protestants now reject the authority of traditional leaders such as the *Alcade*, who serves not only as the village mayor but also the leader of community rituals. Protestant police officers now challenge the orders given by the *Alcade* when they believe that the Alcade asks them to perform a service contradictory to their beliefs, such as punishing or fining villagers who refuse to participate in community service or rituals (see Schackt 1986 Page 95)

Unable to fully participate in civil life, Protestants increasingly turned to new forms of political representation. As the *cargo* system became more contentious and religiously problematic for Protestants, they increasingly participated in the new "Village Council" system established by the colonial government in the 1960s in an effort to replace the civil authority of the Alcade (Wilk 1997 Page 169). Even before the advent of Protestantism, the rise of the Village Council was beginning to upend the gerontocracy (rule by elders) in Mopan which community leadership was encompassed within a lifetime of civil-religious service (Gregory 1972). Village Councils are often composed of educated young men and increasingly women, who are thought of as better equipped to deal with outsiders than village elders (Gregory 1972; Wilk 1997 Page 169). A decade later, this questioning of elder's authority intensified as Protestant converts increasingly appropriate the new colonial governance structure of the Village Council to give political voice to their growing dissatisfaction with the traditional order of *Kustumbre*. Through conversion, Protestantism provides new impetus for the questioning of

traditional village authority, valorizing individual choice over community norms of *Kustumbre* which were previously regarded as indisputable. Debates over the basic tenants of *Kustumbre* normalizes "missionary interventions into the religious and cultural life of the community as part of the slippery slope of a 'long conversation" (Piot 2010 page 111; see Comaroff and Comaroff 1993).

# Pluralism and the Reinvigoration of Religious Life

Despite the religious fragmentation of the formerly unified Catholic-Maya community, the advent of competing Protestant sects has reinvigorated social and religious life for many Mopan in often surprising ways. The introduction of rival doctrines has provided the impetus for "a remarkable intensification of religious life in general" with the Belizean Maya much more conscious of "religious" life than ever before (Schackt 1986 Page 143). The proliferation of competing religion and their accompanying patterns of religious taboos has created a system of "totemic" difference for distinguishing groups in the community (see Lévi-Strauss' 1963, 1966). The contrasting behaviors and prohibitions of the various churches, (rather than strictly doctrinal differences) not only "provides a shorthand for differentiating the various churches from one another... but also permits the proliferation of that which is otherwise identical" (Piot 2010 page 106-107). While religious factionalism has sundered the religious holism of the community, it has also provided the "basis for extra-communal solidarity" (Schackt 1986 Page 166). With each community split into rival factions, ties between villages have grown stronger and allowed for the development of broad regional networks. Members of various sects will often invite/host members from neighboring sister churches of the same denomination to take part in revivals, collective labor and weddings. Over time, these repeated interactions have formed the basis of powerful regional factions.

Schism has also allowed for new opportunities for social prestige and positions of leadership. In the past, each person was expected to participate in the appropriate *cargo* position for their life stage, moving up a rigid ladder of hierarchy towards elder-hood. Now, even as participation in the *cargos* has declined, Protestant churches provide new leadership opportunities within the growing movement. Missionaries chose promising converts for Bible training at religious schools established in the Q'eqchi' areas of Guatemala, so they could lead their own churches as indigenous pastors and elders. In San Jose, Protestant schism has led to the multiplication of positions of religious authority that allow for social advancement and prestige in much the same way as the now defunct *cargo* system.

In response to the rise of indigenous Protestant lay preachers, Catholic priests also began to train lay *catechists* to lead their congregations in their own languages when the priest had duties

elsewhere in Southern Belize. These new social possibilities allowed new leadership roles to crystallize for both Catholics and Protestants as they increasingly "became more used to dealing with people of other cultural groups" (Schackt 1986 Page 166). At the same time, the indigenous preachers and *catechists* became more culturally self-reflexive as they "learned to argue and think about religion in relation to social and political relationships" (Schackt 1986 Page 166).

Protestantism's challenge to the spiritual supremacy of Maya-Catholic Kustumbre not only led to proliferation of new churches, but also to religious renewal in the Catholic Church as well. Before the coming of rival denominations, Maya-Catholicism was "a weak superstructure of poorly known religious doctrines erected on top of religious concepts more closely related to the ritual practices of the local 'community religion'" (Schackt 1986 Page 143). As converts streamed to the new Protestant churches, the Catholic Church increasingly began to position itself as "an ideological opponent of Protestantism." With more Catholics became exposed to the scriptures in their own language, "Catholic doctrine became a source for arguments against the claims of Protestant theology" (Schackt 1986 Page 143).

# The Secularization of Kustumbre: Culture Day and the Fiesta of San Jose

Today is San Jose day, not just Culture day. It's a big day for the patron saint of San Jose, that should be celebrated by the whole village, not just for the children. All the Catholics are supposed to get together and celebrate that day. Before, they would build a house for the saint and people would donate pork or beef for everyone to eat for free. They would invite people from five or six villages and hire a bus to bring them here. Then all the people would pray and dance out in the open for the saint.

But we have forgotten those things. Now we just have little children performing activities and games while people try to sell you things. (Thomas)

The rupture of ritual knowledge and practice has been accompanied by a general process of "secularization" of formerly sacred domains of life. Even as new religious opportunities have emerged for the Mopan, secularization has led to a "deterioration in the role of 'religion' in proving the major idiom for social integration" rupturing the sociality of religious holism (Schackt 1986 Page 143). Secularization is the process in which religion becomes disarticulated from its central place in social life. In contrast to previous religious holism, "religious groups may multiply" in secular society so that the existence of schism "ceases to be understood as anomalous or even important" (Schackt 1986 P 117). Secularization relegates the sacred from the public sphere to a private matter of individual choice as "people may convert and reconvert between various denominations and sects without thereby affecting the overall organization of society" (Schackt 1986 P 117). This fashioning of a division between the

"social" and the "religious" is central to modernity (Asad 2003). This can be seen clearly in the shift from "the Fiesta of San Jose" to the non-denominational "Children's Day" which has taken its place.

March 25<sup>th</sup> 2011, I attended the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Children's Day in San Jose. Formerly known as the Fiesta of San Jose, "Children's Day" is a cultural revivalist celebration of what it means to be Maya in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. March 25<sup>th</sup> was formerly a ritual-festival day to honor the patron saint of the village. During this fiesta, everyone in the village would gather together with offerings of food to pray and make offerings to the village saint for continued prosperity. Despite more than 30 years of celebration, the fiesta of San Jose was discontinued in the 90's because of religious conversion and the fear of dabbling with "mixed mindedness" in the things of the past. The celebration lay dormant until 2006 when it was revived as the secularized festival for "Children's Day."

Today, the formerly sacred character of the fiesta of San Jose is debased while some of the outward forms remain. Traditional marimba and harp music is played while children dance the *harana*. Children wear their traditional "cultural clothes" (*Indian nok'*) and participate in a series of "cultural competitions" shucking corn and splitting firewood.



Corn Shucking Contest at San Jose Children's Day 2011

Indigenous dance competitions are held, but the displays were secular and made no attempt at spirituality. Rather, they were displays of cultural pride. Though no offerings are presented to either the saints or to God, "Culture food" such as *caldo*, *boyo*, *ch'uuk wah* (*sweet tortillas*), and cacao drink is sold as a fundraiser for the school. The sale of cacao drink at Children's Day points to the broader desacralization and commoditization of cacao. Although a formerly obligatory component of social feasting and spiritual offerings which formed the heart of the Fiesta, now Protestant denigration of the sacred character of cacao has relegated it to a cultural "tradition" devoid of its supernatural essences and now ripe for commoditization. One cacao farmer explained how conversion led to this process...

My old parents started to teach me about the secrets of cacao, but when I converted to the Nazarenes, I put those things out of my mind. Now people just use it for the money and for the drink. Now they don't do anything sacred with it anymore (Lucas)

While the transformation of the sacred fiesta of San Jose into the harmless tradition of "Children's Day" allows for the reintegration of the social community after religious schism, "it does so at a price, for it reduces it to a type of play and renders it marginal alongside 'real' religion (Christianity)" (Piot 2010 page 112; see Schackt 1986 Page 165). The desacralization of cacao and other manifestations of *Kustumbre* is part of a larger impulse by "modern" Mopan converts to render divisive *Kustumbre* into an unthreatening diversion which for the entire community, as a means to circumvent the problem of "Mixed Mindedness" (see Chapter 7). Unlike the religious character of the Fiesta of San Jose which it replaced, the organizers of Children's Days claim that is not 'religion' and therefore not inherently spiritually dangerous. Rather, they claim it is merely Maya culture which is fit for children's play and keeping alive their heritage (see Piot 2010 page 112). Whereas culture previously was simply lived, it is now a conscious and articulate value as a conscious celebration of cultural difference within globalization. Something to be defended and, if necessary, reinvented (Sahlins 2000 :17). Even as the old ways are made harmless as play, the Mopan have not been able to banish the spirits of *Kustumbre* to the past as new forms of dangerous spiritual relations have emerged as the spirit owners of nature have become reimaged as evil spirits in Protestant cosmology (see chapter 7).

#### Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have explored how the introduction of Protestant ideology has shifted the symbolic meaning of cacao from sacred to profane and transformed Mopan society. I first recount Don Teul's story about how cacao was blessed by the *Chaaco'o* as a sacred plant used in their

Supernatural rituals of planting. While Don Teul's tale locates cacao in the sacred realm of Maya-Catholic agricultural cosmology, his story is also the catalyst for Pablo and Juan's commentary on the changing morality of cacao in their new Protestant faith. While Pablo is interested to hear the old stories of cacao from his youth, he denies any real intention of practicing the Old Ways. Instead he claims to be a detached "anthropologist" merely documenting traditional Mopan culture. In contrast to the curiosity of his father, Juan patently rejects the traditional association of cacao with the realm of the supernatural, while admonishing his father to not backslide into pagan superstitions. This vignette encapsulates both the historical transformation from sacred to profane (see Wilk 1997), but also sheds light on the ongoing contention about the place of cacao in Mopan modernity in the context of religious change.

I argue that transformation of cacao from sacred to profane is representative of the larger religious conversions which have taken place among the Maya over the past 500 years. Contextualizing this change, I trace the *longue duree* of religious change from the Pre-Columbian era through the Maya-Catholicism of colonialism to the recent advent of Protestantism. While the Spanish conquest imposed Christianity on the Maya through steel, blood, fire, and language<sup>85</sup> this conversion did not result in complete religious replacement. A form of folk Catholicism (known as *Kustumbre*) arose during the colonial era in which the underlying spiritual grammar of Pre-Columbian animism was synthesized within the Catholic religious lexicon. In the praxis of what is now referred to as the Old Ways, the ancient Maya cacao sacrifices were reimagined as offerings towards saints and nature spirits. *Kustumbre's* synthesis of pre-Columbian Maya religion and Catholicism into a unified religious tradition reinforced the sacredness of cacao within Mopan spiritual life by allowing a continuation of cacao offerings within Catholic rituals.

In contrast to *Kustumbre*, the Second Conquest of Protestant conversion demanded rupture with syncretic Maya-Catholic cosmology. Protestant missionaries and indigenous converts claim that there is a fundamental incompatibility between these ideological systems and that the Mopan must reject the superstitions of *Kustumbre* in order to have a new life with Jesus. In this value system, the traditions of *Kustumbre* are denigrated as backwards and unmodern while Protestantism is constructed as progressive. Protestant ideology positions itself as "modern" through the promotion of values such as individuality, textuality and cosmological hegemony.

Protestantism emphasizes the salvation of individual souls rather than the religious holism of *Kustumbre*. This growing religious individualization has fragmented social holism, especially in regards

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>85</sup> see Hanks (2010)

to collective labor and church affiliation. At the same time, Protestantism privileges the orthodoxy of religious text as superior to syncretic ritual praxis. Mopan Protestants now pray to Jesus alone for their troubles, rather than perform the ritual offerings of the Old Ways to animistic spirits of the landscape.

Conversion has led to a fracturing of social life as religious factionalism has cross-cut previous ties based on kinship and residence. Collective labor groups are now increasingly self-segregated by denominational membership, as Catholics and Protestants both prefer to work only with their fellow churchgoers. Similarly, the religious brotherhoods known as the *cargos* have undergone a precipitous decline as religious pluralism has provided a language of critique against the existing social order. Theological differences become the fuel for social antagonism rooted in the politics of the local. Even as old ties of social affiliation have come undone, new ones have formed. Competing denominations have come to replace religious brotherhoods as totemic divisions in Belizean Maya society. The establishment of competing churches has provided new sources of prestige, opportunities for leadership and ties to powerful outsiders.

Protestant conversion has called into question the spiritual holism of the past when Mopan communities were "all of one mind" religiously. Theological choice and denominational difference has created the domain of "religion" as a discrete arena detached from social life. The rupture of the spiritual and the social has resulted in a growing secularization of the outward trappings of *Kustumbre*, even as the ritual core has become increasingly marginalized. The demystification of cacao has taken place within a broader Protestant condemnation of ritual offerings and the syncretic spirits owners of *Kustumbre* which is the subject of following chapter 7.

In the aftermath of conversion, the formerly religious "Fiesta of San Jose" which was centered on feeding the village saint has fallen out of practice for many years until it has recently been revived as "Children's Day" to teach cultural pride to primary school children. The secularization of *Kustumbre* attempts to render it as harmless play and symbols of difference in a globalized world. In the context of material secularization, cacao has become stripped of its former sacred character and repositioned as a symbol of Maya culture, ripe for commercial development.

### Chapter 7 - The Demystification of Nature and Ritual Abandonment

#### Introduction

Chapter 7 examines the role of Protestant conversion in the vilification of nature spirits, the abandonment of environmental rituals and the demystification of the environment. Building off the previous chapter, I argue that the social fragmentation of Protestant conversion has been accompanied by a parallel rupture between humans and the spirits of the landscape. This transformation has sought to rid Mopan cosmology of "fetishism", causing a shift from relational animism to the vilification of previous religious cosmology. Protestants condemn ritual practice as idol worship and the yum (masters of nature) have been renormalized as evil spirits unworthy of respect/tzik. The vilification of ritual has led to a division between "Old Testament People" who continue to follow the Old Ways, and "New Testament People" who attempt to purposefully forget the spirituality of Kustumbre and discontinue ritual practice in the creation of a Mopan modernity unconstrained by the superstitions of the past. In the contested present, the fear of mixed mindedness precludes the hybridization of the Old Ways with Protestantism. This has resulted in a growing secularization of Kustumbre as ritual and spirituality are abandoned while material culture is revalorized as a marker of Maya ethnic pride. In spite of this purposeful disarticulation of Kustumbre, the fear of witchcraft points to the continued unsettled nature of conversion. In the context of secularization, I argue that the Protestant condemnation of Kustumbre has desacralized cacao as a sacred ritual instrument, allowing for it to be repositioned as a profane commodity in the context of agricultural development in which humans have legitimate dominion over their environment.

# **Part 1 - Protestantism and Changing Environmental Relations**

# Feeding the House (Story)

When I moved to San Jose, I rented a pink plank board house from Thomas that was part of the Coh family compound. Thomas lived up the hill from us, with his wife and three children while his sister Andrea lived next door. Thomas was in his mid 30s, and like most men his age, he was gone from the village much of the time working wage labor out on the coastal farms. But every two weeks, Thomas would get a long weekend off from his job, and would come back to San Jose to see family and tend his farm. When he was in the village, Thomas would stop by and visit us down the hill, passing the hot Sunday afternoons swinging in our hammocks. Thomas's long suffering wife, Yolanda, would always say

that Thomas was like a parrot and just loved to talk.

Thomas's love of conversation (*tzikbal*) and his profound interest in Maya traditional culture made him an ideal source of ethnographic information. Thomas was of the generation of Mopan who had experienced the upheavals of Protestantism and development in his youth. While young men of his generation in San Jose had joined the new Protestant sects and had rejected *Kustumbre*, Thomas and his family had stayed true to their Catholic roots. Although Thomas no longer practiced many of the old rituals, he was very interested in learning about the "Old Ways" from his grandfather, Syriano, who was one of the last Mopan "old heads" who did the old rituals properly with the faith necessary to successfully petition the spirits for the good of the community.

One Sunday afternoon as we talked out under the tin roofed porch, Thomas told me the ritual genealogy of the house lot where we now lived. At various points in the story, his sister Andrea interjected her own remembrances to these events that had taken place so many years ago.

Fifty years ago, San Jose was just a small village that was just starting to form out of the scattered *alquilos* (farmsteads) in the area. Thomas's paternal grandparents had first moved to the area, clearing the bush and building a little thatch house down by the bend of the rippling creek, across from a fertile riverine kitchen garden full of cacao and coffee. When Thomas's grandparents had originally settled the land, they followed the old tradition of consecrating the landscape, as a show of respect for the spirits who inhabited and protected that particular landscape. He told me how his grandfather made his ritual by lighting candles and saying prayers to *Santo Dios*, (god), *Santo Witz* (the hill sprits) and *Santo Hook* (the spirit of the flat lands). The family then went around to the four corners of the lots and burned *pom* or copal incense. The house was offered a ritual meal of cacao and tortillas. Finally, they ritually slaughtered a pig, "bathed" the house posts in its blood and "planted" (buried) the pig's heart in the center of the new yard as an offering to the spirits. This blood sacrifice was intended to consecrate the new homestead, ensuring fertility for the land and protection for the family.

In the newly established village of San Jose, every family consecrated their houses to the owners of the landscape. This pattern of ritual encirclement and sacrifice also took place on the larger scale of village life. When the location for San Jose was first chosen, the villagers walked the boundaries of the new village, "feeding" the corner-posts of their lands with blood offerings from a sacrificed pig. They then buried its heart at the top of the central hill in the landscape. This central location was spiritually significant and eventually the altar within the Catholic Church was constructed on that very spot. In the early days, the villagers would walk the boundaries of San Jose every year together and renew the rites that protected their community (see chapter 5).

By building relations with the spiritual owners (yum) of the landscape through ritual, Thomas's grandparents transformed the wild forest (k'aax) into the domestic human world of house (naj) and village (kah). Thomas said that his grandparents were "old heads" (uchb'en pol) who followed Kustumbre with their whole heart and weren't "mixed minded" in their commitment like so many people these days. With the house properly fed and respected, the land soon began to produce abundantly.

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Years later, the family had grown considerably. Everything was going well in the new home until his grandparents moved away from the village. In search of new agricultural and drawn by the opening of the new southern highway, Thomas's grandparents left San Jose to help establish the new Mopan village of San Roman. After his grandparents left San Jose, the vacant house was passed on to his parents when Thomas was still a young boy. The family was happy in their new house and the farms and animals were prosperous. But a few years later in the early 1980s, they noticed that the land had started to change. The soil began to lose fertility and the animals weren't as healthy as they had originally been. Although the family paid little notice to these signs at first, soon the spirits became more forceful, sending a swarm of vampire bats to harass them. Andrea remembers the fright she felt when the bats attacked as if it were a dream. She recalls the terror of...

Bats! When I was small (~1980), I remember when the bats came. Every night when we would get ready to go to sleep, you could hear the noise of the bats flying around the inside of the house. And then they would bite the feet of the children. Then the children start to get sick. I even put my foot in the sack, but the bats still come in the night and eat my foot!

And the bats would bite the animals too. The chickens, the pigs, the horse, they were not happy and were always sick. The pigs were thin and one even dropped dead. You set your chicken eggs to hatch and as soon as they get big, suddenly they drop dead.

My mother asked, "Why did the bats come?" "Why do the bats bite the children and the animals like that?"

The plants no longer grew vigorously and the household's pigs and chickens began to get sick and die. Even the very frame of the house itself shook in discontent. Thomas's parents were perplexed as to why the landscape had turned against them. His parents were concerned about the misfortune that had beset their lands and believed that there was a spiritual cause to the malady. To understand the root of their problems, his parents went to find Thomas's grandfather in the new village of San Roman to ask for his help. When they told him all that had happened, he considered the situation and told them ... "The land was inaugurated and now the rituals are weakening. Since you have not fed the house, the land will not give as it did before."

Thomas's parents listened to his stories about how the house lot was first consecrated to the spirits of the land. Even once his parents heard about the old rituals, their problem was not solved.

They were still left with the problem of performing the necessary rituals to renew the spiritual relations.

Returning to their home village, Thomas's parents contemplated whether they should renew the environmental magic that blessed the house. The family was concerned and began to discuss the problem amongst themselves. Since they didn't know how to properly conduct the rituals without further angering the spirits, they would have to hire a bush doctor (*ilmah*) to renew the bonds. Even though they knew that the old rituals had great power, they also were also dangerous and they risked angering the spirits if the rituals were not renewed in a timely fashion.

Thomas's parents talked to a lot of older people to try and find someone to perform the rituals for re-consecrating the house. As they worried about what to do, they asked Thomas's maternal grandmother in San Antonio what they should do. She told them that once house curing ceremonies are preformed, they must be sure to keep up with these ceremonies or the demands of the spirits will not be met and bad things will happen. She said that often times, when evil happens, it is because people failed to please the spirits that they had previously engaged. At the same time, she also counseled them that times are changing and they must consider what will happen if the ritual knowledge is lost. She told them...

"Your parents practiced the traditional ways of living. Even if you pay to renew the rituals, what will happen next time the rituals fade? Even if you find the curer who knows these things, what would happen if he were to die or leave the village?" Who will renew them again if no one know the proper words and deeds?"

In that time, Protestant missionaries had begun to spread their teachings vilifying the old rituals as idol worship, causing many to "forget" their old traditions. Since there were only a few old people left in San Jose who could perform the old rituals, it would place the family in jeopardy when they could no longer find someone to renew the magic. So the maternal grandmother counseled them to follow the "modern ways" and just pray to Jesus for protection instead, rather than do the old rituals.

Thomas's parents considered her words. After deliberation, they chose not to learn the rituals and actively let the rites that consecrated the land expire because they were inherently dangerous. They followed her advice and asked Jesus directly for help, rather than going through the indirect mediation of *Santo Witz* and *Santo Hook*. Without knowing how to do the rituals themselves, the family would be stuck back in the same situation in a few years when the ritual needed to be renewed again. Instead, they decided they should hold a church service and pray to Jesus to heal their land. They called all the remaining Catholics in the village and prayed three times to Jesus. By the next day, the bats had

disappeared and left the family in peace. Since that time, Thomas's family has relied on Jesus alone. From this more "modern" perspective, Jesus offers a more predictable, less vengeful form of spiritual appeal, free of the dangerous complexities of ritual knowledge transmission associated with Old Testament ways (a local metaphor for ritual sacrifice).

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By the turn of the 21<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas's parents had both died and the house was once again abandoned. With no one living in the house, the human managed landscape of the farmstead fell into disrepair until Andrea, Thomas's unmarried sister, moved back into the old family cook house and a now grown and married Thomas returned home to build a house next door across the creek for his new family. Since that time, Andrea has done a lot of work to bring the homestead back to a working farm. She cleared the yard of debris, pruned the overgrown plants and planted numerous varieties of fruit trees, creating a productive kitchen garden just outside of her house. As we looked out over the yard, we could see all the work that Andrea had done to make the land productive again. But Thomas said that despite all her hard work, the soil isn't as good here and fruit trees won't produce like they used. Just like his parents, Thomas and his siblings had all noticed the decline of fertility on the original homestead since it was settled. But despite this shared observation, they all had different explanations for why the land no longer gave like it used.

Andrea, the oldest sister, was of the opinion that the old rituals had worked originally but without anyone to renew them, it was better to end the old cycles of ritual sacrifice which ensured fertility, rather than risk malevolent spirits taking revenge on them for neglecting their obligations. While people like her grandparents had the spiritual strength and faith to successfully enter into reciprocal relations with the *yum*, times were changing and the Mopan people had lost much of their connection to these spirits. Even though she was a good Catholic, the repeated Protestant invocation of "Jesus" as the answer to all manner of problems had influenced her. With the loss of ritual knowledge, she now prayed to Jesus directly. She believed that unlike the capricious, risky and dangerous nature spirits, Jesus was a benevolent deity who could be petitioned without fear of future repercussions. She said...

Some old people still make the offerings to the house, but I don't make the copal smoke or feed the posts with blood anymore. Now that my father and mother are gone, we cannot make those things again because we got nobody to teach us. I've forgot it all. If you don't do the ritual right, it's very bad. It's too hard to teach those things, so people just stop to do it. Now, when the babies are sick, or your animals don't want to grow, or maybe you are hungry – now we just pray for Jesus for help.

Thomas also remained a strong Catholic, but like his sister he also believed that people should

"go to Jesus" rather than risk engaging with the old rituals. He told me...

Yes those Old Ways could work, but if you don't know how to do it proper, that is dangerous for you. You can't just start it up because you could mix up your ideas. If you just try and fail, it will just make it worse. So now it is safer to just pray to Jesus Christ (Thomas)

Despite Thomas's interest in the traditions and rituals of *Kustumbre*, he also offered a scientific agriculture opinion of soil fertility, rather than attributing the decline to purely spiritual causes. Years of working outside of the village on a commercial vegetable farm had exposed Thomas to agronomic perspectives on land use, degradation and fertilizer and he had adopted this non-local "modern" explanation of the land's declining fertility as a statement about his own progressive outlook. Thomas said that since the yard sits on the riverine slope, the topsoil has slowly eroded over the fifty years since the village was settled. Now the topsoil is thin above the underlying limestone bedrock and so when fruit trees start, they do well and begin to grow tall but the root systems never really develop deeply. This is why he claimed that they don't produce as much fruit as they did back in his grandparent's day (see chapter 9 on Agronomy and Technical Knowledge).

Later, I recounted this story to their younger sister Lucia and asked if she had any recollections of these events from her childhood. In contrast to Thomas and Andrea, Lucia had quit the Catholic Church and become a Baptist when she married her husband. For Lucia, it was for the best that they had stopped practicing the house rituals because they were worshiping false gods. Lucia said that she didn't believe in any of those superstitions because she was now part of a "religious" family. She said that it was best to put the Old Ways behind them and instead look to Jesus alone to solve your problems. While the "old heads" like her grandparents had believed in the rituals with their whole heart, they had been mystified by evil spirits (k'ak'as ik) masquerading as protecting yum. Lucia told me that entering into pacts with evil spirits was a recipe for disaster. No longer subservient to the evil spirits which the Mopan once worship, Lucia and her family felt increasingly free to engage in "modern" agricultural practices that no longer required the superstitious rituals of the past.

Despite the rejection of *Kustumbre* by the current generation, some village elders still held to the Old Ways. Even though his grandchildren no longer practiced the old rituals, their grandfather Syriano continued to perform the rituals of *Kustumbre* with his whole heart. Although he was wise in the secrets of the past, his wealth of cultural knowledge was in danger of becoming lost. Young people, both Protestant and Catholic, were no longer interested in apprenticing with an old man who practiced old fashioned "idol worship." Mopan Protestants often repeat claim that they no longer worship the things of this world (especially in the context of ritual offering), rather "the one who made the world."

#### The Desacralization of Nature

The story of the ritual genealogy of the homestead speaks to larger issues of religious change and environmental demystification that have occurred in Mopan communities since the coming of Protestantism. Steinberg argues that for the Mopan, religion and environment are closely interwoven so that changes in one of these spheres can have transformative repercussion on the other (2002: p 91). Among many of the Mopan, the vilification of the Old Ways has called into question the moral and symbolic meaning of sacred nature, especially relating to cacao.

In the context of religious conversion, Protestantism in Belizean Maya communities has given rise to a new model of environmental relations which desacralize nature by disconnecting it from the realm of legitimate spiritual authority. Through the adoption of Protestant environment paradigms, converts attempt to banish the danger of the spirit world from the realm of human dominion (creating a nature/culture divide) but also creates a void in dominion over nature which was once the domain of the spirits but now can be domesticated for human use. Protestant mode of environmental relations was based on a biblical dominion over the earth which objectified nature (Descola's (1996) naturalism or Latour's (2009) mononaturalism) an object for unfettered human consumption. This shift entails a complete reorganization of concepts of nature, the supernatural and the self.

I argue that this is transformation is part of a larger process towards the creation of a hegemonic mononaturalism. Visions of the cosmos that were both "animistic" and "perspectival," become increasingly replaced by "naturalistic" mononaturalism (Descola 1996; Latour 2009). <sup>87</sup> While the shift from animism to naturalism can take place internal to a culture, often this transformation is the result of large scale social transformations initiated from powerful outside interests, such as missionaries and development organizations. In this period of punctuated equilibrium, definitions of nature are reconfigured and realigned with the Western values of mononaturalism, resulting in a reconfiguration of the natural world through the colonization of local habitus.

Protestant denigration of environmental ritual has promulgated the literal dis-integration of prior logical cosmologies of nature. In the Old Ways of *Kustumbre*, cacao was strongly associated with the domain of the sacred and a key locus of symbolic and ritual associations (Wilk 1997). In the religious cosmology of *Kustumbre*, the Mopan respected cacao as a sacred plant blessed by the *Chaako'o*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>86</sup> For example, see the transformation in Europe from the spirit filled forest to timber resources (Scott 1998).

While Descola employs his model to describe different models of environmental relations synchronically and cross-culturally, the same categories can be employed to talk about changing nature-culture diachronically.

Because of this blessing, cacao was set apart from *balamte* as a holy instrument essential in the creation of relations of respect, both among humans as well as between humans and the supernatural.

The introduction of a "modern" Protestant ideology has been the catalyst for the dislocation of cacao from the realm of the sacred as cacao became symbolically associated with pagan superstitions of an unmodern past. Because ritual implements such as cacao and copal were major components in traditional Mopan ceremonies of sacrifice and healing, the sacred use of these plants has become the target of condemnation by Protestants. Protestant attacks on traditional Mopan ritual practices have besmirched the holy character of cacao. As many Mopan Protestants came to see cacao as emblematic of the old ritual instruments /practices, cacao has become desacralized and Protestants have ceased using it in religious ceremonies.

According to Keane, one of the primary missions of Protestantism is to liberate non-believers from the "fetishism", in which people falsely give agency to the material world (Keane 2007).

Protestants believe that distancing themselves from the "fetishism" of Mopan *Kustumbre* is an essential component of a modern identity. To combat fetishism, Mopan Protestants condemns the traditional belief in preexisting supernatural intermediates of nature spirits and saints as nothing more than evil spirits and idol worship meant by the devil to lead the Mopan astray. Instead, Protestants claims that believers can only have a relationship with the divine through Jesus. For Protestants, the mistaken attribution of subjectivity to inanimate objects is due to misdirection by the devil who plays on pagan superstitions. Protestantism seeks to unmask the fetishism of nature and liberate people from subjugation to inanimate forces. In this way, Protestantism attempts a figure-ground reversal so that spirits of nature no longer have power over believers but rather, believers now have dominion over the earth. But rather than a complete demystification of belief and a complete replacement of a spiritual/religious environmental cosmology with a technical perspective, in many indigenous societies the spirits and beliefs of the past are reimaged in opposition to modernity/progress as symbols of backwards superstition and demonic influence (Robbins 2011).

Protestant rejection of fetishism and ritual offerings neutered the spiritual efficacy of cacao and other ritual implements from the natural world by dislodging them from their central role in Mopan religious life so that cacao is no longer a sacred plant deserving of respect. Within the new Protestant ideology, these sacrifices are unnecessary because no relations with spiritual nature are created or need to be renewed since with Jesus, all you have to do is pray. In this religious rupture, the Protestant rejection of cacao as an implement of the sacred is emblematic of the larger vilification of the Old Ways. By rejecting the old cosmology as dangerous idol worship and dabbling with evil spirits, Protestant

converts disarticulate cacao from traditional systems of meaning, allowing the symbolic void to be reimagined in the light of modern values. Nature becomes subject to new processes of valuation while ritual offering and symbolic respect become framed as a form of dangerous spiritual meddling.

Through these acts of cultural humiliation (see Robbins 2004a; Sahlins 2005), the performance of the old cacao rituals has dramatically decreased as the Mopan consciously attempt to refashion their identity as "Christian moderns" (Keane 2007). In this new modern identity, outward practice of religious activities reflects the inward condition of belief. The purposeful discontinuation of traditional religious rituals is seen by many "progressive" villagers as a means to deny the spiritual efficacy of the Old Ways. Protestants no longer practice the old ritual for fear of inviting dangerous mixed mindedness. At the same time, Catholics who continue to perform the Old Ways are derided as "backwards" and are gossiped about by their Protestant neighbors. In this process, the spiritual values of meaning formerly embedded in Mopan conceptions of cacao have become disarticulated from the plant. Within the context of these changes, the social pressure against the ritual use of cacao has now largely shifted cacao from the sacred domain to the profane (see Wilk 1997). I argue that this transformation of values prepares the moral groundwork for the introduction of commercial cacao development by fostering a Weberian sense of capitalism among Protestant cacao farmers, and reframing nature as a collection of natural resources devoid of legitimate spiritual ownership (Steinberg 2002).

Faced with mounting social stigma for traditional ritual practice, many Mopan began to abandon their old cacao trees during the late 1970s. The decline of cacao for religious use was part of a larger decline of "cultural-ecological activities" among the Belizean Maya associated with the Old Ways of *Kustumbre*, including bee keeping and the maintenance of multiple colors of corn with religious symbolism (Schackt 1986; Steinberg 2002 p 96-99). Without the religious obligation to employ cacao in *Kustumbre* rituals, cacao importance faded in Mopan spiritual life and the cultivation of cacao in San Jose declined until the introduction of large scale cacao development projects in 1984. Because of the danger associated with Old Ways, Protestantism has attempted to purge cacao from its place in the sacred realm and reposition it safely in the realm of profane commodities. As the cultural significance of cacao shifts from sacred to profane, following the trajectory of similarly divested core crops, it becomes a veritable commodity-object rather than a subject in a system of relations.

The dramatic increase in Protestant conversion among the Belizean Maya in recent decades has also altered the cultural values regarding to land. Mopan Protestants no longer actively worship that the hill gods (*Santo Witz Hook*) who were once thought to live in the mountain caves and animate the landscape, and deny their legitimacy as owners of the land. Instead, they deny the beneficence of these

spirits and instead look to Jesus as the only proximal deity that can intercede on human behalf to *Dyos* (god) far away in heaven (rather than embodied in the landscape) who has control over the whole world (see Schackt 1986 Page 55). Steinberg claims that Protestant attempts to vilify Mopan agricultural beliefs as pagan superstition have transformed land use patterns and resulted in the loss of traditional ecological knowledge among many converts (2002). In an effort to modernize the Maya of Southern Belize, some Protestant missionaries "'encourage' Indians to take out land as private property. To do so one has to 'develop it'" (Schackt 1986 Page 157). Similarly, the masks used in religious dances have also become demystified. In the past, the masks used in Mopan religious dances were believed to be alive/animated and members of the dance troupe were required to "feed" the masks rum and cacao to mollify the spirits residing within them. Today, though, Protestants claim "that the masks are not living beings", just inert wood carved by man (Schackt 1986).

When I asked Alberto, the Mopan Nazarene pastor in San Jose, if his church still used copal and cacao in their ceremonies, he replied that they no longer preformed those old pagan sacrifices. He claimed that "before we worshiped the things of the world, now we worship the one who made the world." This sentiment was widely espoused by converts in interviews several Baptists lay church members, a Jehovah Witness and a Pentecostal minister affirmed this explanation with varying levels of condemnation for what they perceived to be Catholic meddling in material worship. By removing the materiality of the natural world from ritual, Mopan Protestants attempted to sever the ties of sacred relationality which had previously animated the environmental cosmology of *Kustumbre* in the interest of replacing spiritual dominion over the landscape with human ownership.

## From Yum to Evil Spirits

The adoption of Protestant values has dramatically altered the Mopan's relation with the *yum* (spirit owners of nature). Protestants say that these supernatural beings which the Mopan traditionally worshiped are not merely "*pixan*" (soul or shadow), but in fact "evil spirits" (*k'ak'as ik'*). According to Mopan Protestants, these evil spirits are agents of the devil (*Kisin*) meant to lead the old time Maya astray by worshiping the forces of evil, rather than Jesus Christ.

One of the most prominent examples of this vilification of the formerly sacred spirit world has been with the Morning Star. Before the advent of Mopan Protestantism, the morning star Venus<sup>88</sup> was often referred to with the biblical name "Lucifer," meaning "light bringer" to refer to is appearance just before dawn (Thompson 1930). In the 1930s, however "Lucifer"/morning star was not vilified as the

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>88</sup> Known as *Santo Xulab* {saint star) or *Nohoch Ich (great eye*) (Thompson 1930 p 57).

Christian devil ruling over hell. Rather he was the "elder brother" of the Maya pantheon<sup>89</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> most powerful deity called upon in prayers and offerings. The Morning Star was the original master of the wild animals and he was the patron of the hunt, fishing as well as an important agricultural deity (Fink 1987 p 404; Thompson 1930 p 57). Like the sun, the morning star was a remote deity and delegated his responsibility to the "lord of the animals" (u yum a Baalche) who was seen as his emissary on earth. 90 To ensure a successful hunt, Mopan hunters made offerings to both the morning star and the Lord of the Animals (Danziger 2001 40). Distinct from the morning star, the Mopan underworld (Meknal) was ruled by a devil known as Kisin. 91 Thompson reports that in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the name Kisin had largely been forgotten by the Mopan except as a swear word (Thompson 1930 p 67-68). Since the introduction of Protestant missionaries emphasizing Satan's role as the cause of misfortune, Mopan converts to evangelical Protestantism have collapsed the distinctions between the morning star/Lucifer/Kisin and have begun to strongly associate him with the Christian devil. Kisin is now feared widely among the Mopan (Verbeeck 1998 Page 48). Within a decade of Protestant missionization, even Catholics had begun to blame and fear Kisin as the diabolic source of misfortune. Today, the worship of the morning star as elder brother of the sun and master of the hunt which had been part of Mopan Kustumbre has largely been actively forgotten as New Testament believers accuse those who still practice sacrifices of devil worship.

Like the morning star, the place of the *Cheil* in Mopan environmental cosmology has been transformed through the introduction of Protestant theology. In this new paradigm, the *Cheil* have also been disenfranchised from their ownership of cacao groves, in the same way that cacao was disarticulated as a material instrument of Mopan ritual. While the Belizean Maya have customarily made offerings to the *Cheil* for generations as "payment" for harvesting wild cacao, this relational pattern of environmental interactions was overturned beginning in the 1970s with the introduction of Protestantism into Mopan communities. When I asked an older cacao farmer if he still respected the *Cheil* when he harvested seeds from the wild cacao, he shook his head no and said...

Anytime I walk in the wild cacao, I take some of those seeds to plant. And nothing will happen to you now because the wild cacao has no owner anymore. The Cheil have gone, maybe they are dead. (Lucas)

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> As the morning star rises each day just before the sun, the morning star is thought of as the "elder brother" (suk'uun) of the sun.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>90</sup> In Yucatan, a parallel deity is known as the "lord of the woods" – Yum K'ax (Verbeeck 1998 Page 48).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> In the Yucatan *Kisin* is also thought to be a cause of earthquakes. (Thompson 1930 p 67-68)

As many Mopan have adopted a Protestant environmental theology, there has been a move by New Testament People to actively refute the ownership of the *Cheil* over cacao. Rather than disbelief never existing at all as fanciful superstition (as per standard Weberian theories of demystification), the disbelief of Protestant converts is an active attempt to create a reality in which the *Cheil* and other spirits of the landscape are either dead or withdrawn deeper into the forest, removing themselves as guardians of nature. They says that the *Cheil* no longer haunt the cacao, especially the new larger groves of cacao that are the result of commercial cacao development. Through the adoption of Protestant ideologies, the vilification of *Cheil* allows for expanded human domination of nature by stripping the *Cheil* of their legitimacy as owners of the cacao (see Robbins 2011). The disenfranchisement of the *Cheil* by Protestant ideology has opened the door for a realignment of Mopan values concerning the ownership of land, in the context of agricultural development. As cacao development projects have encouraged the agronomic rather than relational management of cacao, the spiritual owners of the wild cacao have been increasingly replaced by a conception of human ownership.

No longer spirit owners of nature; the Cheil have been transformed in the Mopan cultural imagination. In many ways, Mopan beliefs about the Cheil are a reflection of the Mopan society caught at the cross roads between the tradition of Kustumbre and a modern future. Although Protestant doctrine is framed as libratory from the superstitions of the past, nevertheless the old beliefs die hard. Despite the ongoing disenchantment of spiritual nature, the *Cheil* have not disappeared from the landscape entirely. Even in modernity, the Cheil continue to exist on the margins, haunting the encroaching forests beyond the frontiers of the village, creating a geography of disenchantment. The Cheil are a juxtaposition of the ancient past living just beyond the modernity that the Mopan are creating. Unable to leave the Old Ways behind, Protestants continue to "believe in the ongoing existence and efficacy of the spirits... albeit demonizing them" (Piot 2010 page 60; see Robbins 2011). As Protestant conversion has removed the Cheil from their position as "owners" of cacao who must be respected with ritual offerings, they have been reimagined as "evil spirits" (k'ak'as ik), rather refuting their existence. The demonization of the supernatural owners of the landscape is active step towards the creation of a human dominion of nature, managed by modern rationality and private property. With the Cheil vilified and disenfranchised of their ownership, they are no longer thought of as spirits who must be respected, so that the fear of supernatural repercussions no longer motivates the Mopan to perform the same displays of respect towards cacao trees.

While many villagers publically claim to no longer believe in the *Cheil*, the project of human dominated nature has been incomplete. Even as the *Cheil* are derided as nothing more than evil spirits

who can be banished by invoking the power of Jesus, the Mopan of San Jose have become increasingly wary of the forest reserves surrounding their villages as dangerous places. The commercialization of cacao has shifted land use patterns with more permanent cash crops located near the village. (see chapter 9). This has led to a dramatic decrease in the harvesting of cacao and other wild plants from the forest, so that now only a few hunters venture far beyond the last milpas in search of game.

While many say the *Cheil* no longer roam the forest, in recent years, Guatemalan Maya *Xateros* (collectors of *Xate*) have begun to cross the nearby border from Guatemala<sup>92</sup> into Belize, living for up to months at a time in the forest reserves located just beyond San Jose. Hiding out in the forest, *Xateros* illegally harvest *Xate* (*Chamaedorea spp.*), a valuable ornamental plant used by 1<sup>st</sup> world floral designers with over 30 million *Xate* palm exported for Palm Sunday alone (Rain Forest Alliance<sup>93</sup>). While the Guatemalan side of the international border is largely deforested, Belize's extensive national park system boasts an amazing biodiversity of plants and animals that are ripe for illegal harvesting. To collect *Xate*, the *xateros* move in small groups under the jungle canopy, utilizing the old networks of logging roads which crisscross the supposedly "natural" parks that compromise more than 1/3 of the country.

Defense Force patrols the area regularly to destroy *Xatero* camps, and secure the porous national border in an effort to project state sovereignty. Despite the military's presence, the *Xateros* continue to be lured back into Belize by the prospect of natural riches. The Mopan of Belize fear and distrust these shadowy figures moving under the canopy, as chance encounters with the *Xateros* in the bush sometimes lead to bloodshed. Although a few in the village had actually met *Xateros* in person, the evidence of their existence such as camp sites or trash could be found littering the forest floor. Those who have actually encountered *Xateros* have not always been lucky in their encounters. A few months after I began living in San Jose, the *alcade* (mayor) and another man were on an expedition to film an eco-tourism promotion of Doyle's Delight, the highest peak in Belize (1124m), when they were attached by *Xateros*. Their story was recounted in the Amandala, Belize's national newspaper. According to their statements...

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>92</sup> San Jose is < 5 miles from the Guatemalan border

<sup>93</sup> http://www.rainforest-alliance.org/kids/species-profiles/xate

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>94</sup> See <a href="http://amandala.com.bz/news/guat-xateros-caught-chiquibul-forest/">http://amandala.com.bz/news/guat-xateros-caught-chiquibul-forest/</a> http://amandala.com.bz/news/san-pedro-columbia-villagers-meet-illegal-xateros-on-hydro-maya-river-trail/

#### The Story of how the Alcade and Old Mr. Sho Got Shot by Xateros in the Forest.

At around 8:00 a.m., they left the Doyle's Delight area to return to their village. They rested at Union Camp, near the Colombia River Forest Reserve, for about 30 minutes. At about 3:30 p.m. that day, while at the same location, three Hispanic men believed to be Guatemalan xatéros, one of them armed with a machete, asked the San Jose villagers for food.

They gave them the food and afterwards the man armed with the machete pulled a gun out from his waist and fired shots at the two men.

Cho was shot in his lower abdomen, while Sho was shot in his left shoulder.

Cho and the gunman had an altercation and the gunman also chopped him in his head with a machete.

The Hispanic men then escaped via the Nazaro Perez Road, not far from the border.

Despite their injuries, both men made it alive to San Jose in the dark of night, at around 9 last night, and they were transported via ambulance at 9:00 Thursday morning to Punta Gorda, and later today to Dangriga. <sup>95</sup>

Although the two men from San Jose had offered their food to the *Xateros*, their attempts to create sociality were repaid with violence that would have killed weaker men. When news of the attack reached the village, some whispered that the reason for their misfortune was a social slight against others in the community. Although the original contract for the eco-tourism film had been for eight men to go along on the expedition, in the end, the two men had decided that instead it was better to split the money in half, rather than eight ways. So they went by themselves. This motivation for individual gain, rather than collective benefit is still considered socially contentious, despite the influence of capitalist values. By those who still hold to the Old Ways, the *Xatero* attacks could be interpreted as a cosmic retribution against the men for failing to conform to the "expectation of reciprocity" at the heat of *ki uy ool* (social happiness/harmony) (Gregory 1975). Like so many things in San Jose, even where the outward form has changed from outside influence, the underlying themes remain animated by Mopan cultural categories (see Piot 2010 page 60).

In many ways, the vilification of the Cheil and their reimagining as Xateros can be seen as a self-narrative about the struggles the Mopan face in incompletely rejecting an unmodern past in favor of a demystified modernity. These Guatemalan *Xateros* have come to represent a modern and grotesque reinterpretation of the *Cheil*. Both of these groups share many parallels in the Mopan cultural imagination. Both are seen as "people of the forest," and eschew living in permanent villages. Neither engages in shifting agriculture. Instead they each are intimately connected with wild jungle plants. Like

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<sup>95 3</sup> Guat xatéros shoot, chop 2 Belizeans (http://amandala.com.bz/news/3-guat-xatros-shoot-chop-2-belizeans/)

the *Cheil*, the Guatemalan *Xateros* speak a version of Maya that is archaic and contains more "original Maya." <sup>96</sup> And like the vilified *Cheil* in Protestant thought, these Guatemalans are not thought to be legitimate owners of the forest. Rather they are both seen as dangerous usurpers who exist beyond the possibility of social relations.

The Mopan's changing relationship to "those of the forest" is part of a larger pattern of transformation of environmental relations in the community which have been catalyzed by the introduction of Protestant Christianity. Despite the attempts of Mopan converts to leave the *Cheil* behind as ancient superstitions, "those of the forest" remain as *Xateros* in their cultural imagination as a reminder of the past they have so ardently attempted to leave behind in order to avoid mixed mindedness with their new faith. The inability of the Mopan to completely banish the *Cheil* from their environmental cosmology and the emerging threat of the *Xateros* points to the continued unsettled quality of interactions with nature.

#### Protestantism and the Vilification of Ritual

to five or more before switching.

When my father-in-law was alive, I would go with him to the cacao field to pray and make the rituals. But now everything changes due to the new religion. Ever since I left Catholic Church and I joined Nazarene's, I haven't done those things again. When you plant corn or anything now, you just pray to Jesus, that's all. (Lucas)

In their disavowal of the Old Ways, the Protestant mission to overturn fetishism and establish human dominion over the natural world is seen most prominently in the vilification of Mopan environmental rituals as unholy (k'as). Missionaries exhorted converts to reject the superstition and paganism of Kustumbre and embrace personal salvation through Jesus. Protestant converts believe that participation in these activities is spiritually dangerous and can seduce Christians back into the paganism of the village religion (see Piot 2010 page 104). Protestant converts reject the traditional practices of Old Ways of ritual offerings of blood and cacao to spirits and saints as an outward manifestation of their new faith.

The public denouncement of the rituals of *Kustumbre* by Mopan Protestant converts has caused many of these traditions to fall into disuse. Protestant ideology offers a public challenge to domains of traditional life around issues that were formerly uncontested, such as ritual offerings (Piot 2010 page

<sup>96</sup> One example of the linguistic conservatism of Guatemalan Mopan is that the Mopan of San Jose today only count to three in Mopan Maya (*hun, ka, ox*) before switching to Spanish, while Guatemalan Mopan speakers count

111.) While some families continue to sponsor rituals, there is not enough consensus to perform community wide events anymore (see Faust 1999 Page 87). When I asked Justino if anyone still conducted the old rituals of the Maya, he told me...

Some in the Catholic Church continue to maintain their tradition their way of doing rituals for planting corn, or building house. But the people who have joined the new churches don't do that anymore. Even though it is their own culture but they won't do those things anymore because they believe they are satanic. (Justino)

As sign of their new way of life, the Protestants of San Jose no longer participate in the ritual and beliefs associated with *Kustumbre* (Steinberg 2002; see Faust 1999; Wilk 1997). Protestants no longer consecrate new farms with prayers and offerings to the owners (*yum*) of the flat lands and mountains (*Santos Witz and Santo Hook*). They don't "feed" the spirits of the house cacao, copal and blood. Nor do they leave food for their dead ancestors or make offerings to statues of the saints. Rituals for the divination and control of the weather and other natural phenomenon are shunned. Similarly, Protestants fear and condemn traditional healers and shamans as channeling the devil, charlatans or witch doctors (Steinberg 2002, p 103; see Piot 2010 p 111). Even though some in the community still seek them out when aliments are incurable by western doctors; most are discrete about these visits, lest they "advertise a certain contradiction in their own beliefs and expose them to ridicule and charges of hypocrisy" (Faust 1999 Page 87; see Wilk 1997 p 242). In contrast to the Maya-Catholic emphasis on orthopraxy and ritual performance over a theology, Mopan Protestants publically denounce and deride the rituals of Kustumbre as pagan "idol worship" and refuse to participate in them. One Protestant cacao farmer explained how he had come to realize that the old time Maya had been misled by the devil when they conducted their sacrifices...

I used to help the old men do the rituals before when I was young man. But I don't believe that superstition nowadays. It's from the Devil! (Felipe)

The concern with idol worship is one of the strongest criticisms that Protestants level against Catholics. Both indigenous ministers and lay converts shun ritual acts as "idol worship" because they believe they falsely give spiritual agency to the natural world (fetishism), and confuse evil spirits for good (mystification). Protestants express disdain for both the veneration of Catholic saints as well as sacrifices to indigenous spirits. Whereas Catholics see these sacrifices and offerings as a means to make social relations with powerful benevolent spirits who act as intermediaries between humans and a distant God (*Dyos*); for Protestants, the collective rituals of the Maya-Catholic tradition are considered

dangerous because they attempt to make bargains with capricious spirits. Protestant religious ideology disarticulates the ritual process of *Kustumbre* by removing the creation of relationships between humans and the spirit world. Protestants circumvent these relations with capricious spirits by going directly to Jesus with their concerns, because he is the only remaining benevolent supernatural deity.

By "going to Jesus" for their problems, New Testament People circumvent the key aspect of relational sacrifice at the center role of the traditional Mopan ritual process in order to minimize spiritual danger by removing people from the spiritual interactions with the landscape. The Protestant reliance on Jesus as the sole source of spiritual efficacy has the double effect of not only disempowering the spirits of the traditional Mopan cosmology (now recast as evil spirits), but also removes the agency of human worshipers by circumscribing their direct ritual efficacy. Unlike the dangers of Maya-Catholic rituals, Protestant theology offers a clear and stable pattern of salvation in a world where good and evil operate on separate plains. Whenever Mopan Protestants face risky or dangerous situations, they now pray to directly to Jesus for help with healing from sickness, rain for crops, or help with personal struggles with sin. When the cacao crop of southern Belize was decimated by Monillia in 2010 (see chapter 9), a Protestant preacher opened the annual general meeting of Toledo Cacao Growers with a prayer to Jesus to heal the blight upon the land. Rather than performing rituals to heal their plants, Protestants instead pray to Jesus and put their faith in him for a cure.

Although Protestant rejection of ritual was highly contentious at first, it has now become widely accepted, even among Catholics. At first, many who remained in the Catholic Church saw this rejection as dangerous to the social and environmental health of the community and warned the converts would suffer the consequences for their actions. However, as the years pass and more villagers abandon rituals without any apparent negative repercussions, Protestant neglect of rituals has "disproven their utility also for many Catholics as well so that when individuals among the Catholics had had their own milpas harmed by winds or animals, they had to consider if conversion might not in fact increase their agricultural luck" (Schackt 1986 Page 149-150, 165). The abandonment of ritual by Catholics happened rapidly after Protestants began to convert. For example, Schackt reports that within five years of conversion (1980), only 1/3 of Catholic families still conducted environmental rituals (Schackt 1986 p 149-150). In village discourse, traditional Mopan ritual practice has become marked as backward and unmodern, in contrast to Protestant worship style and theology, which is characterized as progressive and modern. Thomas explained this feeling...

The young generation of Maya don't respect those rituals. They are changing their faith now because we are not being taught the proper ways anymore. That is why we are losing our old culture. Before,

when you went to plant, the whole family would go along and did the ceremony together and there was no shame in that. But now, if you have eight or nine farmers together to plant, maybe only one of them makes the traditional rituals beforehand. The others will see the candles and food you have set out and they might challenge him saying "I don't do those rituals, let's see who produces better in the end." And they will mock you in front of the people. That is not fair. It is like they want to separate themselves, like they are not a member of the Mayan people. (Thomas)

Even as many Mopan have replaced relational sacrifices to spirits with prayers to Jesus as the source of spiritual efficacy, the only piece of the old Catholic-Maya ritual process which retains its importance for Protestants is the insistence on sexual abstinence before and after exercises of spiritual power. Protestants say that it is not enough to merely pray to Jesus without the proper control of the body. Instead, they claim that the spiritual heat of *k'inam* still must be built up and dissipated in the proper way to focus the spiritual energy of the petitioner on the divine. Following Weber, I argue that Protestants reinterpret the disciplining of sexuality (*k'inam*) as a physical manifestation of individual sincerity, displaying willful control of the body and inner salvation (see Weber 1905). Converts reimagine the indigenous cosmologies of *k'inam* to legitimize new Protestant theologies by making them legible within the familiar rhythms of local ritual practice.

### Part 2 - Contested Futures

### Pablo and Justino Lost in the Woods (Story)

During my time in San Jose, I went on a number of expeditions in to the far forest beyond the outer limits of the village. Going into the forests was always one of my favorite activities. Hiking under the canopy provided a chance to see many of the natural wonders, diverse flora and fauna that southern Belize is famous for.

One day, I was invited to go with some of my neighbors on a short day hike into the forest to scout out a few sink holes and caves for potential eco-tourism sites, as well as maybe to hunt some wari (peccary) if we were lucky. We left very early in the morning to beat the tropical sun, heading out through the farms, beyond the limits of the human transformed landscape of the milpa fields before crossing into the high bush of the Columbia forest reserve. We hiked many miles that day, making a great loop in the forest to see the three different cave entrances. While we were there, one of the men told how he had once helped a botanist take plant samples from these caves. The scientist had determined these *cenotes* (sinkholes sacred to the traditional Maya) were the only places in the world

where an endemic species of Zamia cycad (Zamia decumbens) grew. After he told this story, some of the men took some seeds and sprouts to plant around the village, interested in promoting eco-tourism in San Jose as a symbol of the village's unique character, just like the uniqueness of the endemic cycad.



Zamia decumbens

As the sun began to set, we turned to begin the long march back home. After we left the sinkhole, two of the men, Pablo and Justino, became separated from the rest of the troop after turning down the wrong trail. Soon, they became lost in the woods, although they did not realize it at first. Pablo finally realized that they were lost and they started to wonder what to do. In all his anxiety at becoming lost, Pablo had to go and take a shit, so went off into the bush "to think." But this only made things worse because Justino and Pablo became separated and now they were each alone under the bush. They each traveled for about an hour on their own, trying different trails, trying to find their way but only going in circles. As nightfall began to draw near, each wondered where the other had gone.

Alone in the woods as the sun began to set, each man was ill equipped to spend the night so far from home. Although Pablo carried a shotgun and a lighter, he didn't have a flash light to help him see the way. On the other hand, Justino was carrying the bird they had shot for food as well as the flashlight. But without a lighter, he had no way to cook the game bird and did not relish the thought of spending the night cold and hungry in the woods.

Calling out to each other with bird noises, they eventually met up again after an hour and were greatly relieved because being lost in the bush with someone else is much better than the crazy feelings that come with being lost alone. They realized that they had already gone by the same place and then backtracked to the sinkhole before walking out again. Eventually they found the right trail and made it home after night had fallen in the village. When they finally came out of the woods by Pablo's house, they were both too tired to walk anymore, so Pablo drove Justino the last two miles home on the motorbike.

The next day, I ran into each man in the village and was regaled with stories of their adventures in the woods. Justino even showed me the blister on his foot, which is pretty impressive since Mopan people have hard feet, but walking seven miles in Wellies with no socks can even give the best Maya a blister or two.

While both men recounted the same basic facts about their ordeal, they offered different supernatural explanations for their misfortune. While Justino, the lapsed Catholic, likes to consider himself thoroughly modern (being one of the few in San Jose to have traveled to the United States and the United Kingdom), he still holds many of the old beliefs. Justino told me how when he became lost, he knew it was because he had taken the seeds from Zamia in the sinkhole without asking proper permission from the *yum*. Although we collected many other wild plants that day such as copal bark and pacaya, Justino was certain it was the Zamia seeds that had caused him to get lost. This is because he had taken it disrespectfully from the sinkholes, which were spiritually powerful places. When he realized the error of his ways, Justino left the seeds behind and begged forgiveness from the *yum*. Soon after he made amends, his luck changed. He came across Pablo and found the correct trail taking them safely home.

Later that day when I saw Pablo, I also asked him about his adventures in the woods. Pablo, who is a devout Baptist, had a different perspective on the matter. Unlike Justino, who attributed getting lost in the forest to disrespecting nature, Pablo admitted no such guilt. He said that sometimes bad things happen in life and when they do, all you have to do is simply pray to Jesus and he will help you. Lost and alone in the woods, Pablo prayed to Jesus to deliver him. His faithfulness was rewarded and soon the way home became clear.

### Old Testament & New Testament People

In the context of religious conversion, the religious geography of San Jose has become fractured between factions known as "Old Testament People" who follow the old rituals of *Kustumbre* and "New

Testament People" who reject these practices as backwards idol worship. These terms are used both as markers of self-identification and also serve as antagonistic monikers when gossiping about others. Despite their opposing views on religious praxis, both the New Testament and Old Testament People share a common cultural metaphor in which traditional Mopan agricultural rituals are equated with the Rabbinical sacrifices of the ancient Israelites (Schackt 1986 Page 150; see Piot 2010 page 58). Despite this agreement, each of these groups takes this religious comparison to opposite moral conclusions.

"New Testament People" are comprised of Protestants as well as those younger Catholics who also have rejected offerings to spirits as dangerous idol worship. Although the message of ritual rejection began with Protestant converts, their charge of idol worship against their Catholic neighbors has resulted in all but the most conservative elders rejecting the environmental rituals of *Kustumbre*. This faction claims that rituals of Old Testament *Kustumbre* religion are merely old pagan traditions wrapped beneath the veneer of high Catholic ritual. They argue that the old rituals "merely covered over" sins for a short time before the power of the rituals faded and had to be periodically renewed. New Testament People claim that these rituals have been superseded by the ultimate sacrifice of Jesus' death on the cross so that their sins have been removed "once and for all" (see Piot 2010 page 57). They argue that just as the blood of Jesus has superseded the old sacrifices of Mosaic Law; so too, should indigenous rituals of bloodletting and feeding the spirits be left behind in favor of Christ.

From this perspective, the old Mopan rituals are condemned as spiritually dangerous and New Testament People say that the traditional Mopan cosmology is filled with spirits who are capricious at best and demonic at worst. Among "New Testament people", the rejection of traditional ritual is an essential prerequisite in the creation of a "modern" self. This trend is most clearly expressed by Protestant converts. Protestants are often conflicted about their cultural past and express humiliation about the way that they and their ancestors practiced the superstitions of the Old Ways (see Robbins 2005). Protestant ideology conditions converts to be ashamed of indigenous religious expressions. Instead, they are encouraged to embrace American style Protestantism for fear of appearing unmodern and unProtestant to friends, neighbors and fellow church members.

This cultural humiliation is most pronounced among the youth who were born after the arrival of Protestant missionaries. While older Protestants who converted as adults remember performing these rituals in their youth, those born since the late 1970s have never known a time when the entire community was religiously of "One Mind." For these youth brought up in Protestant tradition, the rituals of *Kustumbre* are tangible reminders of a superstitious past that threatens to define them as backwards or primitive. The strong rejection of the Old Ways by Protestant youth is exemplified in the

opening vignette of the previous chapter when Pablo's son Juan criticized his father for showing too much interest in Don Teul's stories about the sacred nature of cacao. In contrast to his father's nostalgia for the loss of the Old Ways purposefully forgotten in Protestant conversion, Juan rejects the sacredness of cacao as superstitions, which threaten the religious progress of Protestantism. In the tenuous rejection of the past, even asking questions about the Old Ways is tantamount to backsliding.

In a small interconnected community like San Jose, gossip is a powerful force of social discipline. In their rejection of the unmodern Old Ways, Protestants not only police the ritual practices and beliefs of their members, but those of their Catholic neighbors as well. Catholics who hold on to the rituals of *Kustumbre* are the subject of gossip by their Protestant neighbors who talk disparagingly about their "backwards" and "sinful" ways. This intense social pressure by Protestants has caused many younger "New Testament" Catholics to reject the traditional rituals for fear of social stigmatization. Young Catholics often use the rejection of the traditional ritual practices as a sign of their modernity in the face of their Protestant neighbors' gossip. At the same time, Catholic discontinuation of ritual is also the result of the fear of spiritual reprisals if they fail to renew diminishing relations with the supernatural. While their parents and grandparents practiced the rituals of the Old Ways, many younger Catholics fear that their inability to successfully revitalize the decaying rituals will have negative repercussions. Unable to maintain the old spiritual relationships, many younger Catholics have turned their backs on the past and embraced Protestant ideas of "going to Jesus" rather than entering into spiritual relations through traditional ritual.

My conversations with older cacao farmers often turned to this discontinuity of ritual knowledge. They often spoke of the transmission of knowledge from their grandparents to themselves as part of their slow initiation into social and religious adulthood. Now that they themselves are the elders, they lamented the disconnect between themselves and the younger generations. When I asked informants why they thought people were becoming less respectful and not carrying on the old rituals, the consensus was that people in the community were "ashamed" to practice old beliefs. As my neighbor Thomas said...

"Our Mayan people are being kind of confused right now. We don't know who we are anymore. We are lost."—Thomas

Reframing Mopan traditional rituals as shameful, Protestants employ narratives of cultural humiliation as a means of repartitioning the spiritual and natural world (see Robbins 2005). Many Catholics thereby abandon rituals or perform them in secret so as to avoid ridicule by their Protestant neighbors.

Without the regular social performance and transmission of environmental offerings, the knowledge and practice of proper ritual enactment has dwindled and is now only practiced amongst the oldest generation of Catholics in the village. Now, only those Old Heads (*uchb'en winik/ uchb'en pol*) of the Catholic Church who reached adulthood before the coming of the Protestant missionaries continue to practice the sacred rituals passed down to them from the ancestors. These village elders are now in their 70s or older and were the last generation to come of age in a time when the entire community practiced the sacrifices of *Kustumbre*. These Catholic elders refer to themselves as "Old Testament People" because they perform the traditional sacrifices dictated by *Kustumbre*, which are thought of as analogous to the animal sacrifices made by the ancient Israelites. Thomas refers to his grandfather as one of the Old Testament believers, who still kept faith in the Old Ways saying...

At harvest, the old people would kill a chicken as an offering, just like the prophets in the Old Testament. (Thomas)

For both the traditional Mopan and the ancient Israelites, ritual offerings of desirable substances such as food, incense and blood, were used to entice the favor of the supernatural and draw them into personal relationships with humans. By juxtaposing the ritual practices of Mopan *Kustumbre* with the religion of the Biblical Israelites, the Old Testament People of San Jose seek to counter Protestant accusations that they are performing "idol worship" and legitimize their continued practice.

While the divisions over ritual practice between Old Testament and New Testament believers is a strong social fault line in San Jose, it does not formed the basis of stable political opposition in the community (cf. Re Cruz 1996). While at one time (in the 1980s), Old and New Testament ritual practice could have functioned as the identifying marker between opposing factions, this is no longer the case. As the years have passed, conversion and old age have taken its toll on the Old Testament Mopan, and no new members are added to the group. All villagers born since the 1970s (whether Catholic or Protestant) have adopted New Testament principles. For the Mopan, the division between Old Testament and New Testament people is generational and temporal. The coming of Protestantism to San Jose is seen as the fault line which marks the beginning of a new era, in the same way that the coming of Jesus divides the Bible into Old and New Testament. In this way, Old and New Testament have become local descriptions of the tremendous social and religious transformations that have accompanied Protestant modernity.

#### Mixed Mindedness and the Creation of a Modern Self

In San Jose, the division between Old Testament People and New Testament People is reinforced by the social condemnation of "mixed mindedness" for those who attempt to dabble in both the Catholic traditions and the new Protestant way of life. Because it is perceived to have real consequences for spiritual and bodily health, both Protestants and Catholics carefully guard against "mixed mindedness." Despite their conflicting ideological interpretations about traditional Mopan ritual practice, both Old and New Testament people share a belief in that spiritual action requires undivided intent in order to be successful.

Old Testament People who still make offerings to spirits avoid mixed mindedness by guarding against contaminating faith in the efficacy of traditional rituals with doubt. They say that the old rituals of *Kustumbre* are powerful but must be respected and remembered. They claim that there was real power in the old traditions, because the people who practiced the old traditions weren't yet introduced to Protestantism. For example, the old people tell the story about how the Catholic Church in San Antonio was built using the ancient magic. They say when the men went to cut the massive timbers used to support the building, they blessed the logs with copal and invocations to the spirits. After the ritual, the logs were said to have levitated, becoming light as a feather so that only ten men were needed to be able to carry all the supplies needed from deep in the forest.

Old Testament People believe that while there is still the potential for humans to invoke the power of *Kustumbre*, they also must bear the responsibility for the periodic renewal of these relationships. As the years pass, the ritual bonds between human and the spirit world begin to weaken and can become dangerous if not properly revitalized. For the Old Testament People, the decline in supernatural efficacy over time is expressed as entropy in the world. This decline can be seen in many areas of life. For example, agricultural lands that have been ritually consecrated produce abundantly for a time before becoming less fertile. People thought cured by bush doctors can relapse into their sickness. Houses that were once blessed can eventually collapse. Good weather can turn deadly. All of these relations are dependent on the periodic renewal of the ritual offerings to ensure the continued strength of their spiritual efficacy. Once a ritual has been made, the participants must be committed to the long term maintenance of these supernatural relationships and avoid being mixed minded. If the ritual revitalization of the these bonds are not reaffirmed, the relationships of respect between humans and the spirit world erode in the same way that interpersonal bonds of conviviality deteriorate without

regular sociality. The need to constantly revitalize the social bonds with the supernatural motivates the Old Testament People to continue the Old Ways of *Kustumbre* in the face of mounting social criticism.

Despite the continued renewal of spiritual obligation by the Old Testament People of San Jose, they admit that the power of the ancient magic today is not what it once was because of the mixed mindedness of the community. The Old Heads say that before the coming of Protestantism the people of San Jose were all "of one mind," in spiritual unity and were brought together through ritual practice. The most important of these rituals occurred annually when the entire population walked the boundaries of the village to make offerings at the four corners and finally in the ritual center of the Catholic Church. The ritual circumscription of San Jose delimited the village as sacred space that was watched over by patron saint Jose. The ritual consensus of having one mind amplified the spiritual potential in the community and allowed for the creation of robust relations with the supernatural. For Old Testament People, mixed mindedness is a salient metaphor for the tragic loss of ritual holism caused by religious pluralism and the root source of the decline of spiritual efficacy in *Kustumbre*.

While New Testament People share a concern with the problems of mixed mindedness, they construct the locus of this problem in individual faith, rather one of holism and continuity. For New Testament People, mixed mindedness expresses the potential for ritual danger that comes from not committing fully to one ideological system. By claiming to no longer "believe" in or practice the rituals of relationality found in the old traditions, they seek to deny the spirits' supernatural agency. This purposeful separation from the past is an expression of the libratory narrative of modernity, wherein Protestantism offers individuals freedom from fear of supernatural forces.

For Protestants, this phenomenon of mixed mindedness is a source of all manner of misfortune ranging from illness to poor harvest to natural disasters. For example, when a Catholic farmer from across the hill lost his plantation to a marauding herd of cattle and soon after, his house was destroyed by fire, it was suspected amongst the Baptists that his bad luck was a result of spiritual confusion. Similarly, when a young boy fell ill with childhood leukemia and western medicine failed to cure him, his family converted to the Baptist Church in an effort to rescue their child. The Baptists held a number of church services to pray for healing and the boy seemed to be in remission, before he suddenly died. When the disease reemerged, village gossip attributed his illness to the mix-mindedness of his grandfather, the Catholic majordomo, who had fallen back into the Old Ways of alcoholism and ritual planting practices. These acts were considered as proof that the family had not fully committed to their new Protestant faith and the fate of the child was seen as a lesson reflective of the moral correctness of the family's actions.

When New Testament People pray to Jesus for their problems, they believe that in order to ensure successful outcomes they must avoid dabbling in the rituals of *Kustumbre*. During the outbreak of Monillia fungus which decimated cacao production across southern Belize (see chapter 9), I asked a number of Protestant cacao farmers if they were considering bringing back the ritual sacrifices (known locally as *watinsa*) to cure their plants. All of these New Testament farmers replied that while the rituals of their ancestors still had power to heal the crops, the consequences of making the necessary supernatural relations are too high. To perform the old rituals again would expose them to making bargains with evil spirits. At the same time, conducting the *watinsa* to heal their cacao would call into question their new faith in Jesus, and by extension, their commitment to a modern way of life unfettered by pagan superstitions. As one afflicted farmer said, "How can we go back to our old way of life when we have come so far?" as he used his hands linearly to show the step-by-step linear movement of progress. The fear of mixed mindedness by New Testament People entails a purposeful forgetting of the rituals of *Kustumbre* and precludes hybridization of the Old Ways with Protestant Ideology. One convert to Jehovah's Witness who was a leading proselytizer in the village, explained it as...

"Sometimes your culture tells you one thing, and the Bible says something different. It is hard but we have to follow the Bible." (George)

Despite their unwillingness to expose themselves to the ritual dangers of Kustumbre, New Testament People often express a begrudging respect for the personal faith of the Old Heads. They say that while it would be dangerous for them to both make offerings to spirits while praying to Jesus, that the Old Testament People remain firmly committed to the faith of their ancestors. Because they are undivided in their intention, the Old Heads have access to great spiritual power. As one villager remarked...

People nowadays, they don't believe. But the old people, he knows what he is doing. You have to have belief in those things. (Marciano)

While the New Testament People insist that Jesus is the only way to modern salvation and continue to proselytize for the discontinuation of traditional ritual practice, they do not deny the efficacy of the traditional rituals, only the morality of the source of this power. For New Testament People, mixed mindedness is a statement about the fundamental incompatibility of two competing value systems that speaks to the emergence of individual faith, rather than religious holism.

## Forgetting *Kustumbre* and Cultural Humiliation

Me? No I don't do that ritual anymore. We don't do it now because, people now when they see you do that, they laugh at you. (Marciano)

As a growing number of the Mopan (both Protestant as well as Catholic) have begun to adopt a distinctly "New Testament" religious ideology, the old rituals of *Kustumbre* have become increasingly relegated to the "Old Heads" and the ancestors. While the debate over the morality of ritual speaks to the growing schism in San Jose between Old Testament People and New Testament People, these divisions have not coalesced into stable social factions (*contra* Re Cruz 1996). Rather, the adoption of a New Testament ideology by both young Catholics and Protestants has marginalized the continued practice of *Kustumbre* rituals to the oldest generation of living Catholics. Each year, the number of Mopan who practice *Kustumbre* rituals is dwindling as old age and conversion take their toll. Even those who still remember the Old Ways often lack the esoteric knowledge to properly enact the rituals. For example....

My grandfather told me that I should make the offerings to cure the disease if it ever returns to my cacao again. But the thing is, I don't know what prayers he used into the cacao field, so I can't try what I don't know. The old people know these things but now they are mostly all gone. (Lucas)

While 35 years ago the entire village was "of one mind" in the ritual practice of the Old Ways, today only a handful of elders consider themselves Old Testament People. Without the transmission of ritual knowledge to the younger generations, the Old Ways are in danger of being purposefully forgotten by the majority of villagers who would like to leave these practices and beliefs in the past. Many in the village spoke of this rupture saying that young people were no longer asking for knowledge from the elders, so that...

"It (the old rituals) is not being passed today. They are changing faith right now because we are not being taught again." (Yolanda and Thomas).

Soon after the generation of the current village elders reached married adulthood and began to learn the esoteric secrets of the spirit world, the traditional valorization of Maya-Catholic rituals was called into question by the rapid spread of Protestant ideology. Ritual abandonment has disrupted the transmission of sacred cultural knowledge between generations. In contrast to the primacy of textual knowledge in Protestant ideology, traditional Mopan ritual knowledge is transmitted orally and

practically. The secrets of the Mopan supernatural are passed from elder to newly married young adults through ritual apprenticeship that involves learning through participation. But the arrival of Protestant conversion has caused many young people to reject the knowledge of the elders as foolish superstation and pagan idol worship which have no place in a "modern" Mopan identity. A woman in San Jose explained how religious conversion had caused many people to be ashamed and cease practicing the rituals of the past, saying...

Before everyone was Catholic, but nowadays people go to all the different churches. And when they changed churches, the people stop doing the Old Ways. I think they (Protestants) still remember how to make those old ceremonies, but maybe they don't show it because the Baptist preacher calls those things "ma ki." (no good). I think even the preacher knows how to do those things, but maybe he is ashamed. That is why I think they stopped doing that.

In other villages like Jalacte (a Q'eqchi' Village on the Guatemalan border), you don't have to know shame because everyone practices those things. But here in San Jose, when you start to do those old things, and all the Baptist they will tease you if they see and talk about it with your neighbors. That is why I think the people right here stopped doing those things. (Yolanda)

Even though the "old heads" still practice the offerings of relationality with the spirit world, their numbers are diminishing as old age takes its toll. For many elders, the loss of ritual practice speaks to a growing sense of culture change. As the younger generations have increasingly rejected the ways of the past, there is a growing sense of cultural humiliation about the rituals of *Kustumbre* and many people seem eager to discard these practices as a sign of their spiritual modernity. This cultural humiliation is essential to the modernizing project of Protestantism. Sahlins explains that in order to desire the benefits of 'progress' and thereby denounce elements of indigenous culture, both the selfworth and value of the people's object must be depreciated through disgrace and cultural shame (Sahlins 1985:p 17).

Faced with the growing criticism of traditional ritual practice, Catholic elders are increasingly wary of exposing themselves to mockery for sponsoring public offerings and sacrifices. Old Testament People say that the younger generation has turned their backs on the *Kustumbre* of their ancestors. Rather than expose themselves to the ridicule of self-styled "modern" villagers, the Old Heads have turned inward and have refused to pass on their knowledge to those who lack respect (*tzik*) for the Old Ways of *Kustumbre*. Old Testament elders now perform the old rituals in secret, hidden away from the ridicule of Protestant villagers. With each passing year, more of the old ritual practices are lost as elders

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 $<sup>^{97}</sup>$  This form of enculturation is known colloquially as  $\it xuch\ tukul-literally\ "to\ steal\ knowledge".$ 

die without imparting their wisdom to the next generation, causing a growing disconnect between older and younger generations.

## Epilogue: Outbreaks of Witchcraft and Modernity

The struggle of both Old and New Testament People with mixed mindedness serves as a Mopan metaphor for the social tension caused by religious schism. In many ways, stories about mixed mindedness are parables that the village tells itself about who they are, who they are becoming and the struggle to balance *Kustumbre* and modernity. One of the most dramatic of these indigenous self-narratives about the perils of mixed mindedness occurred during my fieldwork when there was an outbreak of witchcraft among school age children in Belizean Maya communities throughout the region.

In the era before Protestant missionaries, Mopan shamans were considered to have both the potential to heal (*ilmah*) and to cast dark sorcery (obia / pulyah) as two sides of the same power. Shamans both cursed and defended against the curses of fellow shamans, dueling to prove their power in contests to the death. Dark sorcery of shamans were seen as a manifestation of evil in the community, yet also an inverse byproduct of their curative magic (see Mentore 2005 p 195-200). Dark sorcery was also a powerful leveling mechanism against those who dared to challenge the "expectation of reciprocity" demanded by Mopan society, suppressing the emergence of individualism in favor of holistic/collective values.

Following the advent of Protestantism in Belizean Maya communities, all forms of shamanism, both healing and cursing, have been condemned by missionaries as satanic practices. Even as Protestantism promised freedom from the past, the fear of witchcraft has become increasingly pronounced in recent years among the Belizean Maya (see Wilk 1997 Page 242). Unable to leave behind the past, the continued threat of spiritual attacks remains a concern for Protestant converts who fear contamination of mixed mindedness if they continue to dabble in the rituals of the past.

Despite the history of dark shamans and witchcraft accusations in Mopan villages, the cases that emerged during my fieldwork were different from the accounts presented in the ethnographic record about the Belizean Maya. Children have not traditionally been the target of witchcraft, being neither shamans nor engaged in individualistic money making enterprises. Rather, Maya children were thought of as mediators of adult jealousy, "shielding the household from the evils of resentment" (Berman 2011). In recent years, this pattern has changed so that now young, school aged children are increasingly the target of witchcraft.

These incidents are part of a wider resurgence of witchcraft around the globe. Although the anthropological study of witchcraft dates to the earliest days in of the discipline (Evans-Pritchard 1937), the worldwide resurgence of witchcraft "has provided scholars with fertile ground for exploring the intersection between global neoliberal/capitalist agendas and local" worlds (Piot 2010 page 119). The reemergence of witchcraft episodes is intimately "connected to changing local relations with the broader (colonial and postcolonial) capitalist economy" (Piot 2010 page 119). Witchcraft narratives can be seen as "modes of self-representation" which "are very much discourses about such hard realities-about unequal access and the failures of European development, about the il/legitimate constitution of political authority, about the temptations of illicit wealth production. They are concise, albeit allegorical, ways of trying to understand shifts in power's operation in today's world" (Piot 2010 page 127).

The introduction of translocal Protestantism has destabilized prior cosmologies about the logic of shamanism, reconfiguring the religious terrain of Mopan social life so that all forms of magical efficacy are considered evil.<sup>98</sup> At the same time, the introduction of development has increased the educational opportunities for more Belizean Maya children away from the home, at the expense of removing them from the protection and wisdom of their elders.

I first became aware of the severity of these supernatural attacks on school children early in my fieldwork, when I was first was learning my way around southern Belize. <sup>99</sup> One morning, I went along with some cacao extension officers out to the Q'eqchi' village of Silver Creek, near the southern highway, where they were conducting cacao field inspections. After they had finished touring the farms, we visited a household near the center of the small community, sharing a meal beneath the cool of the thatch. Suddenly children started running screaming from the primary school across the village green, followed by their bewildered and crying Peace Corps teacher. We were confused about what was going on at the time as we watched the spectacle unfold in front of us. Later, the stories began swirling around about how one of the young girls at the primary school had become possessed during the class, shaking with superhuman strength, spitting blood and cursing in an unknown language. This display had terrified the students and teacher, sending them fleeing in terror. The gossip said the girl was completely absorbed in this state until someone sent for a Protestant preacher who prayed over her and helped her recover her senses.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>98</sup> Scholars have argued that the Protestant "preoccupation with money-making and prosperity is easily transcoded as witchly desire" (Piot 2010 page 180).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Cross culturally, witchcraft accusations are especially prevalent in schools with stories of "students witching teachers in retaliation for poor grades, of teachers witching recalcitrant students, of students witching other students" (Piot 2010 page 153).

The possession of the girl at Silver Creek was not unique. The pattern repeated itself throughout my time in southern Belize, with another case a few weeks later in the nearby village of "Big Falls," resulting in the school closing for a time until the threat of moral panic had passed. The threat of sorcery against school children culminated later that month with an incident at *Tumul K'in* ("New Day"), the Maya language high school across the mountains in Blue Creek. San Jose had three families that sent their children to the boarding school and as soon as they came home for their bi-weekly visit, the town was abuzz with the latest gossip about what had happened. I was planting corn with the family of the Nazarene Pastor that Saturday morning, and as we worked, his two high school age sons, who were home from *Tumul K'in* for the weekend planting, excitedly regaled me with the strange happenings that had occurred over the past fortnight.

They told how on two separate occasions, girls at the boarding school had become possessed by evil spirits, shrieking in the night. 100 When the resident teachers had come to investigate what was going on, they found the girls in the same condition as the child at the earlier incident at Silver Creek School. The possessed girls began foaming at the mouth and calling themselves "Lucifer." They shook violently and when school officials tried to restrain them, the boys said that the girl did a backflip to escape their grasp. The incidents each lasted about an hour before the afflicted students returned to their right senses. Despite this temporary improvement in their condition, they would soon lapse back into fits of possession and screaming. The girls later described the sensation as being covered by a detached "shadow," the same size as their body that began to control them. The boys telling the story claimed that the next morning someone had found bits of the girls clothing and hair buried in the school yard, left there as magical foci by whoever had cursed the girls with the demon possession. In addition to the two girls who had become possessed, another student had been "cursed" by a spiritual attack which was manifest when he was bitten by poisonous snakes, nearly killing them. Others claimed to have seen spirits or shadows (pixan) walking the school grounds that looked like the ghosts of young children. These incidents continued for a number of days until someone had gone to fetch one of the East Indian Protestant ministers from Punta Gorda who had said prayers to counter act the possessions temporarily, but the evil menace remained and threatened to return at any time.

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Women and girls are often the target of contemporary witchcraft attacks which "may also be tied to the backlash unleashed by development's focus on women and girls to the exclusion of men and boys" (Piot 2010 page 180).

Over the next week, the possessions became the topic of gossip in villages across the region, as parents considered pulling their children out of school until the scare had subsided. Under intense pressure to resolve the situation, the school called a PTA meeting for the following Saturday. They invited parents and community members to attend this meeting to talk about the problem and discuss possible solutions. I went to the PTA meeting along with two of the families from San Jose with children attending the school. Long before dawn, we caught the "late bus" out of the village (4:15am) and traveled across the district to attend the morning meeting in Blue Creek. When we arrived, Maya families (both Mopan and Q'eqchi') from across southern Belize had gathered for the meeting with more than fifty people in attendance. When the meeting finally started, the school officials welcomed the parents and thanked them for coming out for such an important meeting, although the exact nature of the misfortune or the specific symptoms of the victims were never overtly stated by school officials. The meeting was then officially begun with an ecumenical Christian prayer to God to lift the ongoing spiritual menace.

Over the next three hours, the meeting swirled in a linguistic mixture of English, Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya, with many people arguing back and forth about both the causes of the misfortune as well as what could be done to solve this dangerous situation. During the open forum of the meeting, a number of parents offered explanations for why the witchcraft had occurred and out of these opinions, there seemed to be two conflicting theories.

For a few parents, the root cause of the spiritual attack was "envy." Those who held this view claimed that the girls had become bewitched by those who lacked the money to send their children to the school and were "envious" of the good fortune of their neighbors. In a similar vein, others contended that it could be the "envy" of villagers in Blue Creek who were passed over for wage jobs at the school in favor of their neighbors. In both cases, economic inequality that ran counter to the Mopan ethos of limited good and reciprocity was thought to be the motivating factor which had led the jealous party to perform "obia" <sup>101</sup> (black magic) against the children. They believed that this sorcery was ill social feelings made manifest into supernatural retribution against their neighbors. This attribution of misfortune to social jealousy is an expression of the social values of holism and equality at the heart of *Kustumbre*.

A second group of parents discounted jealousy as the underlying cause, and instead claimed that the possessions were linked to mixed mindedness that came from dabbling in ritual practices

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>101</sup> Although the term "*obia*" to describe witchcraft originally came the Mopan's Garifuna neighbors, it has been in common use for over 100 years and has been incorporated into lexicon and cosmology of the Mopan (see Thompson 1930).

"traditional" Maya culture as a means of ethnic pride, and the reinvigoration of rituals which are in decline due to Protestant condemnation, is an important part of this revival. <sup>102</sup> Earlier in the year, the school invited Maya shamans from across the border in Guatemala to come and bless the school by performing the *mayajak* ceremony. Similarly, in classes about "Maya culture," teachers had students act out a "simulation" of an indigenous healing ceremony by walking through the actions and using the ritual implements such as cacao. Although this activity was framed as merely an academic exercise, many parents believed that the revival of these rituals was dangerous in any form and opened students up to possession by evil spirits (*k'ak'as ik*). They argued that the Maya people of Belize should put those Old Ways behind them and not call upon their more pagan cousins across the border in Guatemala to bring back the traditions they had worked so hard to leave behind. Additionally, they argued that teachers or students not performing the required period of abstinence before and after the ritual could also bring misfortune. Finally, even if the rituals were properly respected, the spirits could quickly turn from protective to vengeful if offerings were not renewed within the prescribed time, bringing misfortune on all those involved.

Even as the meeting continued on through the late morning without consensus as to what caused the incidents, a general plan to remedy the situation emerged. The PTA rejected the idea of renewing the rituals to appease the spirits because doing so would be a public proclamation in their "belief" in the Old Ways, and a sign of mixed mindedness. Although another school in Big Falls had temporarily closed after a witchcraft scare had occurred there, the parents of *Tumul K'in* rejected this option for their school as well because they were concerned that others in the district (non-indigenous as well as "progressive" Belizean Maya) would laugh at them for being superstitious Indians that had sacrificed their children's education out of fear of "ghosts". By refusing to close their doors, the school and parents were refusing to give the old spirits power over them anymore, rather expressing a scientific disbelief in their existence. Instead, they agreed to hold an ecumenical prayer service with both Catholic and Protestant religious leaders present, so that everyone could join together to cast out the evil. During this time, they also resolved that everyone should remain abstinent to give the exorcism greater efficacy.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> In their curriculum, *Tumul K'in* emphasis/valorizes Maya (both Mopan and Q'eqchi') language and cultural heritage to provide "an intercultural education that reflects that values and aspirations of a Maya people" (Wainwright 2008 Page 225).

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The incident of witchcraft at *Tumul K'in*, and the PTA meeting that followed, speaks to tensions in the competing values of Mopan social life between those based in *Kustumbre* and "modern" Protestantism. Although some of the more conservative members of the PTA were inclined to attribute the spirit possessions to *obia* (sorcery) caused by envy/jealousy of their neighbor, their opinion was in the minority of those present at the meeting. The dissention from this view by the majority reflects the weakening of the holistic values of "limited good" within *Kustumbre* that has been increasingly replaced with values of Protestant Capitalism. These "modern" values privilege individual differentiation in both spiritual and economic spheres. Unlike the Old Ways in which inequality was seen as the result of selfishness within a zero sum world, the ascendance of new values of Protestant individualism links virtuous morality to financial prosperity.

Rather than "envy," far more concerning to most PTA parents was the threat of ritual revival and the accompanying spiritual mixed mindedness. Although *Tumul K'in* had attempted to disarticulate ritual practice from the spiritual realm by positioning it as "cultural revival" or "ethnic heritage," such claims of disenchantment were considered dubiously by many parents. For them, it was not that the old rituals lacked power in the modern world. On the contrary, they believed that rituals of *Kustumbre* were still were very powerful, yet still they rejected them as spiritually dangerous and incompatible with their new "Christian modern" self identity (Keane 2007). The old spiritual beliefs and practices of *Kustumbre* were judged to be incompatible with the desire for a modern identity free from superstition and fetishism, making such mixed mindedness dangerous to those who meddled in the disingenuous enactments of the old traditions. Without the right mindset and faith, just "going through the motions" was "playing" with dark powers and would bring ruin. Instead, they counseled that they must turn away from the past because they now knew about Jesus and the modern Christian faith.

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A few months later, I returned to *Tumul K'in* for their annual celebration of "Maya Day." In many ways, "Maya Day" at *Tumul K'in* was similar to San Jose's Children's Day, but on a larger scale. The event drew a large number of Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya from throughout southern Belize as well as a white tourists looking to experience" authentic" Maya culture. Although the two groups intermingled at the festivities, there were striking differences in the activities that each engaged in. Large crowds of Belizean Maya participants enjoyed the performance of the Cortez dance, the competitions in corn shucking and log splitting, and eating traditional "culture food." However, when the school introduced Guatemalan Maya shamans who had come to conduct a "new fire" ceremony to inaugurate the Maya

Day festivities, the Belizean Maya were noticeably absent as a crowd of Euro-American tourists gathered around to snap pictures and take videos of the exotic ceremony, with its colorful ritual implements, bowls of cacao, smoking incense and invocations to the old gods. Even as there has been a flourishing in material culture as a secular expression of Pan-Maya ethnic pride (such the cacao drink, marimba music and cultural dress that was prominent in the celebration of "Maya Day"), this has not extended to the spirituality of *Kustumbre*. While material culture has become cause for celebration, participating in religious ritual (even in the guise of ethnic pride) has become shunned, especially with the possession of the girls by evil spirits still fresh in everyone's minds. Unlike the syncretism of Mopan Catholicism, the fear of mixed mindedness renders these expressions of *Kustumbre* incongruent and creates a rupture between exterior markers of identity and interior belief. This precludes returning to the Old Ways of ritual practice in the name of ethnic pride or the creation of a new religious hybridity.

#### Conclusion

This chapter has explored the disruption of Mopan ritual offerings of cacao and the ensuing demystification of the natural world brought about by Protestant conversion. The story of "Feeding the House" sets the stage for this discussion by providing a narrative history of the how ritual relations with the environment have changed in recent decades. When the house was newly built, it was consecrated with ritual offerings of cacao and chicken blood to entice protection from the spirit owners (*yum*). When the power of the rites began to weaken with the passage of time, the next generation decided to leave the dangerous Old Ways behind and instead "go to Jesus" to heal their land. Although some in the community still remember the sacrifices made by their ancestors, Protestant condemnation of fetishism and mixed mindedness has largely precluded a return to the ritual offerings by vilifying the syncretism of *Kustumbre*.

As Protestant ideologies have challenged the indigenous cosmologies of spiritual nature, the place of cacao in Mopan religious life has changed as well. While cacao maintained its sacredness for the Mopan after forced conversion to Spanish Catholicism, the Second Conquest of Protestantism has vilified cacao offerings to saints and spirits. Rather than "feeding" the supernatural to create relationships of respect, these rituals are now condemned as pagan idol worship. I argue that Mopan modernity involves a purposeful alienation from the spiritual means of producing relationality with the supernatural. Protestant missionaries and pastors exhort converts to abandon the superstitions of the past and to build a relationship with Jesus, rather than the spiritual forces that inhabit the landscape.

While the spirits of *Kustumbre* were thought to be capricious beings capable of either benevolence or environmental retribution, "going to Jesus" is a safer alternative which creates a clear separation between the realms of good and evil. In this new paradigm, Protestants reject the traditional Mopan pantheon by transmuting the syncretic saints and nature spirits of *Kustumbre* into evil spirits. Whereas once the *Cheil* were thought of as the "owners" of the wild cacao who must be respected, today they have been replaced with dangerous *xateros* who threaten those who venture into the forest. The vilification of the cosmology of Mopan TEK (traditional environmental knowledge) is part of a broader belief in anti-fetishism within Protestant theology which encourages believers to exercise dominion over a demystified landscape. By delegitimizing the *Yum* as sprit owners of the land and nature, Protestantism recreates a world empty of rightful owners, and ripe for human domination. In this way, Protestant environmental ethics is a neo-colonial practice which has delegitimized the animism of Mopan environmental *habitus* and seeks to replace it with the hegemonic values of mononaturalism at the heart of Western modernity.

The desacralization of the old rituals of Kustumbre have reverberated beyond Protestant converts of San Jose and today the Catholic Church is divided over the continued practice of these ceremonies. Most young Catholics have taken the Protestant critique of Kustumbre to heart and no longer perform the traditional offerings to spirits and saints. Despite the mounting hostility toward traditional ritual practice, the Old Heads of the Catholic Church continue to conduct relational rituals, hidden away from the prying eyes of their judgmental disapproving neighbors. The growing contention over the morality of ritual practice has socially divided San Jose along this ideological fault line. On one side, the group known as Old Testament People is made up of those elderly Catholics who believe that the rituals of Kustumbre must be upheld in order to maintain the proper relationships of respect between humanity and the supernatural. Old Testament People legitimize their ritual offerings by juxtaposing the rituals of Mopan Kustumbre with the sacrifices made by the ancient Israelites. In contrast, New Testament People reject this justification and instead condemn ritual offerings as unmodern idol worship. These Protestants and young Catholics claim that the Jesus' death on the cross superseded the rituals of both the ancient Israelites and Mopan Kustumbre. Because New Testament People direct their prayers to Jesus, the rituals of relationship-making with the spirit world are no longer necessary, and so these acts are relegated to the realm of backwards superstition incompatible with a modern Mopan identity.

The religious divisions within Mopan communities over belief and ritual practice are reinforced through the stigmatization of mixed mindedness. Despite the shared condemnation of mixed

mindedness by both Old Testament People and New Testament People, each group invokes this metaphor differently to delegitimize the other. For Old Testament People, the condemnation of mixed mindedness speaks to issues of social holism and the spread of religious fragmentation, which they believe has weakened the ritual efficacy of the community. In contrast, New Testament People construct mixed mindedness in terms of individual faith. New Testament People believe that modern Mopan must not dabble in the Old Ways and instead must put their full faith in Jesus. They claim that indulging in traditional rituals not only calls in to question the sincerity of their faith, but also jeopardizes the practitioners by opening up them up to possession by evil spirits. Even as New Testament People insist that the traditions of the Old Ways should be relegated to the past, they do not deny their spiritual power of these rituals, only their morality. They believe that magic of those rituals are too powerful to control without the proper faith and doing so without open up their hearts to evil spirits.

In an effort to liberate themselves from the hold of evil spirits, New Testament people purposefully "forget" the rituals and practices of environmental *Kustumbre*, leaving behind the backwards ways of the past to embrace modernity. Mopan modernity involves a conscious secularization of "tradition," as material markers of ethnic pride are valorized, while spirituality is something shameful to be relegated to the ancestors. But in many ways, the demystification of *Kustumbre* is incomplete and the Mopan have been unable to leave the spirits of the past behind. The struggle to strip the Old Ways of their power can be seen in the rising incidents of witchcraft targeting school children. When two girls from *Tumul K'in* school were possessed, the subsequent PTA meeting about the incident shed light on the ongoing contention in Belizean Maya society as to the cause of these incidents. While some parents blamed traditional causes of envy or jealousy for the misfortune, many claimed that it was the disingenuous enactment of the old rituals as part of Maya educational efforts that were the cause. Even "going through the motions" was an avenue for opening oneself up to possession by evil spirits.<sup>103</sup> When the school later invited Guatemalan Maya shamans to bless "Maya Culture Day" with a new fire ceremony, the Belizean Maya participants in the festivities consciously avoided contamination from the "pagan" ceremony.

The contention of traditional Mopan religious practice by New Testament People has transformed the religious significance of cacao. In the Old Ways of Kustumbre, cacao was strongly associated with the domain of the sacred because of its symbolic and ritual associations. The introduction of a "modern" Protestant ideology has been the catalyst for the dislocation of cacao from

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>103</sup> According to the Old Ways of *Kustumbre*, it is impossible to "go through the motions" or treat a ritual act as play (see Danziger 2011)

the realm of the sacred, shifting it towards the profane. Material practices that once symbolized these connections become devoid of true meaning, signifiers without a signified. Cacao becomes an empty sign rather than a sacred vessel and the embodiment of relational respect. In this way, a dangerous ritual implement of Kustumbre rituals is repositioned safely in the realm of profane commodities. The emergence of these modern values in Mopan culture creates a social space in which development projects can flourish. I argue that the rise of Protestant values sets the stage for the introduction of commercial cacao development and fosters a Weberian sense of capitalism among New Testament cacao farmers in San Jose. In the following two chapters, I follow this thread to explore the rise of commercial cacao development in Mopan society and relations with nature.

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### **Chapter 8 – Development and Society**

## Introduction

This chapter traces the role of cacao development in the transformation of Mopan society. In part 1, I begin with an introduction to cacaos journey from the farm to a commodity in the world system. From this introduction, I then describe how the creation of a commercial cacao industry has sought to reconfigure indigenous social values to conform to "modern" values of Weberian capitalism. The commercialization of Belizean chocolate can be considered a case study of the social transformations that occur in indigenous communities at the interface of global capitalist development. Through this process, development not only transforms material/economic practices but also is a vector for the adoption of the value systems of western modernity. Large scale social changes such as increasing individualism, inequality and a capitalist ethic are reinforced by the widespread adoption of Protestant theologies that are congruent with capitalist development.

In part 2, I examine how cacao and chocolate have become intertwined with representations of Belizean Maya to a multicultural audience. I explore how particular images and tropes of Mayaness are deployed in print advertisements, public events and promotional films by different actors involved in the Belizean chocolate industry. While corporate marketing forefronts the relationship between Maya identity and chocolate to improve their bottom line, the Belizean Maya have been successful in promoting Belizean chocolate as a means to channel outside development resources towards the creation of cultural revitalization.

#### Part 1

# The Journey of Cacao from Belizean Farms to Global Chocolate Bar

As a global commodity, cacao moves through the world system, from the farthest periphery of the Belizean forest to the brightly lit supermarkets of the global meteropole. The journey of cacao from seed to chocolate bar in the grocery store begins in one of the 28 cacao growing Maya villages which dot the backcountry of Southern Belize. The seedlings start slowly and if all goes well, after about five years, they will begin to produce fruit. Once they mature, cacao trees begin to form delicate white flowers hanging from the trunk and branches. After pollination, the flowers produce large fruit which look vaguely like a ridged American football and come in a variety of colors ranging from yellow, green,

brown, red or purple. The fruits grow heavy (2lbs or more) and can grow over a foot in length. As they ripen, the fruits will become brighter and more floral. Inside the pods, cacao seeds hang like strings of pearls encased in the sticky pulp of white fruit that smells vaguely of a mixture of bananas and citrus.

Although cacao produces some fruit throughout the year, most of annual production comes during the peak harvest season between December and May. During this time, the trees become loaded with fruit and the usually quiet cacao fields buzz with activity as villagers go to harvest their cacao every two weeks. This is especially true on Saturday mornings when the village school is closed and the children are able to help their families in the farm. Once they reach their destinations, families fan out in the fields to begin harvesting. Low hanging fruits are picked with a gentle twist of the fruit's stem, while those growing high up in the upper canopy require the use of a "harvest knife" attached to a 10 foot poll to reach. Once all the ripe fruits have been harvested and piled up, the people begin to "broke" their cacao by whopping each of the pods with a stout stick. When struck along the center, the ripe pods ring out with a hollow thud and tough outer husk begins to crack open. Reaching in with their fingers, they pull out the strings of sticky fruit and fill rough hewn 50 lb. plastic sacks. With their bags full and the sun hot in the tropical sky, the Mopan cacao farmers head for home with the weight of their bags hanging across their foreheads by straps and the sweet juices of cacao soaking through the clothes on their backs.

The shift in cacao from primarily home use to commercial sale has meant a more involved post-harvest process than in the past. When cacao is needed for home consumption, most Mopan households prefer to make chocolate drink with "washed" cacao seeds in which the white fruit has been rinsed off in the creek and the remaining beans are left to dry in the sun. This unfermented cacao is purple in color and has an acidic flavor unsuitable for conventional chocolate manufacturing and is therefore processed in this way for the sole purpose of local usage. The majority of the cacao grown in Southern Belize however, is destined for commercial sale and must first be fermented in order to obtain the rich brown color and chocolaty aroma desired by producers. The fermentation of cacao takes two weeks and every few days, someone must tend to the fermenting cacao and stir the pile so that the beans ferment evenly. The cacao seeds and the surrounding white pulp is placed into wooden boxes and allowed to rot, with the sticky juice dripping out the slats in the bottom. During this time, the cacao seeds are transformed from raw, purple seeds into the rich dark brown color desired by *chocolatiers*.

About fourteen days after the cacao is placed in the box, fermentation is completed and the beans are removed. The newly fermented cacao must then be dried slowly to prevent mold from ruining the beans, so it is spread out on concrete floors or tarps to dry in the sun. The slow drying

process takes another week before it is completed, and during this time, the cacao must be carefully watched and taken inside whenever a rainstorm threatens or the evening mist starts to roll in.

Once the beans have finally dried, farmers place them in rough bags used to carry the seeds to the Toledo Cacao Growers Association purchasing depot in the district capital of Punta Gorda. Standing next to large sacks of dried cacao, farmers wait in the predawn darkness for the rickety school buses that serve as commercial transport to take farmers and their produce to the market. As the bus slowly makes it way out of the hills toward town, more passengers are collected and their 50-pound bags of cacao are hefted into the back of the bus. Tumbling down the cratered road, ever downhill, the bus winds through the inky blackness of the predawn. Soon the bus is full with market day buyers and sellers. By the time the buses finally reach the highway, the sun is rising out of the Caribbean Sea and the buses from all over the district crowd the road as they near the bustling trade town.

When the TCGA office opens at 7am, there is already a line formed as Maya people mill around waiting to sell their cacao. Old people mingle with the young, and women are as likely to be lined up to sell cacao as men. Some sell large amounts, multiple bags topping the scales at more than 100 pounds while other have only a few pounds of beans that will pay for a few items they need to buy at the produce market that day. Each bag that comes in must first be inspected for weight, moisture, mold and bean quality. Once the buyer is satisfied by the quality, a TCGA employee cuts the member-farmer a check for \$2.25 bz per lb. The cacao beans are then bagged and stored in the warehouse along with all the other beans purchased throughout the previous year.

Because of the low production volume in the country, the TCGA is only able to export their cacao once a year so that the beans will now sit for up 12 months as the warehouse gradually becomes full of 50 pound bags stacked neatly on wooden pallets. As shipment day approaches, the warehouse becomes full almost to the point of bursting at the seams. Then one day, a semi-truck from Belize City appears and a small gang of cacao extension officers fill the trailer from top to bottom with sacks of cacao beans. The workers then affix a seal on the door and with a wave goodbye to the driver as the truck lurches forward and begins to amble off in a cloud of black diesel smoke towards the ship docks. There, a waiting freighter will loaded with the modular container full of cacao beans as its hold is meticulously stacked containers of other commodities bound for the global market.

The cacao grown in San Jose is part of commodity chains stretching across the globe. Although Belizean cacao is destined for consumers in the United States and United Kingdom, it must first travel to an Italian port for processing. At the factory, the fermented beans are first crushed and pressed to separate the valuable cocoa butter and liqueur from the cocoa solids used to make the commercial

chocolate. Once complete, the chocolate bars are packaged in designer labels and reloaded back onto a cargo ship for global distribution. Upon arriving at its destination, the containers full of Maya Gold chocolate bars is then divided up among truck and trailers bound for the grocery stores of first world consumers.

# The Promise and Peril of Development

Throughout my stay in San Jose, the word on everyone's' lips was development. San Jose is not a "modern" place by contemporary American standards. The village lacks electricity and the only access to markets is by rough dirt roads. The village of about 1000 people is a place of thatch and zinc roof houses, scattered up and down the faces of low rolling hills covered in cacao plantations; a place where peasant farmers feed their families and produce surplus to sell in the market. Even as the village of thatch houses and peasant farms create a pastoral image of a timeless indigenous community, San Jose has become increasingly enmeshed in a web of development projects with links around the globe.

Before 1990, San Jose was kind of an out of the way place but now it is at the forefront of development, both by outsiders who view San Jose and the people in it as things to be developed, and by the people of San Jose who are reaching up to the invisible streams of money hoping to bring in outside resources to create San Jose as a "modern" Mopan village. Mopan people engage development from a perspective of cultural "bricolage," so that such "innovations were appropriated, Mopan fashion, into a clearly Mopan world of meanings and values" —often to the chagrin "of many a development project staff person" (Danziger 2001 p 24). Development initiatives that generated the most interest/participation from villagers are the ones "likely to augment a family's cash income," ease the burden of laborious and time consuming tasks at the center of "village and household affairs," (Danziger 2001 p 24). Development has transformed Mopan society in a variety of ways. Some of these changes are viewed positively, reducing disease, increasing free time and bringing an influx of cash into indigenous communities. Other outcomes of development have had ambiguous or negative results, depending on the person's specific positionality. Development initiatives have created new inequalities and expenses as the Mopan are increasingly subjected to the whims of global forces beyond their control.

The proliferation of projects in San Jose is a local enactment of the global mission of development in the post-colonial world. Development has been considered "the central organizing concept of our time" (Cohen and Shenton 1995). In the post-colonial era, development is positioned as a technical project to "modernize" the people of the decolonized "3<sup>rd</sup> world." A walk through the central

loop of San Jose village is a palimpsest of more than 30 years of development, charting the rise and fall and sometimes rise again of global development initiatives. In the 1970s, development brought a "growing atmosphere of change" to Mopan life (Gregory 1972, 1984), that optimism was reversed in the post-independence neoliberal era of the 1980s following Belizean independence and the collapse of the Hershey's market for Belizean cacao. By 2010 this decline seemed to be replaced with a renewed vigor of social life and ethnic Maya cultural pride, while still noticeable in the decrepit facades of past development attempts.

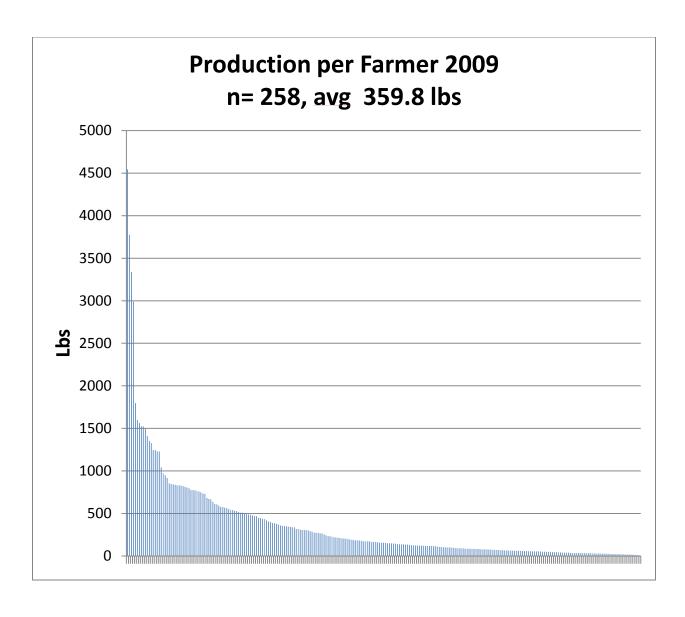
Development is largely driven by national and international theories and "best practices" designed to promote the goals important to capital and the *meterpole*, rather than "locally defined needs" (McClusky 2001 p 34). Development in southern Belize has been sporadic and uneven, with the ruins of good intentions splayed across the landscape (see McClusky 2001 p 34; Wainwright 2008; Wilk 1997 p xvi). San Jose is littered with the physical reminders of a myriad of development projects, both past and present. The physical relics of developmental projects point to both the promise as well as unrealized dreams of the scores of projects, which have come and gone in the village. Projects were put in place for all manners of technically defined social ills hindering modern agriculture, education, health, the empowerment of women, economic opportunities, and environmental sustainability. Funded by far away donors, these development projects represent both the promise of improving the social and economic livelihoods of the Mopan as well as the dashed promise which almost inevitably follow. Projects arrive amidst fanfare and public meetings, with strong interest in the beginning, but as problems arise or funding runs out, the project begins to sputter into decline, sometimes over a long time, but often abruptly. The inattention to local development desires and needs has resulted in decaying ruins of agricultural ventures, health outposts, and all manner of cooperatives all of which served as a cautionary tale about the fragility and impermanence of development (see McClusky 2001; Wainwright 2008).

Mopan villagers who have lived through the last four decades of structural adjustments, often ground historical events in the crisis and interventions of development (see McClusky 2001 p 34). Mopan villages are filled with a history of failed cooperatives, and people drift in and out of the orbit of different projects over their life history trajectories. But even as individual development projects have come and gone over the years, the overall project of "development" has become a constant presence in southern Belize. Whereas before, development was something out of the ordinary, now after decades of projects fade into the background of social relations and the norms of western modernity are normalized. The values of development gain traction in Mopan social life because they are congruent

with the ideologies of Protestantism that have taken root in Mopan communities. The history of cacao as the object of rural development in southern Belize exemplifies this process in which social progress becomes aligned with the history of European capitalism that privileges the maximizing producer, the individual consumer and allows for the emergence of growing economic inequality.

## From Holism to Inequality and Individualism

Today, cacao is the leading cash crop in the Toledo district and is significant source of income for hundreds of families in the region. But not all cacao farmers have had the same success, leading to growing economic and material inequality. In the patchwork development landscape of southern Belize, some households have been able to leverage the advantages of development towards personal gains. Rather than the stated goal for helping the poor, development can instead allow for the growth of inequality, the sundering of social relations and the reorganization of the natural environment to meet the (quantified) interests of the market (Rist 2002). Unequal developments have allowed some in the community to prosper due to greater access to factors such as capital, land, family labor, credit or technology which allow them to better take advantage of the entrepreneurial opportunities, while leaving behind others (Faust 1999; Netting 1993; Wilk 1997 Page p 138, 158). This inequality between farmers is evident in the differences between all the households who sold cacao commercially in Belize during 2009 (see below).



In 2009, there were 728 households in southern Belize which grew cacao, although only 258 of these had sold any cacao in the past year. On average, each of the 258 households that sold commercially produced a surplus of 360 lbs for the commercial market beyond the needs of home usage, on an average of 2.2 acres. But this figure belies the stark stratification of production between different types of cacao farmers. Belizean cacao farmers can be divided into roughly four categories based on their annual production. Large producing farms (1000+ lbs), medium farms (999-500), small farms (499-1 lb) and household farms (no commercial sales, home use only). Of the more than 93,000 lbs of Belizean cacao sold commercially in 2009, roughly 1/3 (34,228 lbs) was produced by 18 large producers (1000+ lbs), another third (29,502 lb) was sold by 43 medium farmers, with the remaining

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>104</sup> These terms are relative to each other. A large farm in Belize is still quite small compared to the global average.

third was grown by 197 farmers. The remaining 470 member farmers of the TCGA sold no cacao at all during this time.

Much of this difference in production is the results of uneven rates of market integration, available agricultural labor and differing socio-natural values. Larger producers embrace capitalist values of scientific agriculture to maximize the return on investments in the management of their plantations. In contrast, the long tail of production curve is made up of an assortment of marginal cacao farmers including the elderly, Old Testament traditionalists, single women, and those who participate in labor migrations. In general, while New Testament farmers embrace capitalist enterprise, Old Testament elders are more likely to practice low intensity and dispersed agricultural practices of *Kustumbre* (see chapter 9).

While a few larger growers bring in a couple hundred dollars a year from cacao, even selling a few pounds of cacao each month can have a major impact on a family's economic situation. In recent decades there has been an explosion of new needs and wants which have demanded the attention and limited reserves of the Mopan villagers (see Sahlins 1972). Sales of cacao provide much needed income and help many families deal with the rise in cash based expenses. Before large scale development came to southern Belize in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Mopan economy was limited both in terms of what they produced for sale, as well as what they could purchase. Cash was rare in the village and people got everything they needed from the farm or limited trade. Only a few items such as "trees, shotguns, and items of clothing and personal adornment" were considered personal property, while everything else was the "communal property of the household" (Wilk 1997 p 242).

Improved infrastructure and access to markets has led to an abundance of consumer goods becoming available in San Jose. Consumer goods such as radios and TVs are becoming more common home furnishings, which is remarkable in itself for a village with no central electricity system. It is common to see modern technology (cell phones, pickup trucks, solar panels), juxtaposed with markers of traditional village life (such as thatch houses). The increased cash and access to new services has led to a "ratcheting" of rising standards of living as many Belizean Maya have become accustomed to features of "modern" life, such as consumer goods, "better housing, schooling, medical care, and wider varieties of foods from the store" (Wilk 1997 p140-141, 177). Although these novelties begin as luxuries, soon they become accepted as necessary for everyday life.

One of the most striking outcomes of Protestant condemnation of cacao rituals combined with the introduction of store bought alternatives has been the marked decline in the making and drinking of the traditional Mopan chocolate drink, *käkäh*. The adoption of western food commodities in place of

traditional "bush food" was a frequent topic of conversation during my fieldwork. While homemade chocolate drink was once a central part of any important meal, today it is becoming rarely used. With the introduction of store bought alternatives, the homemade käkäh has been replaced with other "box ha" (black water) drinks such as instant coffee or tea, filling the same social role. Similarly, imported sodas and sugary powdered juice mixes have become important symbols of culinary prestige, representing access to wealth and markets. One older cacao farmer spoke about these changes...

I used to see the ladies going to the lunch in the farms to feed the labor and the workers cacao with their meals, but now it is different. Nowadays it seems they are not in favor of cacao drink anymore. When the go to farm, they just carry the little packet now (of Kool Aid or instant coffee). They just put the packet in the water. Things today are getting easy. (Pablo)

New replacement drinks are much less time consuming for Mopan women to produce, but cost scarce cash. The changing nature of Mopan consumptive practices were illustrated when I went to a wedding in San Jose with the family of my neighbor Thomas. During the reception, Thomas commented on the rising expectations in Mopan engagement and wedding feasts. He said that before at weddings, people would eat chicken caldo with tortillas and drink cacao or coffee out of buckets that the host served you from a common drinking bowl. But now those foods seem old fashion and low class so that everyone wants bbq and soft drinks or even beer and stout at weddings these days. This shift from collective eating and drinking to prepackaged individual servings is part of a larger pattern of changing social values. The standards of modern consumption have led to the ratcheting of consumer expectations in the community so that even if you decide to have a traditional wedding feast with a pot of caldo and a bucket of cacao drink, people will now look down on you.

Today in San Jose, the traditional cocoa/chocolate drink is reserved only for honored visitors (often outsiders) and occasionally still on special ritual occasions and holidays (see Schackt 1986 Page 42). Stripped of its former significance, cacao is now able to be replaced with easier store bought alternatives, without fear of spiritual reprisal. In conjunction with the desacralization of Protestant conversion, the commercialization of cacao has largely removed it from the sphere of reciprocal (demand) sharing within the village and rearticulated as a bulk commodity within global commodity trade. Now, those without cacao trees of their own now must purchase the cacao beans at the market or use commercial substitutes like Nescafe instant coffee (see Wilk 1997 p 119). This change is readily apparent in daily acts of hospitality shared when visiting neighbors. Every time I would visit a household in San Jose or one of the surrounding communities, I was served a beverage as an act of hospitality (see chapter 3). Even though these interactions took place multiple times a day for nearly a year, I only spontaneously received cacao drink five times. Even among cacao farmers with acres of cacao trees, I

was almost always served a hot mixture of Nescafe and dehydrated creamer, occasionally juice or Kool-Aid. On my last visit with the family of San Jose's cacao extension officer, the matriarch served cacao drink to mark my return home to the United States. After the meal, she apologized for not serving chocolate drink more during my previous visits, even though her husband was the cacao extension officer and she knew I was interested in traditional cacao use. She explained that Nescafe or Kool-Aid were just much easier and quicker to make when you have so many other responsibilities.

The replacement of local cacao drink with store bought alternatives is part of a broader pattern of development in Mopan communities in which homemade goods are replaced by far away producers. Belizean Maya villages that have largely replaced items made in the village through labor intensive processes (most notably cacao drink) with purchased goods. These new consumer goods, improved infrastructure and ready markets have largely alienated villagers from items that they once provided themselves through local production. While outside goods are often desired as labor saving, novelty or prestige goods, they all require the expenditure of scarce cash. In contrast to previous obligations which could be paid in kind or through labor exchange, new expenses could only be paid in cash. Every family in the village now has some need for cash to finance everything from school tuition fees and books, new foods and commodities from the outside, i.e. solar panels, as well as pay for new reoccurring costs like the village water bill. One farmer expressed the dangers of being drawn into cycles of rising expenses and wage labor...

If you don't have a plantation, you will have to buy everything. You have to buy soap, lard, sugar, and plantains. You have to buy because the kids want to eat. Even if you make a little money, soon it is gone again (Justino)

The influx of consumer goods along with the adoption of capitalist economic values has transformed Mopan notions of property to emphasize individual ownership. Increasingly, people have more personal property including bicycles, instruments and most conspicuously, cell phones that are epitomized by the unique phone # for adults and teenagers with access to cash. These consumer goods are primarily owned and used by individuals, rather than corporate or community social groups. The increase in individual private property at the expense of communal property is an expression of modern consumerism fostered by capitalist development, and enhanced by the sanctification of the individual in Protestantism. In this process, the "traditional holistic worldview" has become replaced with one in which the "individual has become the ideological least common denominator and measure of all things" (Abse 2007; see Dumont 1983, 1986).

In contrast to the uchb'en k'in (old days), the coming of development projects created a new ideology in which the holism of the group is challenged by individual advancement. The unequal spoils of development have allow for a new societal concept wherein the idea of limited good is replaced by an ethos in which individuals fate becomes disentangled from the collective whole (see Wilk 1997 Page 171). The emergence of Protestant individualism over the past four decades has normalized inequality through the increasing adoption (by Protestants and many Catholics alike) of a New Testament theology in which the locus of sacred shifts from the community to the individual's personal relationship with Jesus. In the past, differences in wealth within Mopan communities equalized through participation in the cargo system, converting material wealth into prestige. "The arranging of fiestas is a costly affair" and the fiesta sponsors must provide not only enough food and drinks for all the guests, but also for ceremonial expenses associated with dances/rituals including masks, costumes, musicians and ritual/dance instruction from a religious specialist (Schackt 1986 Page 79). The sponsorship of fiestas was one of the most important avenues for the socially acceptable expression of prestige and authority within Mopan society organized around the principles of limited good and the expectation of reciprocity (see Gregory 1972). Because ostentatious displays of wealth are avoided for fear of witchcraft retaliation throughout Mesoamerica, scholars have argued that the sponsorship of fiestas act as a "leveling mechanism" which serves to redistribute wealth and serve within the community (see Cancian 1965: Diener 1978; Smith 1990; Vogt 1976 Page 140). Through religious service, problematic wealth could be transformed into prestige and status of social ranking. With the coming of new economic opportunities, this system became fraught with contradictions of prestige between the gerontocracy whose status was achieved though age, and the economically successful who were able to finance the activities (see Gregory 1974).

Protestant condemnation of indigenous spirituality as witchcraft has removed the threat of *obia* as an economic leveling mechanism, enhancing the tendencies toward inequality in uneven development. While sorcery was an effective buttress of limited good in the old ways of *Kustumbre*, its efficacy remained only as long as the community was "all of one mind" spiritually. The sundering of religious holism through Protestant conversion created multiple factions in each community with conflicting views about the morality of both money and indigenous shamanism, weakening the fear of spiritual repercussions for economic success. This emerging economic inequality was augmented by growing Protestant criticism of the cargo system and village dances as pagan and old fashion. The decline of the *Cargo* system and ritual sponsorship has weakened sentiments of limited good and have allowed for the emergence of visible inequality in Mopan communities.

While some households now have access to pickup trucks and solar panels, their neighbors may still use kerosene lamps and travel to farm by horse, bike or foot. Children from well to do families tease their poorer neighbors and cousins for being old fashion because they lack the tangible markers of modernity such as jewelry, shoes and new clothes. Similarly, development cash has allowed individual households to purchase solar panels, so that electrification is a marker of individual advancement, rather than collective progress. This difference between the electrical haves and have-nots is starkly visible every night after the sun goes down as some households light up the hillside and boom loud music as others sit quietly in shadows with the flicker of candles. Capitalist development privileges individual consumerism, just like the proliferation of Protestant churches in Mopan communities has brought spiritual choice to individuals. New Testament entrepreneurs display the rewards of their business ventures in consumer practices, ranging from vehicles, cell phones, and home improvements such as solar panels, while elderly Old Testament households focus primarily on local production and lack many of these accoutrements of modernity. Personal consumption of nonlocal consumer goods carry symbolic values that are instrumental in the creation of a "modern" identity, as well as material instruments in contests over the reshaping of society (Wilk 1997 Page 161).

The rise of inequality is a direct challenge to the egalitarian ethos of Kustumbre. Before widespread Protestant conversion among the Belizean Maya, large scale inequality was constrained by the ethic of reciprocity and limited good within *Kustumbre* which was enforced by fear of witchcraft and cursing. While the fear of *obia* helped keep inequality within communities in check in the past, New Testament villagers believe that Jesus protects them from the malicious witchcraft of Old Testament neighbors. Protestant converts believe that Jesus is qualitatively more powerful than the spirits of *Kustumbre*. They believe that their new Protestant faith removes them from the spiritual repercussions of an ideology of limited good, allowing for the emergence a Weberian ethic and its accompanying acceptance of inequality. The decline in witchcraft reprisals brought about by Protestant conversion has legitimized the inequalities which have come from development in Mopan communities.

I argue that one reason development has been so successful in southern Belize because of the ideological changes brought by Protestant missionization. New Testament people in San Jose claim that while others may be envious of their profits of their new business ventures, Jesus will protect them from the jealousy of their neighbors. Converts believe that their new found wealth is a sign that they are living according to God's will according to the prosperity gospel taught in Protestant churches. They say that in the new Toledo, there will be winners and losers and those who have "fallen behind" in the pursuit of capitalist development lack God's blessing because of some sin committed or mixed

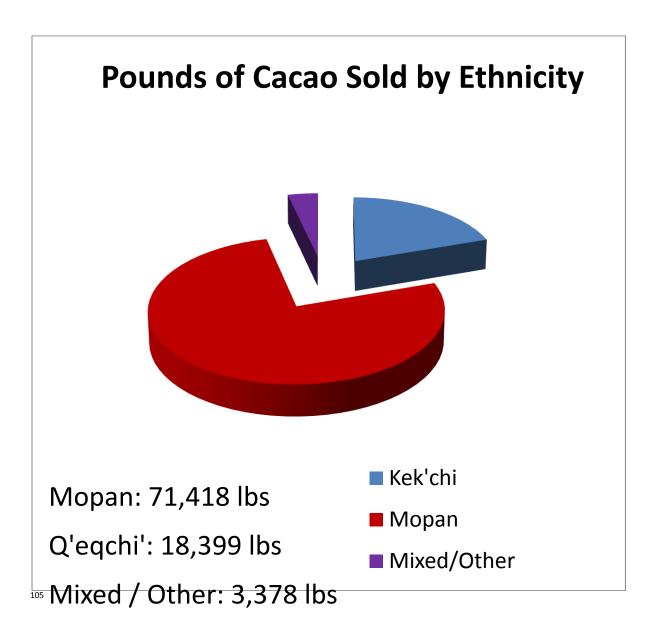
mindedness with the old ways. In their view, the Old Testament elders are seen as backwards and unmodern, lacking the initiative to make it in the modern business world. On the other hand, from the perspective of Old Testament believers, the newfound wealth of Protestant entrepreneurs is a blatant disregard for the equality of *Kustumbre*. Despite their belief that rising inequality is socially and morally dangerous, Old Testament people generally refrain from grumbling too loudly about their neighbors' success for fear of being labeled a jealous witch in local gossip.

# **Uneven Development**

Cacao development has brought inequality on a variety of scales, ranging from the regional to the household. On one level, development projects are distributed unevenly throughout the Maya villages of the region. Differences in geography and colonial history have created different trajectories for commercial cultivation between the Mopan of the highlands and the Q'eqchi' of the lowlands. More than 70% of all cacao sold comes from Mopan villages, channeling much of the prosperity brought by development towards the "Mopan," rather than to broader categories of "Maya" or "Belizean indigenous people." Over the past 35 years, the Mopan have been disproportionately in the object of development initiatives to encourage the expansion of commercial cacao among the Mopan and integrate them into the national economy as commercial agriculturalists. In contrast to the peripheral Q'eqchi' lowlands, colonial agronomist emphasized the productivity of the uplands and concentrated development efforts in the region (Emch 2003 118-9; Wilk 1997 Page 59). Because of this, the Mopan villages of the north are more integrated on the semi-periphery of the national economy with better access to markets for cash crops and infrastructure (Osborn 1982; Emch 2003 116). As the result of both ecological reasons and colonial histories, the Mopan villages located on the foothills of the Maya mountains are the main source of cacao in Belize. While both Mopan and Q'eqchi' may engage in commercial cacao production, the Mopan are much more fully embraced commercial agriculture through national and international development projects (Wainwright 2008).

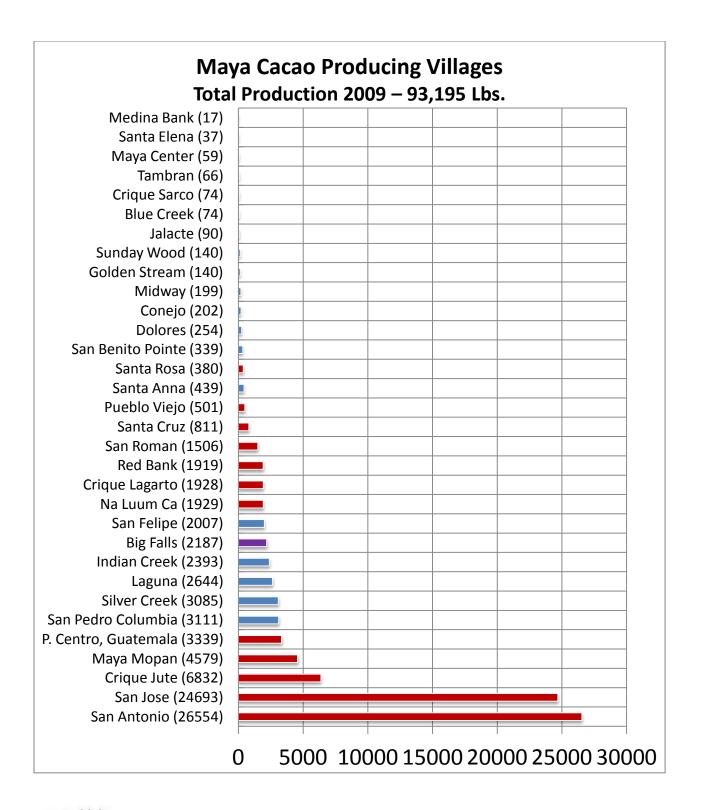
In Mopan areas where cacao was particularly well suited to the hilly terrain of the Maya mountains, the establishment of commercial cacao groves has been a avenue for growing inequality, while Q'eqchi' areas are located in marginal ecological areas of cacao production. The uneven focus of development has help normalized inequality in Mopan villages, as many Q'eqchi' villages remain more egalitarian. While the Q'eqchi' Maya of Belize began to convert to Protestantism a decade before the Mopan and some small villages converted entirely to Protestantism, both the Belizean Mopan and Q'eqchi' alike consider the Q'eqchi' to be closer to nature, more in touch with the old spirits and magic

of *Kustumbre* and more constrained by an egalitarian ethic of limited good. In contrast, Mopan villages are thought of as more modern, with more prevalent trappings of western consumerism and inequality. But unlike more egalitarian Q'eqchi' villages which are the source of most of the witchcraft outbreaks in the region (see chapter 7), many villagers say that "modern" communities like San Jose does not have trouble with *obia / pulyah* (black magic) or jealously as the Old Ways are disconnected from spiritual consequences (via protestant conversion and religious schism), despite the growing inequality brought by development.



 $^{105}$  "Mixed" villages indicate communities where no one ethnicity > 80% of total population (Belize Census 2000).

Within the 42 metric tons of cacao produced in Belize during 2009, it is possible to break down this data further to see trends relating to village production and the number of farmers selling to the market to explore the emergence of greater social differentiation between Belizean Maya communities. Although there are more than 30 Maya villages in which farmers sell cacao commercially, the bulk of production comes from two Mopan villages in particular: San Jose and San Antonio (see chart below). These same two villages also receive the lion's share of the benefits of cacao development including facilities for the fermentation, drying and in San Antonio a station for the purchasing of cacao beans. Similarly, in neighboring Stann Creek district, the village of Maya Mopan is the largest producing community in the district and the location of the northern purchasing center for the TCGA.



Kek'chi

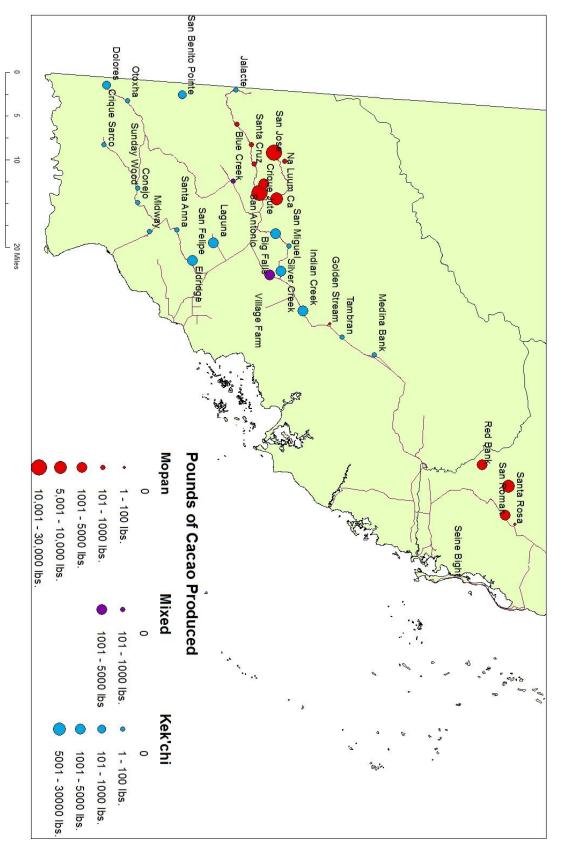
Mopan

■ Mixed/Other

Village	Cacao Production 2009
San Antonio	26554
San Jose	24693
Crique Jute	6382
Maya Mopan	4579
P. Centro (Guatemala)	3339
San Pedro Columbia	3111
Silver Creek	3085
Laguna	2644
Indian Creek	2393
Big Falls	2187
San Felipe	2007
Na Luum Ca	1929
Crique Lagarto	1928
Red Bank	1919
San Roman	1506
Santa Cruz	811
Pueblo Viejo	501
Santa Anna	439
Santa Rosa	380
San Benito Pointe	339
Dolores	254
Conejo	202
Midway	199
Golden Stream	140
Sunday Wood	140
Jalacte	90
Blue Creek	74
Crique Sarco	74
Tambran	66
Maya Center	59
Santa Elena	37
Medina Bank	17

The uneven geography of development can be visualized as a GIS map of southern Belize which is presented on the following page in which the average annual cacao production for 2008 and 2009 is broken down by village ethnicity.

# Average Cacao Production 2008 & 2009



### **Gender Stata Output**

In addition to geographic or ethnic inequality, development can lead to new inequalities stratified by gender (Wilk 1997 p 138). Cacao has been promoted by development agencies as an ideal cash crop for women with because it requires low labor, bears for many years and has guaranteed market. These projects have allowed many women to tend their own groves of cacao and ,along with other development projects, provide a source of cash income for a group which has traditionally had little access to cash. The economic empowerment of women is often forefronted in cacao development. For example....;

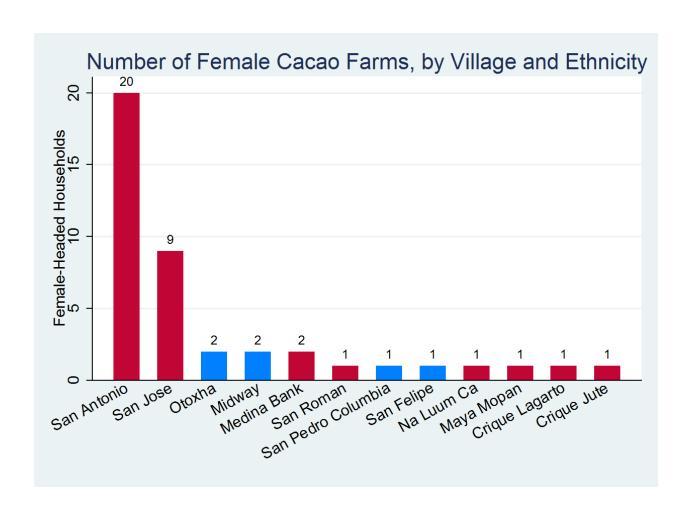
Armando Choco, TCGA Manager, declared that the majority of the cacao plantations belong to men. He believes that for women to have access to and control of the resources, such as land, they need to generate their own income, thus they will be respected, considered and involved in the decision making process. Armando believes that cacao production is one way women will be able to generate income for their own and thus allowed them to make sound decisions. (Edesco 2008; p 15)

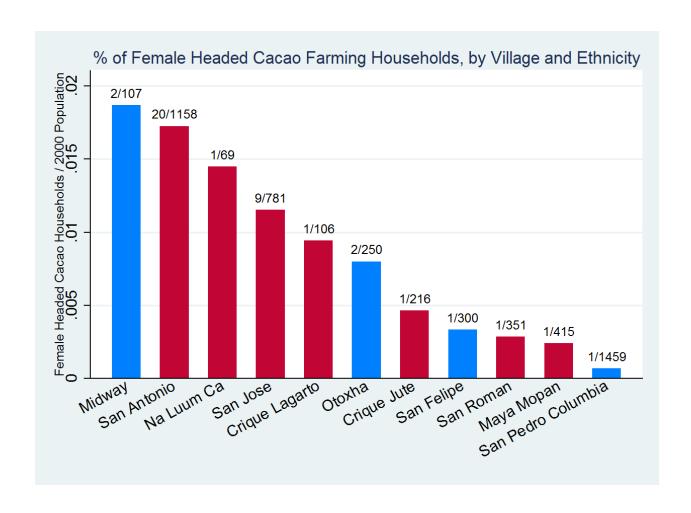
The demographics of Maya cacao farmers in southern Belize can be examined more closely by gender and ethnicity through statistical analysis of cacao sales data. In order to explore this relation, I utilized the statistical software program STATA to run a multilinear regression of cacao production to explore inequality among indigenous cacao farmers in Belize. In 2009, there were 289 Maya households selling cacao in southern Belize (n=289). Disaggregated by ethnicity, there were 209 Mopan cacao farms and 80 Q'eqchi' cacao farms. Of the 209 Mopan cacao farms, 172 are cultivated by male headed households and 37 by female headed households (18%). Among Q'eqchi' households, there are 75 males and 5 females with cacao farms (07%). In total, there are 247 cacao farms headed by males and 42 by females (17%). Gender is determined based on the gender of the person on the sales receipts, TCGA membership registration and organic/Fair Trade Certification compliance. "Male" households have only male farmers listed which "female" includes female members, though these are often listed with male kin such as husbands, sons, or brothers which is unsurprising in a culture in which the male sentiment of machismo still is prevalent.

Head of Commercial Cacao Producing Household 2009 by Gender and Ethnicity

	Mopan	Q'eqchi'	Total
Male	172	75	247
Female	37	5	42
Total	209	80	289

Within these divisions of ethnicity and gender, it is possible to break down this data further within the village level. The distribution of female cacao farmers is uneven with some villages having a relatively high occurrence of female managed cacao farms. These trends can be seen in terms of both total number of female cacao farmers in each village, as well as their relative frequency in terms of the total population of the village (according to the 2000 Belize Census). In terms of absolute numbers, only the large Mopan villages of San Antonio (20 females) and San Jose (9 females) had more than two female headed cacao farms in the community.





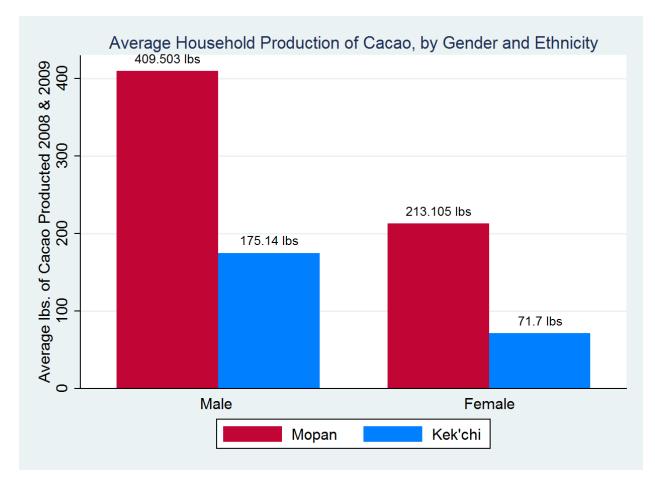
There is a significant relation between cacao production with gender and ethnicity. When considering the impact of gender and ethnicity on cacao production (as a multilineal regression), female cacao farmers are predicted to produce on average 194 lbs less cacao per year than males while Mopan cacao farmers produce on average 225 pounds more cacao than their Q'eqchi' counterparts. Both gender and ethnicity are significant at (0.023) and (0.001) accordingly.

. reg prod0809avg female Mopan

Source	SS	df	MS		Number of obs F( 2, 286)		289 7.39
Model   Residual    Total	3727696.04 72108080.7	286 2521	3848.02 .26.156 		F( 2, 286) Prob > F R-squared Adj R-squared Root MSE	=	0.0007 0.0492 0.0425
prod0809avg	Coef.	Std. Err.	t	P> t	[95% Conf.	In	terval]
female   Mopan   _cons	-194.2996 225.9783 180.8187	84.70811 66.72368 56.388	-2.29 3.39 3.21	0.023 0.001 0.001	-361.0301 94.64657 69.83062	3	7.56924 57.3101 91.8068

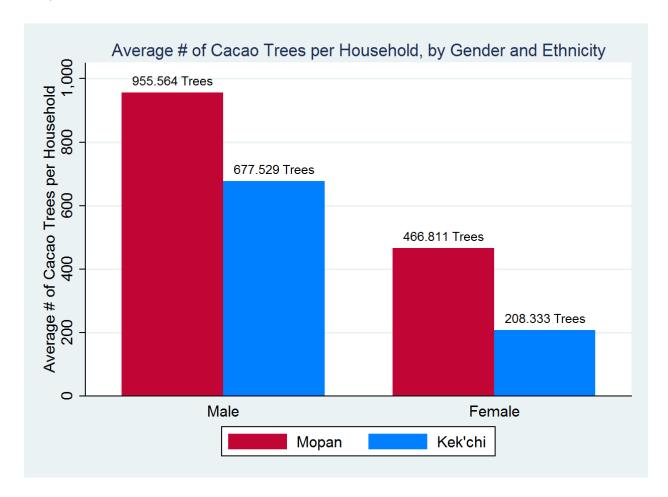
Pearson chi2(1) = 6.1102 Pr = 0.013

Male Mopan farmers produce on average 409.5 lbs of cacao per year while Mopan female produce 175 lbs per year (43% of what male households produce). Q'eqchi' male farms produce only slightly more with 213 lbs per year and Q'eqchi' female with the lowest production of 71 lbs of commercial cacao sold.



Differences in production between Mopan and Q'eqchi' are the result of different amounts of cacao planted between these various demographics. A similar distribution between these four

demographic can be seen in the number of cacao trees harvested by each group. Mopan cacao farms run by males have on average 956 trees per family (>3 acres), while those managed by Mopan females have 678 (>2 acres). Conversely, male Q'eqchi' cacao farms average 467 trees (1.5 acres) and female Q'eqchi' farmers have ~206 trees (<1 acre).



Across a variety of scales, cacao development has brought inequalities distributed unevenly according to ethnicity, geography, and gender to indigenous communities of southern Belize. This inequality is a direct challenge to the ethos of limited good, egalitarianism and reciprocity which was central to the sociality of *Kustumbre*. As some cacao farmers have been able to leverage their position towards greater returns than others without the suffering from sorcery attacks (tied to the decline of indigenous shamanism after Protestant missionization), the old taboos against inequality have weakened. The emergence of this new inequality is justified in rhetoric of "progressive" villagers by saying that everyone is "coming up" from development, some are just coming up faster than others.

### **Development and Labor**

While Green and Black's has a contract with the TCGA to purchase up to a million lbs of certified cacao and thousands of new trees have been planted since 2000 cacao production in Belize has remained flat for years at 10% of the production ceiling due low labor and capital inputs, organic production and the spread of new agricultural diseases such as Monilia (see chapter 9). Despite the ability to earn small but consistent cash earnings from the sale of cacao, the rising expectations of modern consumption patterns and new expenses (education) are often much more than can be earned through small scale cacao farm alone without entering into further cycles of investment and debt.

Although cacao provides a secure source of income and a few have found success as large scale farmers, in general the returns are small compared to the relatively high wages of nonlocal wage labor.

Increasing cash needs and the low returns of peasant agriculture has lead to growing proletarianization in Belize as people leave the village and their positions as agricultural producers in search of wage labor.

Today most young Mopan seek employment outside of the village for long periods of time, working construction, in the hospitality industry at the hotels on the coast, on large scale commercial farms or joining the BDF (Belize Defense Force). These jobs in the national economy provide the lure of high wages for those who can navigate these outside institutions. In contrast to the past when most villagers pursued a similar life path (peasant farmer/housewife, participation in civil-religious cargo), development has opened up a whole new range of opportunities, based on the individual choice of a career. In addition to farming, villagers also now experiment with new livelihoods ranging from "itinerant preaching to part-time wage labor" (Wilk 1997 Page 199). While many Mopan youths have been drawn to the allure of wage jobs on the coast, this large scale migration away from rural areas has disrupted the social life of the community. Men, and increasingly young women, are often gone from the village for ten days or more at a time, returning only every other weekend. When busses come in on Fridays they bring in the menfolk from their far off jobs back to their home villages, while Monday mornings are full going out to work again. Weekends are the only time that full families are assembled and the social life of Mopan communities has been reorganized so that collective labor activities (such as planting, house buildings and politics) occur primarily during these days. This is especially true of Saturday mornings when numerous, overlapping events take place in the village and people display their loyalties though their public choice of which of these activities they attend during their few days back at home.

With only a few days in the village each month home from their jobs, part time farmers have increasingly substituted labor exchanges on other people's milpas with work in their own cacao or commercial vegetables gardens. One of the draws of cacao cultivation is that it can be combined relatively easy with outmigration wage labor because of the low time commitments involved. San Josean's who participate in outside wage economy have become accustom to the individual work ethic of the marker and are less frequent participants in the exchange of labor which once structured village social and temporal relations. Today, many farmers who also work for wages prefer to concentrate their efforts when they return home on crops such as cacao, cattle and vegetables as they do not require collective labor exchange, so can be worked on their own personal schedule. These crops can be easily sold in the market, bringing individual profits disengaged from the demands of inter-household sharing (see Wilk 1997 Page 199). This shift has led Mopan agriculture to be increasingly become concentrated on a few crops with commercial value such as cacao and cattle, rather than the diverse assemblage of plants cultivated in the past. In Belizean Maya agricultural communities, the diversity of cultivated plants has fallen, especially "during the off-season outside the major crop cycle" (Wilk 1997 Page 175).

One of the primary ways that cacao encourages an individualistic ethic is through the fostering the creation of wage labor in the village, as farmers who work out of the village part time have begun to pay others to maintain their cacao farms in their absence. Today, an individual may hire assistants by the day for a cash wage to help in agricultural tasks such as pruning or weeding in cacao fields. (see Danziger 2001 p 20; Wilk 1997 Page 132). In addition to hiring assistants, certain agricultural tasks such as the upkeep of a cacao plantation can now be contracted out for cash, without the owner actually taking part in the labor activity at all. This is most often the case with absentee villagers who have gone off to find employment in other areas of Belize or the United States. Unlike short term crops such as corn and beans, cacao trees will produce for twenty or more years. Villagers who have left to find outside employment will often use part of the proceeds of their wages to have other villagers maintain and harvest their cacao for them in their absence. Although the profits of commercial cacao are reduced by hiring labor, the continued upkeep and use of the cacao farm can be worth the short term costs in order to keep their rights to trees from being abandoned within the village reservation system.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>106</sup> Wilk suggests that wage labor, rather than participation in commercial agriculture, has been the cause of decreasing diversity in Maya agricultural regimes/assemblages (Wilk 1997 Page 175).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>107</sup> The reservation system of land in southern Belize is based on a system of use, rather than ownership, necessitating continued activity to maintain a claim.

Despite the rise of capitalist values, the replacement of collective labor with wage labor in Maya agriculture has been incomplete and is fraught with moral ambiguity (see Wilk 1997 Page 132). While wage labor is increasingly part of village life, it is disconnected from the previous system of labor exchange built around prestige, reciprocity and shared consumption. Furthermore, the employment of alienated labor is considered acceptable only for certain "profane" and marginal tasks such as clearing forest, weeding and pruning cacao. Because of this contention, agricultural activities related to planting and harvesting of "sacred" corn remain the domain of collective labor groups and have been segregated from the wage labor. Protestant demonization of cacao rituals as satanic idol worship has shifted cacao from the domain of the sacred (like corn) into a profane crop ripe for commercialization, and so is available for the introduction of alienated labor.

Even though many have abandoned village life for the higher wages and excitement of migrant labor, the option of staying close to home is an appealing alternative to some villagers, especially the elderly, single women and those who prefer the self-employment of the *campisino* peasant agriculture. For these farmers, cacao is seen as a low effort crop that could provide small amounts of necessary cash for household needs such as children's schooling and the purchase of non-local shop goods. Sales of cacao gave many people the chance to live in their home villages without breaking up families, while still providing scarce cash to meet growing cultural needs and desires.<sup>109</sup> When I asked one prominent cacao farmer in San Jose about the best thing that had come about from the commercialization of cacao, he told me that cacao one industry they had in the village that allowed people to make a little money without having to leave home. Later, he showed me a news clipping he saved in which a reporter asked him about his experience with Fair Trade cacao in which he said...

"If not for the Fair Trade deal, a lot of farmers would have moved away," he believes, "breaking up families and communities. They would have to go away and work on shrimp or citrus farms because there is no other industry here. Being able to sell a product to a definite market means we can stay." – Justino<sup>110</sup>

Despite the ambiguous nature of development, for many in San Jose, commercial cacao has ultimately been generally a welcomed introduction to village life because it gives villagers economic options to stay in local communities, even if it takes external funds to create the conditions for maintaining village life.

<sup>108</sup> The continued association of labor exchange with sacred agriculture and wage labor with profane crops mirrors the division in house construction between local and non-local construction materials (see below).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>109</sup> A multifaceted understanding "of demand and desire", is required in which consumption is both "inherently symbolic and social," dismantles the artificial distinction between consumer capitalism and the values of village life. (Wilk 1997 Page 160; see Douglas and Isherwood 1979).

http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/producers/cacao/toledo cacao growers association belize/default.aspx?printversion=true

## **Investment and Debt**

With the growing acceptance of a Weberian Protestant ethic in Mopan communities, the social constraints on investment and accumulation have diminished, allowing an opening for capitalist centered development. Within Kustumbre, such an investment mentality was constrained by the cultural image of limited good and the expectation of reciprocity as well as the threat of being accused of witchcraft.<sup>111</sup> Protestant missionaries preached not only new spiritual beliefs, but social ones as well. Missionaries sought to encourage an investment mentality to help lift converts out of poverty by participating in the plethora of capitalist development projects that have been enacted in Southern Belize by international donors. These neo-colonial development projects draw on the values of Weberian Capitalism prevalent in the west as the means to end rural poverty. Cacao development initiatives seek to increase production by promoting a business mentality among individual cacao farmers in which the maximization of returns and long term investment for profit is held in high esteem. These capitalist values are framed within the broader context of "sustainable development" that is legitimized by organic and fair trade certifications. The synthesis of these values is evident in the Toledo Cacao Growers Association's mission "to improve the socioeconomic standard of living of its members through competitive and diversified systems of production which incorporate sound ecological principles." (TCGA mission statement)

These nonlocal ideologies have been enthusiastically adopted by many Mopan Protestants. Protestants are invested in a variety of enterprises from shops, to buses and commercial agriculture, creating new competition between households where before there was often only one bus or shop per village. Today in San Jose, Protestants converts experiment with business ventures, owning all the largest shops, two of the three bus lines based in the village and are also heavily invested in commercial agriculture, especially cacao and cattle. Protestants Involvement in these commercial enterprises creates a venue where economic concerns of investments, returns and interest become central to social decision making. These actions flaunt the social norms against investment and entrepreneurship that were previously central to *Kustumbre*, without seeming to suffer the spiritual consequences of witchcraft or jealousy. The growing disconnect between the economic and the spiritual realms due to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> Classic economic anthropology has focused on the way that "traditional" economies restrain unfettered individual accumulation through a variety of mechanisms such as reciprocity (Sahlins 1972; Gregory 1975), leveling mechanisms such as "limited good" (Foster 1965), obligatory reciprocity, or by channeling wealth Into prestige goods within "restricted spheres of exchange" (Bohannon & Bohannon 1958; see Wilk 1997 159-160).

Protestant schism has legitimized the development project and its accompanying capitalist values in Mopan society.

In the case of commercial agriculture, development encourages investment in farms to increase long term profits, while exposing farmers to cycles of indebtedness. The increasing adoption of capitalist investment practices in commercial agricultural has been facilitated by availability of easy credit in the form of agricultural loans. Following Belizean independence, development planners identified a lack of credit as hindering the development of an entrepreneurial class of cacao farmers and recommended small loans to Mopan and Q'eqchi' farmers. To remedy this perceived problem, the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) was established in 1989 by the Belizean government to create a commercial cacao industry in southern Belize. The sudden access to a guaranteed market along with the influx of developmental aid caused dramatic expansion of cacao production throughout the 1980s. At the same time, it also brought new dangers as cacao has the potential to draw the Mopan into outside systems of credit and debt. Even today, decades after the first agricultural loans for cacao were issued, farmers still remembered the disastrous consequences that some villagers faced when they were unable to repay their debts. Recounting the story of the "coming of debt," my neighbor Thomas explained how this experience shaped his view on development. He told how the cacao farmers of San Jose became invested in capitalist development, but then were left holding the bill for produce they can't sell when the market crashed. He told me how...

During the 1980s, Hummingbird Hershey's and the TAMP VITA project came here and started to encourage the farmers to plant the cacao seedlings from Costa Rica. But they would not give the seeds to the farmers, they told the farmers that first they would have to pay for the seeds first.

At first, cocoa price was good. That's why the farmers were interested and went along with the plan to plant cocoa. But then the market closed up and soon they came calling for the loans. (Thomas)

Thomas explained how during the late 1980s, Hershey's chocolate had provided a stable market for cacao which enticed many farmers from San Jose into taking out loans to expand the acreage of their cacao farms through development loans backed by TAMP (Toledo Agricultural and Marketing Project) VITA with assistance from a large USAID agricultural marketing project (see Emch 2003 p 111; Wilk 1997 p 119). Despite the promise of easy credit, these loans carried with them strict provisions which sought to transform Mopan agricultural habitus from "inefficient" peasant agriculture to commercial commodity production. In order to qualify for developmental loans, cacao farmers had to demonstrate their commitment to the new agricultural opportunity by spending "at least three days at Hummingbird Hershey being trained in the new farming methods" and commit to using these imported farming

techniques with the new hybrid stock of high yielding Trinitario cacao which was imported from Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic (Emch 2003; see Ausdal 2008 p 568).

Thomas recalled how farmers were encouraged chemical inputs such as fertilizers and pesticides, and new cacao nurseries of high-yielding, non-local *Trinitario* seedlings were established around the village to provide seedlings at low prices. The combination of imported high yielding genetic material combined with aggressive application of agro-chemicals was seen as the means to transform Belizean cacao from peasant scale yields to modern farms that would be competitive in global chocolate markets. Unlike the relatively inexpensive agricultural methods practiced before, these new techniques were dependent chemical inputs and non-local plant stock which the cash poor Belizean Maya purchased on credit. In order to qualify for these loans, farmers would "have to offer their land and all their assets as collateral for loans," requiring the creation of semi-privatized land tenure (see chapter 9) (Ausdal 2008 p 568).<sup>112</sup>

Although thousands of seedlings were distributed, many of the small plants did not grow to maturity after succumbing to a myriad of environmental disasters including fire, droughts, and flash floods. Despite these early losses, the cacao farmers salvaged what trees they could, and today many of these plants are still producing in the old groves that ring the San Jose. Repayment for the loans was originally set for five years to allow for the cacao trees to mature and produce so that farmers would have the means to repay their obligations. But in the end, the loans were called back in early when the development project folded. In 1992, the world market prices for cacao entered a severe decline, and Hershey's closed its operations in Belize as unprofitable. When the cacao market for Hershey's collapsed, Belizean Maya farmers who had taken agricultural loans to establish plantations were stuck with outstanding bills and no market for their crops. Without a market for their cacao, many farmers became discouraged and cut down their cacao trees to make room for other crops.

Shortly after the market for Hershey's folded, the agricultural extension officers left the village, the Development Finance Corporation (DFC) was closed down and the outstanding loans were recalled. People were given three months to pay their outstanding balances or be found delinquent on their loans and face jail time. Failure to meet these obligations can have serious new consequences, including jail time. Even "acts of God" or natural disasters such as fires and floods seemingly beyond human control become the responsibility of cacao farmers, leaving them financially responsible for repaying the losses to creditors. Many in San Jose and other cacao growing villages felt this change was unfair, as they felt powerless to contest the government calling in their debts. Despite the failure of development, farmers

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<sup>112</sup> http://markettorrent.com/topic/9681?page=2

were still held accountable to capitalist principles of debt and repayment, in order to make them responsible economic citizens. The loss of the market for cacao combined with the sudden need to repay loans created hardships among many Mopan farmers. As the deadline for repayment drew near, villagers had to scramble to collect enough cash to satisfy the government debt collectors. Cacao farmers pleaded with friends and relatives to loan them whatever cash they had on hand. In the end, three men in San Jose were unable to collect enough money to repay their loans and so were arrested and imprisoned until their debts were paid.

The rise of an organic buyer in the mid 1990s for Belizean cacao has reduced the pressures on farmers to take on debt that can come from costly agricultural inputs such as pesticides and fertilizers. While other commercial agricultural crops produced by Mopan farmers rely on chemical pesticides and herbicides, especially in commodity vegetable production, all the cacao produced for export in Belize is certified organic through COR (Canadian Organic Regime) and the EU. This decline in production costs is one of the primary reasons so many Belizean cacao farmers have enthusiastically returned to "traditional" organic cacao production. But unlike the organic cacao farming practiced by Mopan villagers before the coming of Hershey's, modern organic production requires outside monitoring and strict adherence to global regulations. In this new agricultural regime, organic certification is a rigorous process that requires farmers to abstain from chemical inputs for a minimum of three years in and around (50ft.) their cacao before they gain organic certification. Thereafter, cacao farmers are inspected by indigenous extension officers trained from local cacao growing communities to ensure continued adherence to global certification standards (the importance of indigenous extension officers in the transmission and compliance with global standards is explored in chapter 9). Because organic certification relies on the omission of costly agricultural chemicals, most cacao farmers have little trouble passing their annual certification. Farmers who fail their organic inspections are place on probation from selling their product until they pass a re-inspection.

While organic certification has reduced the costs associated with chemical inputs, it has also created new avenues for investment and debt. Organic cacao is far less productive (in terms of harvest weight per acre) than cacao produced by conventional means. In southern Belize, the lack of chemicals and low labor inputs means that the average cacao farmer produces only 180 lbs per acre, or only about 6% as productive as a conventional industrial cacao plantation would yield on comparable acreage. In addition to decreased production, organic cacao is also more labor intensive than conventional

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While the average agro-chemical cacao field can produce more than 3000 lbs. per acre, the small organic farms of the Belizean Maya average a mere 180 lbs/per acres.

chemically enhanced agriculture. Without herbicides and fungicides, the commercial scale harvesting requires greater investments of labor than ever before. Cacao extension officers recommend low tech, labor intensive solutions to farmers for their agricultural problems. For example, instead of spraying weeds with herbicide like Mopan cacao farmers did in the 1980s under Hershey's, now weeding is done the more labor intensive way with machetes. Similarly without chemical herbicides, farmers must now pay close attentions to their farms for infestations of fungal diseases like Monilia, which infected pods must be removed individually and buried so as to not contaminate other fruits. Despite the lower yields and increased labor hour inputs that have come from along with organic cacao certification, ultimately Belizean cacao farmers are more satisfied with the present organic requirements and the price guarantee of the stable market than they were with the free market regimes of Hershey's during the 1980s.

# **Development Groups**

Development opportunities have spurred the creation of new forms of social organization based on personal choice and advancement in Mopan communities, rather than moral obligation to their fellow community members. This emergent individualism of modernity "disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own, he willingly leaves society at large to itself" (Tocqueville 1954: p 104). In Mopan communities of southern Belize, this "little circle of his own" is manifest as the "development group."

In order to strengthen "civil society," the post-colonial Belizean state and development organizations require the formation of official "development groups" to access funds, rather than providing direct assistance to individuals. Groups must be officially registered with the Belizean government and have a minimum of ten individuals from different households with a semi-permanent membership. Development groups are oriented towards a specific purpose or goal for enacting development. Government and NGO agronomic education and training programs now often organized at the level of the development group, utilizing its organizational structure as a way to disseminate new methods and improved techniques (see Wilk 1997 Page 202). Recognition by the government has given development groups new legitimacy, in the eyes of both local and global gatekeepers.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> The implications of Monilia on decreasing cacao production and the organic solutions proposed to deal with it will be explored more fully in chapter 9

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>115</sup> The process of modernization follows a weakening of the "stronger collective conscience" of "mechanical solidarity" which is replaced by growing individualism in which people are "grouped not by relation but by their occupation and social activity (function not lineage)" (Durkheim 1972 p 145).

Over the past thirty years, nearly every villager in San Jose has been involved with some form of development project and many have a large portfolio of memberships in development groups. Today, San Jose hosts a plethora of groups for every possible development end – not only cacao growers associations but also women's groups, land holding groups, cattle ranching groups, basket making groups, youth groups, three competing rice hullers, guest houses for eco-tourism, the water board, and the PTA.

Although development groups are presented as collective enterprises to outside funding agencies, they also have functioned as a vehicle for growing individualism. The history of the past three decades of development in San Jose has been filled with failed collectivist development groups that tried to share the expenses and profits of economic ventures including a bus line, three grocery stores, the logging of the reservation after the hurricane, and the commercial raising of pigs and chickens. Each of these cooperative enterprises ended in failure, because although group members are eager to participate in groups when profits are distributed, when it comes time to pay expenses, people complain that they have no cash and can't pay. Without a means to enforce payment, these groups either eventually run out of funding, succumb to infighting, or subdivide collective property among individual members. Today, the most successful development groups in San Jose, such as cacao growers, cattle ranchers and land holding groups, all represents their members as "collective individuals" (see Handler) to capture the resources of development and channel them towards individual profits of their members. Progressive villager cite the focus on modern individuality as the reason for the success of these groups, saying that they prefer to participate in this type of development because you win or lose based on yourself alone, not the laziness of your neighbors.

Even as religious cargos are no longer the center of village organization, I argue that development groups have taken their place in the social structure. Development groups are secular reinventions of the totemic divisions which were formerly expressed as competing religious brotherhoods. Development groups provide new opportunities for the expression of prestige and the building of social coalitions/alliances in much the same way that cargos did in the days before Protestant conversion. Offices and positions of authority are important offices for accruing prestige in Mopan communities, regardless of the actual duties. Development groups are inherently fragile and require strong charismatic leadership to coordinate the cooperation and financial obligations between households. Community members in positions of authority, especially religious leaders both Protestant and Catholic churches (pastors and catechist) are often prominent members or even leaders of these development groups. Local leaders of development groups draw on their ties of kinship, neighborhood

and religious sect affiliation in recruiting new members for a proposed project. Although those in positions of leadership in development groups continue to practice the same peasant agriculture as their neighbors, they also have greater access to modern convinces such as solar panels for electrification, freezers and pickup trucks, all of which have become some of the most desired prizes of development.

People use development groups to triangulate their social identity and often proudly list their service as chairperson or board member in various groups throughout their lives as a type of self-genealogy of development participation. I argue that one of the reasons for the success of the development "group" as an emergent social institution among the Mopan is because it builds off many of the same values found within Protestant ideology. Households participate in different development projects, and are free to pick and choose which "groups" they join. This privileging of choice is a necessary condition for development placing individuality at the center of social progress (Gilman 2003 p 39-40). This conscious choice of personal affiliation to development groups draws on and reinforces the modern values of individual choice and plurality of opinions, as a parallel to the diversification of Protestant Churches (see Piot 2010).

The diversification of leadership positions due to religious schism has provided both the social model and practical experience for the people of San Jose to quickly adapt to emerging forms of development groups. Leadership in development groups requires "modern" skills, alien to the peasant life of Kustumbre. The bureaucracy within development groups mirrors the growth of new leadership positions in Protestant churches. The planning, preparation and organizational skills learned in religious leadership positions such as public speaking in committee meetings and basic accounting are directly applicable to the structure of development groups as well as leadership positions in the diversification of religions throughout the region. In both development groups and Protestant churches, villagers join local groups based on individual choice. These groups have similar institutional structures and functions, for example forming committees that create strategic plans and budgets for projects, in the styles and language of foreign institutions. These discourses are foreign to many village elders. The emphasis on literacy in Protestant denominations is coupled with the increased importance of formal education to created undercut the Elders' claims to authority based on the wisdom of Kustumbre accumulated over a lifetime. Development leadership positions favor the younger generation with greater access to education, upending the traditional authority of village elders in Mopan communities (see Gregory 1972).

# Part 2 - Identity and Cacao

Just as development has promoted individualization and differentiation between members of Mopan society, it has also encouraged the differentiation of ethnic identity. In many ways, this identity is manifest in public discourse as symbolically represented/connected with cacao. Cacao has taken on a new role as an important symbol of Belizean chocolate in presentations by outsiders and the Belizean Maya themselves. These discourses present the use and cultivation of cacao as deeply connected with "Mayaness" in order to legitimize their product. .

Even as global corporation and local business interests utilizes images and discourses of Maya identity to sell Belizean chocolate, Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya also invoke similar tropes towards the revitalization of an ethnic identity within Belize and to a global audience. Multicultural nation states such as Belize imagine different ethnic groups as a collection of individuals that "share sufficient traits, traditions, and values both to bind them socially and to distinguish them culturally from outsiders" (Handler and Linnekin 1984 p 277; see Handler 1988). 116 These shared traditions create "cultural" distinctiveness characteristic both of individual culture-bearers and of the collectivity" which form the basis for social interaction and unity in contrast to other groups (ibid). In Mopan communities, cacao has become one of the markers of Mayaness and indigeneity. At the same time, the people of San Jose have channeled the benefits of cacao development towards the creation of cultural projects, differentiating themselves from other ethnic groups in Belize and from foreigners. As modern reinterpretations of traditions once discarded as unmodern, these projects of ethnic revitalization are part of "a process of interpretation, attributing meaning in the present though making reference to the past (Handler and Linnekin 1984:p 287). By invoking cacao as a marker of something unique and authentic, the Belizean Maya have been able to mobilize the resources of development towards the revitalization of Mopan identity.

In part 2 of this chapter, I explore how different actors enact/create representation of Belizean Maya identity that are juxtaposed with cacao. I first examine how invoked in the Belizean chocolate industry that draw on tropes of authenticity, timeless and closeness to nature that are congruent with the organic and fair trade certification of the nation's chocolate production. I then explore how the Belizean Maya themselves utilize cacao in their own identity claims to construct the Belizean Maya as a collective individual and cacao as emblematic of the groups identity In these discourses, the ethnic group (Belizean Maya) and product (chocolate) come to represent each other in a reciprocal

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> The construction of ethnic identity as a collective of individuals is a manifestation/enactment of modern values which privilege individualism on a variety of scales (Handler and Linnekin 1984 p 277).

relationship. I then explore how cacao has been important in the cultural revitalization occurring in Mopan communities. This indigenous renaissance privileges markers of cultural distinctiveness, such as clothing, dance, housing, language. At the same time, it downplays the rituals and spirituality of *Kustumbre* for fear of mixed mindedness and social divisiveness.

# Fair Trade Cacao and Belizean Maya Identity

Since 1993, over 90% of the cacao produced in Belize has been used in the production of the Fair Trade "Maya Gold" chocolate bar. <sup>117</sup> In contrast to conventional development projects premised on neo-liberal ideologies, Fair Trade is a form of "moral capitalism" that relies on market solutions, rather than government intervention, in the cause of environmentally and socially sustainable development (Emch 2003 p 129; Nicholls and Opal 2005; Raynolds et al 2007).

In order to sell their product to first world consumers, Belizean chocolate is consciously branded with symbols linking the cacao to the Maya (both ancient and modern) and the Belize's tropical landscape. Drawing on media analysis of advertisements, documentary movies and print media articles, in this section I show how development agencies, corporations and indigenous people themselves emphasize tropes of Maya identity. In its advertising for "Maya Gold," Green and Black's emphasizes the chocolate bars connection to the traditional cacao drinks of the Belizean Maya as a prominent symbol of authenticity (McAnany 2006). These discourses allow Fair Trade corporations to invoke the powerful image of indigenous people living in long-term harmony with tropical nature as a cornerstone of their advertising to affluent 1st world consumers (Fisher 2007; Goodman 2004).

Maya identity is a major selling point in the brand so that consumers feel they are making a personal connection to the indigenous farmers who produce their chocolate. In contrast to the tendency toward fungibility in most aspects of modern capitalism, in which commodities can come from anywhere and they are treated as interchangeable, the opposite is true for the Maya Gold chocolate bar because it is linked to a particular people and region<sup>118</sup> as bearers of additional value. Green and Black's emphasizes the importance of Belize as the place of chocolate production for "Maya Gold." In their marketing, Green and Black's showcases "Belize" as a unique source of their chocolate both because of the favorable climate for cacao production, but also for the deep time depth of cacao growing in the region. This sense of place adds surplus value to their product by drawing on narratives of naturalness,

<sup>117</sup> One of 15 organic chocolate bars offered Green and Black's, now a subsidiary of Kraft Foods.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>118</sup> Although Green and Black's claims that the essential qualities of Belizean Maya chocolate make it unique, in fact Belize does not produce enough chocolate to meet the demand for "Maya Gold" and so additional cacao beans are added to the final mix from the Dominican Republic.

authenticity and history. As Neil La Croix, the head of Green and Black's supply chain, states in a promotional video...

The great thing about Belize is that it's where cacao comes from originally; the farms have been growing it organically for centuries. It has got the perfect climate. It's got the soils, it's got the rainfall, the sun and the heat, that's what all goes into making this fantastic tasting chocolate.

In their Fair Trade marketing campaign, Green and Black 's forefronts Belizean Maya communities, the Maya's ancient history of cacao cultivation, and their spiritual connection to the Earth. Advertisements for "Maya Gold" show finely wrapped chocolate bars with images of a Belizean Maya farmer harvesting cacao in their verdant green fields with machetes and a woman roasting cacao beans on the traditional three stone hearth. 119





 $<sup>^{119}\</sup> http://www.luckyvitamin.com/p-25561-green-blacks-organic-impulse-bar-maya-gold-dark-chocolate-12-oz$ 





These pictures draw on contemporary depictions of peasant life among the Belizean Maya that emphasizes the agrarian lifestyles and forms of domesticity that are common in rural communities such as San Jose as symbols of organic and Fair Trade capitalism. The images of older male Maya working in the farm and the women hand-roasting the cacao bean over an open fire portrays both a fairly accurate portrayal of the agrarian lifestyle engaged in by most Mopan farming households (though common technologies of the modernity such as plastic bowls, wrist watches, cell phones, and the second hand shirts bearing foreign slogans are noticeably absent). At the same time, these images also take on a timeless quality for the 1<sup>st</sup> world audience who experience daily detachment between themselves and their foods. By showing the indigenous farmer in the field and the woman roasting the cacao, the cultivation and processing of Maya Gold chocolate is shown to be genuinely wholesome to a first world audience. These images of traditional indigenous way of life become symbols of Maya Gold's Fair Trade and organic certifications. These images are centered on themes of ecological sustainability and authenticity as markers of added value in their chocolate, rather than drawing on archaeological continuity with the ancient Maya. By presenting indigenous agriculture as timeless and in harmony with nature obscures the more complicated history of the Belizean cacao industry in which non-organic pesticides and fertilizers were once a standard practice of development (see "Investment and Debt" above).

In the documentary "The Story of Maya Gold," Micah Carr-Hill, the Head of Taste at Green and Black's elaborates on how Green and Black's transforms the local spices and flavors of the traditional Maya käkäh drink into the inspiration for their chocolate.

This is the one we make which is inspired by the Mayan Indians' Käkäh drink... In Belize the Mayan Indians have a drink called käkäh and it's something they make with the beans, but they add spices like cinnamon, spices, vanilla and a local leaf which has a citrus flavour, so it's these flavours that we took and did our own version in the Maya Gold bar where we add orange, cinnamon, nutmeg, vanilla and there we have our version of the Maya drink käkäh but in a solid block form. 120

The Maya Gold bar adds strong spices to the cacao to make a dark and potently spicy chocolate whose pungent flavor is in contrast to that of a traditional milk chocolate bar familiar to 1<sup>st</sup> world consumers. This flavor is an acquired taste and many internet reviews attest to the divisiveness of the taste. Unlike the gritty, bitter drink prepared by the Mopan for home use, Maya Gold is a high end chocolate bar familiar to 1<sup>st</sup> world expectations. Through the process of mass production, indigenous flavors are "domestication" for the pallets of far away consumers.



Another prominent venue which links contemporary Belizean cacao production with discourses of continuity with the ancient Belizean Maya can be seen in the annual "Cacao-Fest" held in Punta Gorda. The festival is sponsored by BTB (Belize Tourism Board) as a way to celebrate and promote the Belizean cacao industry. Cacao-Fest is a major tourism draw for Toledo, attracting foreign visitors from around the world to sample the local flavors of the Belizean cacao industry. The many activities of Cacao-Fest include a street festival in Punta Gorda, a wine and chocolate tasting featuring Maya marimba and harp players, and cacao trail tours in Maya villages.

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http://www.greenandblacks.com/assets/media/transcripts/Micah%20Carr%20-%20video%20transcript.pdf

The Belizean Maya participate in Cacao-Fest in a variety of ways from organizing events to selling "culture food," participating in costumed dancers, leading cacao farm tours, as well as partaking in the festivities as spectators. Indigenous participation in the creation of the activities lends a sense of authenticity to the juxtaposition of ancient Maya ruins with Belizean chocolate as a global commodity. The advertisement for Cacao-Fest on the next page highlights many of these associations.



On the flyer, each of the festival days is described and accompanied by pictures representing the activities. Images of Maya musicians playing the marimba, street vendors and costumed dancers are

strategically intermingled with pictures of cacao pods, artisan chocolates and a decadent chocolate fountain. The flyer for Cacao Fest juxtaposes a mixture of symbols to different audiences. Images of the first night of festivities advertise a wine and chocolate tasting by drawing on symbols of Euro-American modernity such as chocolate fountain, fireworks, "Belizean" rather than Maya musical acts, establishing Belizean chocolate as a luxury item aligned with modernity. The second day of the street fair presents multicultural capitalism within the modern Belizean nation state in which the sale of typical foods represents ethnic difference (Wilk 1999). Photos show multiethnic vendors and local chocolate products for sale, allowing festival goers to taste authentic Belizean chocolate unmediated by corporate homogenization/standardization.



Another flyer (above) advertises the grand finale of Cacao-Fest, a "Cultural Fair" held on the final day of the event at the archaeological site of *Lubaantun*, near the Q'eqchi' village of San Pedro Columbia. This advertisement reinforces the relationship between the Maya and chocolate on a number of levels. By holding the event in the pyramid flanked central plaza of the archaeological site at

Lubaantun (one of the largest and most visited archaeological sites in southern Belize), the organizers of Cacao-Fest create a backdrop for the events which unmistakably links Belize cacao with the ancient Maya civilization that once occupied the landscape. Similarly, the day's events consist of Maya cultural entertainment. The dances included a modern interpretation of "ancient Maya dances" performed by the headlining groups "Palenque Rojo" (pictured on the flier) from San Cristobal de Las Casa, Mexico. At the same event, though advertised less prominently, is also the "Deer Dance," the most important contemporary ceremonial dance among the Belizean Maya. 121

The advertisement paints a broad representation of Maya culture that extends throughout time and space. The image of the dancer dressed in full pre-Columbian regalia is paired with the location of the event at a major archaeological site with dancers in Classic era Maya regalia. The event offers a vision of pan-Maya identity that extends beyond the borders of Belize, going so far as to include a Maya dance group from Mexico as the headliners of the Belizean cacao fest. These reinterpretations of ancient dances and colorful costumes reinforces the venue of the event at an archaeological site serves to emphasize the time depth and exoticness of the event. At the festivities, the dramatization and exaggeration of Mayaness from the Mexican dance troupe is obscured and legitimized by the opening act of local Maya performing the deer dance of contemporary indigenous communities in Belize. Through these images, modern Belizean chocolate is associated with indigenous "tradition" known locally as "Kustumbre" and depictions of the ancient Maya in an attempt to create a seamless image that bridges the past with the present.

Similar tropes linking cacao to Maya identity are invoked in media stories about Belizean chocolate. A journalist reporting on the resurgence of the Belizean cacao industry describes how the marketing of Maya Gold draws on the imagery of the ancient Maya and links it with contemporary chocolate producers. The author juxtaposes modern Maya cacao farmers with the practices of the ancient Maya to showcase the authenticity of Maya Gold, often in the span of a few sentences.

Suddenly, it occurs to me that Maya Gold - the name given by Green & Black's to its orange-andspice chocolate bar, made with beans grown by Cyrila Cho and the other 940 members of the Toledo Cacao Growers' Association (TCGA) - is more than just a slick marketing gimmick alluding to a semi-

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> The resurgence of Maya dances is part of a larger pattern of cultural revival among the Maya. Just 10-15 years ago, Steinberg laments the decline of these events, whereas today, they are more prominent than ever, with new villages performing dances while other long discontinued dances, such as the monkey dance in San Jose, were brought back, decades after they had been abandoned. (contra Steinberg 1997; Fink 1987 p 401)

mythical past. It may evoke images of ruined temples, ancient peoples and lost civilizations, but the name is also rooted in the here and now, a tribute to the Maya who produce cacao today. <sup>122</sup>

Rather than merely a "slick marketing gimmick alluding to a semi-mythical past," the marketing of Maya Gold is positioned as legitimate because contemporary cacao growers animate these symbols of the ancient Maya as a tribute to them.

In varying degrees, Maya identity is a central part of advertising for Belizean chocolate which alludes to the glories of the past and romanticizing the organic agriculture of today. To first world consumers, images of contemporary peasant agriculture (luckyvitamin.com), meld together with a dramatized ancient past (Culture Fair) and modernity (wine and chocolate tasting) to create Maya Gold chocolate as a unique, luxury brand, even as it subsumes difference and discontinuity between these narratives.

# **Indigenous Self Identity and Cacao**

In addition to the outsider discourses which link Belizean indigenous identity with chocolate, the Maya themselves play a key role as "culture bearers" in representations of Belizean cacao. These narratives emphasize the indigenous authenticity of the Maya Gold chocolate bar to consumers. In these portrayals, markers of nature and culture (both past and present) become intertwined so that Belizean cacao is strongly marked as the product of a distinctly Maya *habitus*. Reciprocally, the Belizean Maya come to be represented by themselves through the symbols of the cacao fruit.

Through these images and discourses linking indigenous ethnicity to cacao, Belizean Maya highlight certain aspect of their culture as authentically Maya both in presentations to the outside world and amongst themselves. Belizean Maya identity is a "matter of practice and process that is constantly constructed, negotiated, contested, and reinterpreted through the construction of alternative histories" (Wilk ,1997, p. 233). <sup>123</sup> In this process, they participate as active agents of processual cultural identity "engaging and contesting Western knowledge" towards their own visions of a Maya modernity (Castaneda, 1996, p. 8).

http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2006/may/28/foodanddrink.features1

Despite the assertion of a "timeless" character to these aspects of indigenous identity rooted in a primordial past, all of these are "relatively recent innovation" that have their roots in the colonial experience (Wilk 1997 Page 234). Maya identity is a continually reconstructed out of experience and contingency within an indigenous a world view, allowing it to adapt "to changing circumstances while remaining true to a perceived essence of Mayaness" (Fischer, 1999, p. 488).

The TCGA (Toledo Cacao Growers Association) provides a venue for cacao farmers to strategically employ claims of identity. In its public presentation, the TCGA represents itself as a "Maya" organization engaged in a project of revitalizing "traditional" agricultural and by extending Maya culture. The power of the Toledo Cacao Growers Association (TCGA) comes in large part from their ability to engage in the discourses and practices of development with non-local development gatekeepers by linking Maya identity to Belizean cacao. The invocation of a particular version of Maya identity emphasizes characteristics such as the hard working indigenous peasant (who is multi-lingual in English no less) with a spiritual connection to the landscape and continuity with their ancient ancestors are common tropes in narratives about Belizean chocolate. For example, the TCGA logo features the Maya hieroglyph for cacao, while the purchasing depot is painted with pictures of cacao tress and pyramids.



TCGA bag of bulk cacao beans (with ancient Maya hieroglyph of Kakaw as the logo on the bag)

The commodification of Mayaness to Belizean cacao ties the past to the present by emphasizing the deep spiritual connection to the land that, ideally, all Maya farmers possess. This image is an attractive target of numerous development projects, so these tropes are often invoked in grant writing and project funding. Successfully highlighting this indigenous identity allows the TCGA privileged access to economic resources that would be largely unavailable to non-indigenous or mestizo organizations. At the same time, participation in the TCGA has created a also venue for supra-village Maya ethnic mobilization and decision making on a regional scale.



TCGA purchasing depot with pictures of Maya pyramid and cacao. Punta Gorda, Belize.

Not only has Maya Gold chocolate traveled far in the world system from the farms of Belize to 1<sup>st</sup> world supermarket shelves, but some of the Mopan themselves have also traveled outside of the region to promote Belizean chocolate. San Jose's role as a major cacao producing village and its political power in the TCGA has allowed cacao farmers like Justino Peck to act as global ambassadors in the United Kingdom and United States, putting a multilingual Indigenous face on the brand's Fair Trade organic product. When I interviewed him, Justino looked back fondly on his many trips abroad in support of Belizean cacao and would often tell me stories about meeting with important leaders of business, development organizations and politics. His work promoting "Maya Gold" culminated when he was chosen as a global ambassador of the Fair Trade certification to raise awareness about the product.

Peck's face appeared in newspapers around the world a few years ago when the Fair Trade people presented him as a kind of ambassador of Fair Trade chocolate. It was reminiscent of when the missionaries and conquistadors brought Mayan natives to the Spanish court to show the monarchy what interesting human specimens the New World could produce. But Justino didn't feel used. "That's just the way of the world," he says with a sigh.<sup>124</sup>

In these promotions, the Belizean Maya themselves draw on these discourses of continuity with the ancient past cacao growers in their presentation of their product to consumers. In the documentary

http://markettorrent.com/community/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=7992

film "The Story of Maya Gold" (2010), Armando Choco, the TCGA general manager who is a Q'eqchi' Maya, explicitly draws the connection between the Maya Gold Chocolate Bar and the ancient Maya of the ancient site of *Lubaantuun*, located next door to his home village of San Pedro Columbia. He says...

The inspiration for the Maya gold bar came from here. Here in Lubaantun hundreds of years ago, the ancient Mayans used cacao for trading, hundreds of years later the farmers surrounding Lubaantun used cacao as their main source of income. In the ancient days the Maya's carried cacao beans in their pocket because that's what they used as currency. Now the farmers still carry cacao beans in their pocket but in a different format – cash or Belizean dollars, that's what they carry in their pocket, the value is still there and so farmers will continue to plant them.

Armando Choco – General Manager TCGA

In this quote, Choco makes an overt comparison between ancient cacao farmers and those in the TCGA to create a timeless connection between the current Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya who currently inhabit southern Belize, and the ancient Manche Chol Maya of the classic era who built the pyramids. He describes how both ancient and modern cacao farmers traded cacao, and draws a parallel between the use of cacao historically as currency and the modern sales of cacao for money in a capitalist world economy. Linking cacao's role in the pre-Columbian Mesoamerican economy with modern commodity capitalism creates continuity between the present and past. Similarly, Belizean cacao farmers also draw connections between their social drinking of cacao and their involvement in commercial production. Another cacao farmer makes the connection between contemporary cacao farmers and the ancient "Mayan People" by saying...

Nobody taught us how to make it. We are just doing it like the Mayan people. Jeronimo – Cacao Farmer

He emphasizes how "nobody taught us how to make it," to demonstrate the authentic nature of the product, that the knowledge of cacao farming can be traced to the past, an unbroken lineage of knowledge. Over the course of a lifetime, the repetitious act of drinking *käkäh* creates a specific social *habitus* as the familiarity with cacao breeds courage to experiment with commercial agriculture. As another cacao farmer I met once told me...

I have drunk käkäh all my life – for as long as I can remember and it gave me courage to plant my own käkäh.

Eldio – Cacao Farmer

The former chairman of the Toledo Cacao Growers Association also links the continuity of cacao usage among the Belizean Maya past and present with the organically certified product being sold to consumers. He states...

Growing cacao here in the Southern part of Belize is where we grow it organically and it's a tradition that has been practiced in the past and it's going from generation to generation.

Justino - Cacao Farmer and Former Chairman of the TCGA

In this example, Maya identity is also often conceptualized as quality grounded spatiality and historically in the landscape of Belize.<sup>125</sup> This not only increases the authenticity of their chocolate, but also strengthens land rights claims made by the Belizean Maya, connecting present day Mopan and Q'eqchi' populations in Belize to the Manche Chol Maya who inhabited the landscape of what is now southern Belize before British settlement.

In each of these cases, indigenous voices draw invoke Maya identity as a markers of authenticity, continuity of organic production and a genealogy of knowledge embedded within Belizean chocolate. Through a shared habitus of chocolate production, native speakers draw connections between current Belizean cacao farming/farmers and a broader Maya identity across time. By invoking tropes of tradition, history and place, the people of San Jose are able to leverage the resources of development toward an indigenous modernity which emphasizes tangible, secular markers of Mopan identity.

# Money From the Sky - Everybody's Coming Up (Story)

The evening is a time for visiting in San Jose, after the heat of the day has broken, and the villagers promenade around the central loop, chatting and gossiping with the neighbors. Soon after I started off on my evening walk, I met Justino on the road as he was coming home from the farm. I first saw him from a distance, walking gingerly even though he was weighed down with a large sack of wet cacao slung over his shoulder. As he approached, he was covered in sticky cacao juice which leaked from the bag, but was smiling proudly about his recent harvest. We exchanged the traditional greeting of "dyos" and chatted as we shared the road. Justino had just broken his cacao today and was on his way to one of the three cacao drying centers in San Jose.

<sup>125</sup> The connection between place and Maya identity is strengthened through the use of autochthonous metaphors of cultivation and rootedness that privilege the peasant farm as a sacred space and a wellspring of genuine Maya culture. (see Burns 1993; Early 1983; Hawkins 1983; Malkki, 1992; Redfield 1956; Re Cruz, 1996; Tax 1937; Watanabe 1992; Wilson 1995).

Justino had been involved with development projects his entire adult life – cacao growers association, cattle ranchers group, a village guest house program, among many others. As we talked, soon the conversation turned to development and I asked him if he had seen many changes during his lifetime from development. On our way home that afternoon, we walked past many of the major landmarks in the village which were part of the social landscape of San Jose: the school, the hurricane shelter, the churches, the health post and the cacao drying floor. As we passed each one, Justino began to narrate anecdotes about the history of development for these projects with a measure of both pride and melancholy in his voice.

As we passed the Catholic School, he said, "You see the school on the hill? That was built with funds from the UN commissions for refugees with help from the US Navy. I originally submitted the project to renovate the Catholic school to the old priest, and you know what he did? He cussed me out. Can you believe it?"

He pointed to the ruined community center with the collapsed roof. "That used to be our hurricane shelter until it was destroy by Hurricane Iris in 2001. To this day we still can't get the funds to fix it because of politics. Both parties promise to rebuild it if only we help to win the next election, but after the campaign is over, they never seem to find the time or money for out of the way San Jose."

A little further down the road, we finally reached one of the new greenhouses recently built for drying wet cacao. Justino emptied his bag of wet cacao into the step fermentation boxes out front of the building. These slatted boxes were designed to maximize uniform fermentation. Justino, like most of the Mopan, prefer to drink their cacao unfermented, but commercial chocolate manufacturing required fermented beans with the rich chocolaty flavors 1<sup>st</sup> world consumers' desire. Not only was there a shift from unfermented to fermented chocolate beans, but also now they were selling to a global buyer and they had strict standards about the water weight, mold, and uniform fermentation characteristics. As we filled the box, inside of the drying center an old man was raking the beans across the concrete floor, turning the already fermented beans for uniform drying. Justino told me how drying cacao inside was a major improvement over the traditional way of drying them out in the open where moisture or pests could soil them. Justino was proud of his role in bringing these new structures to the village. "Now we don't have to dry outside in the rain and dew," he said.

As we worked, Justino told me about the first time development came to San Jose. It was the early 1980s and Belize had just become a newly independent nation. Justino had just quit his job as a primary school teacher in the village not more than a handful of years after he had himself had been a student there. Free from his government job, Justino became interested in agriculture (as Mopan men

are wont to do) and decided to try to support himself and new wife by farming. Not long after he started farming full time, a government extension officer named Mr. Tzul came to the village and announced that he would be holding a public meeting about agricultural development and the new TAMP VITA program. Although Mr. Tzul was an unknown government official, he was also Yucatec Maya from the Cayo district of Belize and could understand their Mopan Maya language.

That evening, the meeting was full of villagers who had come to hear what the extension officer had to say. Tzul told them that now that Belize was no longer a colony and that in order to build a strong new nation, small farmers in places like San Jose would need to develop their agriculture. He said that now there will be all kinds of agricultural development trainings to teach the villagers about new modern techniques which would help make their farms productive and bring money to Maya communities. Over the course of the next hour, he talked about the new opportunities for the commercialization and scientific management of different agricultural products, which the people of San Jose already produced, but were limited to home-use. Things like chickens, pigs, annatto and cacao all could be moneymakers if they applied the latest agronomic principles to the farms. All they would have to do was to form themselves into cooperative "groups" and register with the government in order to access development funding. Then the money would begin to flow in from all over the world to fund these projects. This money was meant to help them improve their lives. Once these projects starts, San Jose would begin to grow and prosper while developing the new nation. "Everybody coming up," he said summing up the exciting possibilities of post-colonial progress.

At the meeting, Justino sat and listened, he began imagining the new possibilities that these development projects could bring and began to make plans for his farm. Mr. Tzul closed the meeting by encouraging everyone to take advantage of development as a way to improve San Jose. "There's a lot of money floating up there in the sky," he said "all you have to do is reach up there and grab it."

Decades later, Justino still remembered that meeting which first sparked the idea of development and he could still vividly describe the imagery of development funds ripe for the taking.

#### **Cultural Renaissance**

For many indigenous people, the "money from the sky" brought by development holds the potential to lift them out of "the repression and exploitation they have suffered" over the centuries "as a colonized people" (Faust 1999 Page 20). Across southern Belize, development has become a kind of scavenger hunt for outside resources, and one of most successful of these has been the resources and cash from the commercialization of cacao. In San Jose, cacao has been the object of numerous

development projects that have brought money into the village for the construction of new drying facilities, the hiring of teams of men with chainsaws to help old people with pruning their trees, and the purchase of wet beans by a pickup truck which stops by members houses without them having to make the trek to Punta Gorda.

The successful marketing of Maya Gold Chocolate has become a key enabler of an indigenous renaissance that is taking place in southern Belize as the material/economic instrument of cultural revival. Even as outside agencies seek to remake the people and landscape of southern Belize in the image of the west, the Maya of San Jose have their own distinct ideas of modernity brought by development within an indigenous system of values, rather than those of the global elites. Out of the pieces and parts of four decades of outside development initiatives, Maya people have reconfigured traditional symbols in modern contexts.

With the influx of outside resources, cultural activities can enter a period of fluorescence with "the cultural logics governing social relations remain recognizably indigenous" (Robbins, 2005). In this way, development can offer new avenues for the preservation of tradition and offer renewed periods of "culture building" in which the Maya reaffirm traditional identities in the context of global phenomenon (see Ausdal, 2008, p 588; Wilk, 1997). Within this context of this emerging Mopan modernity, a "develop-man" perspective on ethnic identity can be employed to emphasize indigenous agency as "non-Western people use their encounter with the world capitalist system to develop their own culture in its own terms" (Sahlins, 1988, 2005; Robbins, 2005).

Unlike the Yucatec Maya of Northern and Western Belize which have undergone a large scale loss of ethnic identity and a shift towards a mestizo self identification, the southern Belizean Maya (Mopan and Q'eqchi') are undergoing a period of cultural revival in recent years (Medina, 1998, 2003). The Maya cultural revival occurring across southern Belize can be seen in a variety of cultural markers such as language, dress, and political power. Each of these disparate activities represented a statement, in both material and symbolic ways, about a renewed pride in true Mayan culture. The influx of outside resources has allowed a furthering of local systems of value by putting on more expressive displays and taking culture to its maximum extent.

Today San Jose is developing, not only by the standards of development agencies but also according to the Mopan themselves. "San Jose is coming up" was a common refrain during my time in San Jose, often accompanied by hand gestures to demonstrate the linear, upward mobility of progress. This phrase was a claim to development, but not merely the mystification of people in the grip of an unstoppable and all seeing hegemony. Through development projects, notably/including those that link

Belizean cacao with themes of Mayaness, the Belizean Maya have been able to channel outside resources towards the reinvigoration of ethnic identity and pride as they attempt to steer development toward cultural projects. Like the famous Chan Kom of Redfield's ethnographic study of Yucatec Maya, in many ways San Jose is a village that has "chosen progress," (see Redfield 1964).

The evidence of this Maya renaissance was sprouting like mushrooms after the first rain so that today the symbols of indigenous success were everywhere in communities across southern Belize. Village dances, which had been in decline as recently as the late 1990s (see Danziger, 2001, p. 108; Steinberg, 1997) were now gaining in popularity with new villages performing these dances for the first time. Dance revivals were also being held at large scale Maya public events such as "Maya Culture Day" at Tumul K'in high school and the Toledo Cacaofest at Lubaantun ruins. In contrast to these public events oriented towards the wider Belizean and international audience, indigenous dances are also being held for indigenous audiences as well. For example, in 2010, the long abandoned "Monkey Dance" was brought back in the village of San Jose after more than twenty years of neglect. The festival was a costly public event which required renting expensive costumes, hiring dance instructors from Mopan communities across the border in Guatemala and feasting the dancers. Throughout the three days of dancing in San Jose, all the participants and audience of the event were Mopan Maya from San Jose and the surrounding villages, save for the lone anthropologists in the crowd. At the dance, cacao was served to the audience who came out to watch the dance in the chilly San Jose nights. During this event, cacao drink was served as a marker of traditional Mopan culture and as the economic means which had allowed for the resurrection of the lost dance. At the same time, the sacred aspects of cacao and its connection to the rituals of Kustumbre were downplayed. This was in an attempt to create a secular event that would not attracts the scorn of New Testament believers, and so could be the focus of community cohesion in the face of religious schism. The Monkey dance of San Jose is an important case of cultural "develop-man" activities which are designed to create ethnic identity in the gaze of an indigenous (rather than global or national) audience.



Mopan Deer Dance. Santa Cruz, Belize

In other examples of Mopan culture building practices, traditional music of harp and marimba are being enjoyed by a new generation of Mopan. Whereas a decade ago, the music flavor of San Jose was a soundtrack of non-local *punta*, hip hop or Latin music, today marimba and harp can be heard on the indigenous language FM radio station sponsored by the Maya language high school. Although Protestant missionaries initially condemned traditional Mopan marimba and harp music as something to be discarded along with their superstitions because of its role in rum filled drunkenness of indigenous Catholic fiestas, in recent years local musicians have rebuilt the instruments destroyed in the fervor of Protestant conversion. Now marimba and harp music now once again echo in the darkness of the village night.

Music is also providing a bridge across religious schism. At the annual San Jose Culture Day Festivities, a quartet of village elders played old timey Mopan music on marimba, harp, violin and local guitar. Although the band was composed of two Catholics, a Nazarene and a Mennonite, they once again played together at cultural events years after religious schism had broken up their band decades ago. As the band played at culture day, Thomas narrated the story of the bands rise and fall and

triumphant rise again. He said that once upon a time, old man Choc had played the harp really nice just like he had learned from his father and grandfather before. But in the late 70s/early 80 Mr. Choc converted to the Mennonite faith who made him see that kind of traditional rum filled music was from the devil. Mr. Choc came to blame his father for teaching him this evil practice so he broke up his harp in a fit of righteous rage. That day, he quit playing the harp music he and his family had loved for generations so that it would not cause him or others to sin against his new Protestant faith.

So Mr. Choc stayed in the Mennonite faith all these years and became a successful business man by owning one of the village bus services but still in his heart he missed the music. Over the past few years, he built himself another harp and played it quietly in secret so as to not attract unwanted attention from other converts. But after a while his playing grew louder and the neighbors began to hear it in the night. Rumors of the return of Mr. Choc's harp playing began to circulate in the community and his old band mates pulled a blues brothers and decided to get the band back together. They convinced Mr. Choc that they could reform the band as a way to preserve Mopan music and bring it to a new generation who had been raised on the music of outsiders. The band played in a contest on the radio and ended up putting out a CD. Now on Saturday mornings, the national radio station Love FM hosts a Maya music half hour and plays the songs of San Jose which for years had been purposefully left behind in favor of a Protestant modernity.

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In another sign of cultural renewal, the community wide labor exchanges of *fagina*, which were once in decline, has also After Protestant conversion, the *fagina* in which all the men of the community chopped the common areas of the school and cemetery with machetes fell into disuse because of social infighting cause by religious schism. Protestants claimed they shouldn't be obligated to chop around the Catholic Church and other locations which were sacred in the local landscape of *Kustumbre*. This infighting caused the village council of San Jose to hire laborers to do the work instead, and charge each family in the community a tax to cover this cost.

After more than a decade since the fagina was discontinued across the region, it has undergone a revival to become "an important symbol of traditional society," even as it is no longer a sacred obligation (see Wilk 1997 Page 202). In a secular form, the reconstituted fagina allows for a civic venue for all the male adults in the village to not only work together, but also to conduct village politics.

Before the men began to chop the common areas of the village, the group assembled in the ruins of San

Jose's community center, which was crumbling into decay nine years after the devastation of hurricane Iris, (the building a prominent reminder of the dashed hopes of development). The assembly was called to order, and the Belize flag was raised to sanctify the meeting as official business of the nation state, before items of community business were discussed. In one of the San Jose *Faginas* of 2010, the issue of allowing outside logging companies to fell timber in the forest surrounding the village for profit was a contentious issue. After a number of outspoken men had given short speeches both for and against allowing the logging, a paper was passed around where each man present who was officially part of the village <sup>126</sup> could sign his name in either the yes or no column. As the paper was passed around, people commented on how in San Jose, they were proud to practiced Belize's representative democracy, (unlike Maya in less democratic countries such as Guatemala) and justified the proceedings with slogans of "one man one vote" that were common during national election season.

In many ways, the reemerged *fagina* has become a key forum for the whole village to meet publicly and decided important matters collectively. Protestant refusal to participate in the socio-political structures of *Kustumbre* such as *cargos* or as *alcade* (mayor) created a vacuum for consensus building and decision making in Mopan communities. By creating a venue working together for the good of the community, the fagina encourages the reintegration of the social body of Mopan villages sundered by religious schism.

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In a melding of local and global, Maya "culture wear" or indigenous styles of dress is making a return and is even now allowed as part of school uniforms. Today, Mopan women in San Jose sew a variety of indigenous embroidery patterns onto their children's uniforms, transforming colonial garments of homogeny into daily symbols of ethnic pride. Maya culture is also being passed on in a more codified form at the new Maya high school a few miles away at *Tumul K'in* (see chapter 7). The rapid growth of Belizean Maya schoolteachers and administrators has played an important role in helping to maintain a Mopan identity in Toledo by "encouraging their students to 'remember who they are' (McClusky 2001 Page 205). Indigenous educators at both the primary and high school level utilize education as a means to gain their rights as a cultural group. The Mopan Maya language is now being

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>126</sup> A few men present had recently moved to San Jose from other villages in the past few years and had not yet paid their entrance fee to become official village members. A village elder publically chastised these men for their non-payment and said that they should not be allowed to vote since they weren't official, unlike the gringo anthropologist who had come respectfully before the village council, paid his fee and therefore was entitled to vote on the matter.

officially taught by some primary teachers as well, in contrast to the old days when outside teachers punished students who didn't use English. In a dramatic reversal from this linguistic colonialism, in 2010 San Jose held the first ever Mopan Maya language spelling bee which attracted school buses full of children from across the southern Belize. Some of these students have even gone on to become educators for the next generation of Mopan children.

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In Belizean Maya villages with large amount of development capital, those with greater access to cash resource have begun to build larger, more extravagant houses. But in a sign of cultural revival, many in San Jose now were using the profits of cacao to building the old thatch style instead of the concrete block houses popular in town. While a few of the most "modern" villagers completely reject the old style of Maya housing for concrete structures, numerous cacao farmers built new thatch houses and cookhouses, which were larger and more modern than the older ones they replaced. But these thatch houses did not represent a return to poverty for the Mopan of San Jose; rather these thatch houses were being built bigger and with more elaborate construction than ever before. These neotraditional structures incorporate design elements found in basic thatch houses and then elaborate the design details to a greater degree. 127 The results are noticeable. In San Jose, a number of large houses had been built with features such as thicker thatch roofs, more complex construction designs and concrete replacing dirt floors. At the same time, these seemingly traditional elements were melded with consciously modern accourrements such as solar panels and TVs. The spectrum of housing styles, ranging from "traditional" to modern to neo-traditional can be understood as a daily enactment of the social values in the context of development. The use of building materials can be a statement the inhabitants wish to portray for themselves and to their neighbors.

Over the course of a few weeks I helped Pablo, the cacao extension officer for his home village of San Jose and a Baptist elder, construct his neo-traditional outbuilding/cookhouse. The construction of the house was different from other house buildings I had attended previously because of the different types of labor and building materials employed in its construction. Houses built with foreign materials are built with personal or alienated, rather than reciprocal labor. The use of imported materials not only changes the shape of the house, but also the labor relations embedded within its construction. By building a modern style house, a man removes himself from the circular exchange of house building

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>127</sup> Mirroring the late develop-man potlatches of the Indigenous North America (Boas 1960; Graeber 2001).

labor, relying on his own immediate family or hired labor; such as those skilled in masonry and electricians (see Wilk 1997). In the case of Pablo's neo-traditional house, the melding of traditional and modern construction materials that made up the house was a physical manifestation of the different labor practices which had gone into its construction. Parts of the construction process which relied on non-local materials, such as concrete, rebar, and cinder blocks were outside of the domain of labor exchanges typical for Mopan house construction. These parts were built by Pablo, his brother Francisco who worked construction building hotels most of the week, a gaggle of sons and occasional help from the local anthropologists. In contrast to the modern construction of the base of the house, the roof followed an elaborate and expansive double layered design, making it one of the larger thatch structures in the community. The thatching of this large structure was accomplished by a traditional labor exchange of *Kustumbre* where Pablo called in favors and obligations from other members of the community (most of whom were also Baptist). Because they Pablo, his family and the other members of the house building party were all Baptists, no offerings of cacao or blood were made to consecrate the house. Rather a prayer service was held and the building consecrated in Jesus' name.

Over the course of the three day construction activities, Pablo's' wife and daughters prepared traditional meals of chicharones and pork caldo for the workers, along with fruit juice and Nescafe. As the men sat to eat their final meal of caldo as work finished on the third day, some of the men present teased Pablo for being a cacao extension officer, but not having any traditional cacao beverages prepared to reward his workers. Pablo gave an embarrassed shrug and said that he had sold all of his cacao to pay for the new house, and hadn't saved any for drinking. In the modern values of development, cacao has become a commodity like any other to sell for its surplus value to fund the house, rather than its role in the sociality of the shared meal after or as an offering to the spirits of the house.

Pablo's use of cacao as a commodity, rather than an instrument of ritual practice or sociality acts as a microcosm of Mopan cultural development. Emblematic markers of culture are flourishing or being revived such as cacao drinks, school children's culture wear, dances, neo-traditional houses, the *fagina* and marimba and harp music. These revitalized forms of culture serve as emblematic markers of Mopan ethnic identity to themselves and outsiders in a multicultural world. Removed from the realm of the sacred, cacao now is served at Mopan cultural events as a marker of ethnic identity and pride. Chocolate has come to represent the Mopan in local and global consciousness, at the same time that images of Mopan farmers, chocolate makers and villagers are used to sell chocolate. Through the commercial sales of cacao, Belizean Maya communities have been able to tap into the resources of

global development and utilizing them towards the presentation of difference, uniqueness and indigeneity in national politics and to global institutions.<sup>128</sup>

At the same time that many elements of Mopan cultural have become revitalized, ritual practice and indigenous spirituality were noticeably absent so that the use of cacao and blood healing, agricultural rituals and "feeding the house," have largely disappeared in San Jose. The lack of spirituality in Mopan cultural revival is due to fear of mixed mindedness and accusations of dabbling in witchcraft/idol worship. Protestant defetishism has caused a desacralization of cacao in Belizean Maya communities, destabilizing the place of cacao in the Mopan culinary grammar and creating an opening for the adoption of non-local consumer alternatives such as Nescafe and tea to take its place. No longer an important part of sociality with community members and spirits of the landscape, cacao has become repositioned as a secular commodity through agricultural development. Those few "old heads" who continue to follow the old ways of cacao use for ritual purpose are labeled as backwards and unmodern in Protestant gossip.

## Conclusion

Cacao continues to be, the object of numerous development projects in Southern Belize which have attempted to transform a crop of symbolic and ritual importance among the Mopan into a commodity for the world market. These development interventions in Mopan communities have had a variety of repercussions in society, some positive, some negative and most ambiguous at best.

Development promises a better future for the Mopan, in which "money from the sky" allows for outside organizations to provide economic opportunities for allegedly marginal populations. In this process, development interventions construct Mopan society as a reified object to be improved through interventions based on non-local priorities. Capitalist values encouraged by agenda of development while traditional models of Mopan economic and social life are labeled as old fashioned and unproductive. This transformation of values is augmented/strengthened by the theology of Protestant missionaries that privileges a Weberian Protestant ethic as a means to end rural poverty among the Belizean Maya.

The growth of development has brought about many changes to Mopan society. The commercialization of cacao has encouraged an individualistic business ethic which has personalized both the profits and risks of development. The uneven spoils of development income have given rise to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>128</sup> Most notably in the ongoing land tenure case in national and international courts regarding Mopan and Q'eqchi' communities in Belize (Campbell and Anaya 2008)

growing social fragmentation and inequality on a variety of different scales between different ethnicities, villages and households. The profits from commercial cacao sales have created an influx of cash into indigenous communities, providing the means to satisfy the new needs and desires of western consumerism and rising lifestyle expectations, even as it has brought new expenses and financial uncertainties. Cacao provides supplemental income to those who participate in short-term labor migrations. It has also created new opportunities for wage labor within Mopan villages where none existed before. In each of these venues, individualism is valorized as the locus of development. But even as individualistic development has sundered many of the bonds which previously animated Mopan communities, it has also provided a venue for the reinvigoration of society. The emergence of "development groups" has created new contexts for the creation of relationships between households in place of those which have been condemned by Protestantism (such as the cargo system).

As cacao development has transformed Mopan society, cacao has also become positioned as a both a symbol and as a distinctive trait of the Belizean Maya "brand" to a global multicultural audience. In these narratives, the cultivation and use of chocolate comes to stand for a collective idea of Mayaness in chocolate advertisements. Through Fair Trade certification, Maya identity is a major selling point so that consumers feel they are making a personal connection to the indigenous farmers who produce their chocolate.

Both corporate producers and indigenous cacao farmers utilize similar discourses of authenticity, time depth and connection with nature in the marketing of their chocolate. But while these narratives share similar tropes, they do so for different ends. Through sales of their chocolate, the Belizean Maya have been able to direct development towards local ends. Development have been a key enabler of an indigenous renaissance that is taking place in southern Belize as outside resources have been used in the creation of a distinctly Maya modernity. Out of the pieces and parts of four decades of outside attempts to develop the Belizean Maya and their cacao, the people of San Jose have reconfigured traditional symbols in modern contexts. While Protestant condemnation of *Kustumbre* has caused a decline in the social and ritual uses of cacao, it has been repositioned as a marker of authentic Mopan ethnicity along with culture wear, marimba and harp music, the fagina and neo-traditional houses. The emphasis on the tangible markers of ethnic identity, rather than indigenous spirituality, allows for the reinterpretation of Mopan culture in the context of secularized tradition which seeks to move beyond the divisions of religious schism in these communities.

For both good and ill, the "money from the sky" brought by development has transformed not only Mopan society, but also entails a fundamental reorganization of the natural world. In the follow chapter, I consider changes in cacao development have transformed human/environmental relations.

#### Chapter 9 - Post-Development and the Reorganization Socio-Natural Relations

#### Introduction

Chapter 9 explores changing Mopan relations with the natural world in the context of the commercialization of cacao and the emergent cacao fungus Monilia. From a post-development perspective, Monilia can be seen not only a natural disaster, but also a socially constructed problem in need of technical solutions. This chapter first examines how the rise of commercial cacao development led to a radical reorganization of the landscape and created the conditions which allowed Monilia to become an epidemic. I then examine the self-perpetuating nature of development in which development objectives create problems to be solved with further technical interventions. In this context, I argue that these projects not only attempt to remedy the problems caused by an agricultural disease, but also serve as vehicles for the transformation of indigenous environmental relations. This transformation in agricultural paradigms has had unforeseen consequences such as new agricultural diseases, boundary disputes, and growing inequality. Through numerous development projects and agricultural extension training classes, the old ways of Mopan animistic environmental relations are challenged by western ideologies of mononaturalism which privilege scientific mastery of nature. I argue that the transformation of the "old ways" Mopan cacao farming to modern commercial agriculture is amplified by Protestant environmental theology which encourages dominion over nature as a proclamation of faith against the superstition of *Kustumbre*.

#### Development and the Problem of Monilia

From the beginning, our farms at Green Creek were the one of best cacao areas in San Jose and we used to produce 11,000 lbs of dried cacao annually. But when disease Monilia came and it was very bad. In 2009, Green Creek only sold 500lbs. I heard people whisper that Green Creek was going down the drain and would never produce cacao again like before. We were angry and even ready to chop down all the cacao trees and plant something else.

But the organization (TCGA) helped us to manage. They started to help us prune the trees back. Now they are starting to produce again, little by little. I think Green Creek can once again be a model for other cacao farmers. They're hearing about the pruning at Green Creek, and they're coming personally to see the improvements in the cacao with their own eyes. (Justino)

After decades of development interventions, the market for Belizean cacao in the 2010s looks bright. Cacao is now the largest cash crop in the Toledo district, with over a million new trees planted in the past decade with the help of a large development project to take advantage of unlimited market from a global buyer. Those new trees were now reaching maturity and forecast models showed that production from the tiny Belize cacao sector should be taking off. But the optimistic forecasts of yield models told a different story to the gloomy gossip I heard when I talked with cacao farmers.

Shortly after my fieldwork began in 2010, I started hearing about a new disease called Monilia which was decimating the cacao crop in Belize. Farmers told how they had suffered devastating losses from Monilia last year and this year seemed to promise more of the same, if not worse. Some farmers had lost a third of their crop and counted themselves lucky. Others had lost much more and had considered abandoning their farms all together. Despite an increase in the number of cacao trees planted over the preceding decades, yields have fallen short of estimates as losses from Monilia reduced national production 42% compared to peak production and a 33% decrease between 2008 and 2009 (TCGA 2010 p 7). People still went to collect small amounts of cacao that remain in their fields, but the little cacao they found was first used for home use, with little surplus left for the market.

Since the airborne fungus Monilia (Moniliophtora roreri), first entered Belize in 2004, it had spread ruthlessly from field to field, village to village with impunity. Monilia, also known as "frosty pod rot" is an airborne fungus that affects the fruiting pods of cacao trees and related species. Monilia is one of the most devastating diseases for commercial cacao and part of cacao's unholy "disease trilogy" along with "black pod rot" (Phytophthora sp) and "witches broom" (M. perniciosa), (Fulton 1989). Monilia is a difficult disease to control and can be spread far beyond previously infected fields when its spores are dispersed by the wind or carried on clothing of unsuspecting people. For the first forty days after cacao pods are infected, Monilia is asymptomatic and shows few signs of infection. Only a few pods become discolored with black spots as the fungus begins to rot the pods from the inside out. As these disease festers, a thin white mold begins to appear on the pod, eventually worsening until the entire pod is "mummified" in fungal spores. If an observant farmer spots the infected pods early enough, they can be cut off and buried underground with only the loss of the infected fruit. But even with a careful eye, a few pods always seem to evade even the most watchful cacao farmers. With each passing tropical breeze, a new cloud of spores is carried off to infect the rest of the farm and beyond. Monilia spreads rapidly in cacao fields with an overabundance of shade and humidity. This means cacao fields that are unpruned, i.e. traditional cacao field maintenance, are particularly susceptible to this condition.

Throughout southern Belize, cacao farmers felt powerless to stop this new disease. Although some recalled that the old Mopan practiced ritual offering to the *yum* of cacao to prevent disease in their farms, none dared risk attempting this half-forgotten magic for fear of backsliding into "mixed mindedness" (See chapter 7). Threatened with the loss of their livelihood, cacao farmers looked for help, but the Belizean government offered little assistance. The ministry of agriculture was overwhelmed and had no extension officers available to tackle cacao problems. This void in

government social services, like so many others in southern Belize, was filled by an amalgamation of non-governmental actors that include development organizations, research universities and corporations.

To control the growing Monilia epidemic, agricultural extension officers prescribed pruning and regular maintenance of farms. Although Monilia could be treated with commercially available fungicide, Belize's entire crop of cacao is certified organic. Because of this certification, conventional chemical methods of disease control risked contaminating the farms and jeopardizing their niche in the organic chocolate market. Without the option of spraying fungicide, the Toledo Cacao Grower's Association in conjunction with Centro Agronómico Tropical de Investigación Enseñanza (CATIE) searched for new and innovative ways to combat Monilia organically. According to recommended "best practices" taught in CATIE agricultural field schools, farmers were encouraged to radically prune their cacao trees as an organic solution to Monilia infections. Because many farmers lack the financial means or physical ability to prune their trees, the TCGA initiated a project in 2009 to prune 51 acres of cacao in San Jose with the intent on pruning another 393 acres when more funding could be found. These experts claimed that pruning changes the micro-environmental of the cacao plantation by decreasing humidity and increasingly sunlight, conditions that deter fungal infestation. Although the overt purpose of these interventions was the organic control of the spread of Monilia, these agronomic recommendations also amounted to a radical reengineering of the natural world and the Mopan's relations with it.

#### Monilia: The Construction of Social Epidemics

Despite the advantages, the work of pruning to minimize Monilia, is difficult and dangerous work that is too demanding for many elderly famers, who often lack the financial resources to hire laborers to prune for them. Further, even when development agencies loan pruning tools such as chainsaws, many farmers are unable to purchase the gasoline (over \$5 US per gallon) to operate the machines. Without maintenance, their cacao trees grow tall, bushy and wild-looking, in sharp contrast to the short, managed style promoted by technical trainers. Because many cacao cultivators lack the physical ability or economic resources to effectively control Monilia, diseased pods are often left to rot on the trees to spread their spores to uninfected farms. Even when farmers followed the advice of extension officers and tried to conform their fields to modern standards, lax maintenance by their neighbors could easily undo all of their hard work.

The infestation of densely clumped cacao plantations has allowed the Monilia to quickly spread, overwhelming farmers' ability to control the spores blowing in from their neighbors' fields. Farmers

lament that even if they do their best to maintain their cacao field, they can still easily catch Monilia if their neighbor neglects their farms. As one disgruntled cacao farmer remarked when asked if the pruning of cacao had helped the spread of the disease...

I prune my cacao but it doesn't make sense to clean your cacao if your neighbor doesn't clean his. That's why I help my neighbor prune his cacao. If not, the disease will just spread again because the infected fruit can hide high up in the branches and spread when the wind blows. The disease doesn't care where the line is. It just goes. (Justino)

Many development solutions privilege the individual as the locus of rational decision making based on economic maximization. At the same time, cacao with uncontrolled Monilia infestations place neighboring groves at risk, creating the potential for an agricultural disease to become the catalyst for more widespread social strife in Belizean Maya communities. At this point, Monilia had become not only a biological disease affecting cacao production, but also a force threatening social cohesion in indigenous communities throughout the region.

The social impacts of Monilia are spread unevenly throughout Belizean Maya communities according to a variety of risk factors. Rather than an objective measure, perceptions of "risk" as a sociocultural phenomenon are affected by social organization and values that guide behaviors and affect judgments about what is "dangerous" (Beck 1992; Oliver-Smith 1996). For cacao farmers, the social constructs of the risks of Monilia (and its impact on their lives) depend on the level of investment they have in commercial cacao. In the context of this emerging agricultural disease, I argue that Monilia is not only a biological disease affecting cacao production, but also a social and economic issue whose significance is dependent on the various actors' position in regards to development and cacao.

For those who only harvest small amounts of cacao for home use, infestations of Monilia have not impacted them as severely because the disease leaves behind enough fruit to meet local consumption needs. While Monilia rots cacao fruit as they ripen, the actual trees themselves are unaffected and will continue to grow normally. More so, even if a cacao farm is infested with Monilia, some fruit will survive (>10%), providing enough cacao for home consumption and replanting. On the other hand, for those farmers who depend on the sale of cacao for their livelihood, the impacts can be devastating. These negative consequences can occur even if individual farmers actively work to prevent disease outbreaks in their fields. In the context of commercial cacao production, the loss of such as significant percentage of production has destroyed much of the surplus cacao destined for the world market. Despite this loss, this surplus is above and beyond the amount of cacao used for domestic consumption, so that maximization of yields is only required to fulfill the goals of development. In this

way, the study of Monilia allows for an understanding how different actors respond when development is threatened by environmental disaster.

# Agronomic Values and Reimagining the Natural World

The recent Monilia epidemic threatens not only social and economic needs of Belizean Maya cacao farmers, but also the development objectives of creating environmentally sustainable livelihoods for the people of southern Belize. For the Toledo Cacao Growers Association (TCGA), Monilia represents one of the gravest threats to the long term financial sustainability of the organization and to provide services to its member farmers. As annual yields for Belize's cacao production have failed to meet the projected expectation, the market is once again in jeopardy of bust, just as it once was when Hershey's left the country in 1992.

Throughout its colonial and post-colonial history, the Toledo Maya have been the object of numerous agricultural development schemes aimed at transforming the countryside into an economically "profitable" national resource (Abrams 1973; Ausdal 2008; Emch 2003; Higgins 1998; Steinberg 2002; Wilk 1997). These projects seek to rationally and efficiently utilize natural resources in order to provide economic benefits for the Belizean Maya, who are seen as an "underdeveloped" people mired in poverty. These projects are predicated on the assumption that the environment is a reserve of resource to be utilized efficiently, while minimizing waste. One of the most prominent examples of this type of development is through the commercialization of cacao. San Jose is in the heart of Belize's cacao belt and was the object of many agronomic projects designed to improve yields and organically combat disease. The development of a commercial cacao industry is built on agronomic expertise, which valorizes western notions of a scientific environment, resource management, and efficiency, with an emphasis on increasing productive yields (Scott 1998).

In both subtle and direct ways, cacao development projects are part of a broader cultural mission of development to "modernize" Maya environmental practices and economic livelihoods. Development projects seek to not only improve the lives of the less fortunate, but also to enact a transformation of values regarding self, society and nature. I argue that these competing paradigms of knowledge are vehicles for social values that organize the proper relations between people and the natural world (Descola 1996). Development discourses of environment replace them with quantification of natural resources within the framework of western rationality, shifting Mopan understandings of nature from relational to agronomic. At the same time, non-western understandings of nature are

labeled backwards and superstitious, to be reconfigured according to Western notions of investment, conservation and economic maximization (Scott 1998).

In contrast with the "animistic" values that characterized Mopan environmental within *Kustumbre*, development has promoted an alternate set of environmental values which Descola calls "objectivism." Objectivism dominates the Euro-American views of nature found in diverse disciplines such as biology, environmental science, physiology, medicine and agronomy. In Descola's (1996:8) argument, "naturalism" is context-specific ontology: accordingly, a "single unifying nature" coexists with "a multiplicity of cultures," and what, "for us, distinguishes humans from nonhumans is the mind, the soul, subjectivity, a moral conscience, language, and so forth, in the same way as human groups are distinguished from one another by a collective internal disposition" now known as culture. Whereas *culture* differentiates people from one another, *nature* is taken to be simply there, singular, lawful, and invariable - a site of objective analyses (Latour 2009). Western notions of environmental objectivism, "presupposes an ontological dualism between nature, the domain of necessity, and culture, the domain of spontaneity (Viveiros de Castro 1998 p 473). In contrast to animism, "Naturalism is founded on the inverted axiom: relations between society and nature are themselves natural" (Viveiros de Castro 1998 p 473). In a mirror image of animism, naturalism sees human society as part of a larger "natural" universe, which fades into the unmarked background.

Latour, following Descola, draws on this series of classifications to argue that our modern worldview presumes a *multi*culturalism set against a mononaturalism (Ivakhiv 2012). In the mononaturalist perspective, there is only one nature with which different cultures interact. Rooted in the subjectivity of the human mind, conflicts and differences of opinion between humans and idiosyncratic cultures are at the representational level without ever engaging the material reality or cosmology of the world – different ideas of a single biophysical nature (Halbmeyer 2012). Even if humanity featured divergent religions, rights, customs and arts, it could always rely on (universal) reasons to reunite us. For Latour, multiculturalism is therefore the flip side of mononaturalism (Halbmeyer 2012; Ivakhiv2012).

Through the normalization of an objective, mononatural environment, agricultural development involves a "radical reorganization and simplication of the natural world" to suit the goals of capitalism and the maximization of surplus value (Scott 1998 p 2; Wainwright 2008). Development is the expression of capitalism in the context of colonial relations. From this perspective, capitalist values such as efficiency, maximization, utility, commodification, fungibility and quantification are therefore deeply embedded in the development model (Wainwright 2008). Within a progressive notion of modernity, the

effective harnessing of nature is a necessary prerequisite in the development of the individual and society. The collaboration of science and technology underwrite a "modern constitution" by which nature and society have been tacitly identified as separate realms, subject to different forms of objective scientific analysis. Assumed to be located in the mind, human agency and subjectivity are counterpoised against a basically dead, mechanical world of objects (see Merchant 1980). Natural and cultural entities are presumed to constitute two different, separate orders of reality, the human and the non-human. This objectification of nature as devoid of agency or 'aura' (a la Walter Benjamin) can be traced to Descartes in Western scientific thought (Benjamin 2008; Descartes 1985). Removing 'soul' from nature enabled objectification, allowing men to regard it as an inanimate resource to be exploited in the endeavors of men (Plumwood 1993). This 'informing myth' of human autonomy is corroborated by the Christian emphasis on the afterlife and mythology about humans as being cast away from their 'true' home in the Garden of Eden (Plumwood 1993).

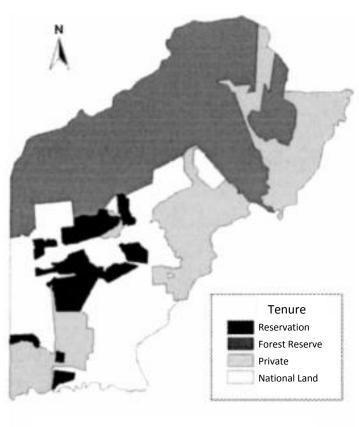
Legitimized by both technical expertise and international funding, the vision of a demystified environment has gradually taken root in San Jose as the Mopan increasingly reframe spiritual relations with a "mono-natural" environmental perspective which privileges the rational utilization of natural resources. In the context of cacao development, I argue that mono-naturalism is a political as much as a social move, produced through colonial and developmental processes of secularization, demystification and functional differentiation.

# Post-Colonial Geographies of Cacao / The Rise of Private Property - Changing Values Towards Land

These changes in Mopan environmental relations can be seen as part of a larger shift throughout Mesoamerica toward a system of values which privilege the individual at the expense of a more holistic social orientation (Abse 2007; Redfield 1964). While lowland Maya cultural understandings of land and agriculture have deep pre-colonial roots (Restall 1997), these ideas are increasingly challenged by competing value systems. The Mopan's increased integration with the cash economy has led to a shift in their views about land as a growing number of villagers (especially among the young) view it as a commodity (Gregory 1972; see Re Cruz 1996). For the Mopan, changing relations to the land and agricultural work has had far reaching implications beyond subsistence patterns.

The relationship between the Maya of Toledo and the state of Belize is an unstable equilibrium inherited from British colonials. A number of ethnographers have described the complex landscape of reservation, private property and state land tenure that the Belizean Maya inhabit (Gregory 1972;

Howard 1973, 1977; Osborn 1982; Wilk 1981, 1997). Although legally administered by the Belizean state in the form of colonial "reservations," the lands of the Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya are actively managed within various local communities through both formal and informal social mechanisms that diverge from those of the state (TMCC 1997). These reservations provide agricultural land for the Maya that cannot be bought, sold, rented or inherited (Bolland 2003; McAnany and Murata 2006). Within this colonial landscape, the Maya of southern Belize primarily practice shifting agriculture in which farmers have usufruct rights over specific fields for a number of years before the land returns to the common pool of land available to the village (Wilk 1997; Gregory 1972). This dual system has resulted in a problematic articulation between competing local and national regimes of land management. The resulting tension is rooted in the divergent cultural understandings about property held by indigenous people and the Belizean state.



**Toledo District Land Tenure** 

Emch 2003 p 122

Following decolonization in 1981, the Government of Belize replaced Britain as the source of legal authority concerning land in the country, managing land through the Ministry of Natural Resources. The new government's land management strategy was based on the creation of "modern" land tenure practices including the dispensation of private leases, the creation of large areas of protected areas and parks and the (ultimately unsuccessful) desire to phase out of indigenous reservations. As the Minister of the Natural Resources stated in the year following Belizean independence...

"The Reservation system existing in certain areas of the Toledo District is the last vestige of colonial heritage. My ministry is reviewing that system and will bring it in line with the secure system enjoyed by Belizeans in the rest of the country. (From an address given by the Minister of Natural Resources, Hon. Florencio Marin as reported by The New Belize, May, 1982.)" (Schackt 1986 Page 157)

Wainwright argues that the post-independence Belizean state desired territorialization, noting the government's efforts to "encourage . . . the Maya Indians . . . to identify themselves more permanently with the rest of the country" and to "encourage the development of more settled systems of farming in the region" (Wainwright 2008 p 228). Development was intended to articulate the Belizean Maya within national territory rather than reservations. As a directed change, development would increase incorporation into markets and privatization of land, albeit with notable risk of uneven consequences (Wainwright 2008 p 204; see Byrd 2011 p 37). Clark notes that when the colonial government began issuing private leases in an effort to increase agricultural production and promote secure land tenure in northern Belize, the affected communities became increasingly stratified, land was underutilized and conflict increased between and within communities (Clark 2000 p 220).

It is in the context of these longstanding attempts to settle the Mopan through agriculture, cacao has been one of the primary implements of enacting this change by development and post-colonial state. The privatization of indigenous agricultural lands in southern Belize by the government of Belize and international development agencies has been a major enterprise over the past 30 years. In conjunction with USAID and the government of Belize, Hershey's agenda promoted the private ownership of communal agricultural lands as a form of loan collateral within a neo-liberal paradigm of economic development and as a means to counter the perceived threat of a communist movement among the Belizean Maya. The collapse of Hummingbird Hershey's did not diminish the focus on

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>129</sup> Efforts by the Belizean government to privatize Maya reservations were backed by US interests at the height of the cold war, in which Maya communist insurgents battled the Guatemalan government (1960-1996) just across the border from southern Belize. One of the main aims of the Maya rebels in Guatemala was a more equitable distribution of land through the reallocation of *finca* (plantation) lands to landless indigenous farmers.

privatization of Maya reservations in the Belizean cacao industry. TCGA continues to list "insecure land tenure" as one of its top three threats to the Belizean cacao industries in public presentations, along with Monilia and natural disasters such as hurricanes, floods and fires.

In the environmental *Kustumbre*, the reservation land surrounding Maya villages was considered to be commons available for the use (thought not ownership) by all official members of the community. Land use pattern of Mopan villages during the colonial era was characterized by fluid, mobile boundaries. The rights to a piece of land were secured through invested labor and are only as permanent as the hands that work it. Customary practices of allocating land based on active use starkly contrast with the rigid boundaries of the state-sanctioned land survey system.

Despite this underlying communal ethos against owning land, individual cacao trees were one of the few items considered private property which could be inherited between generations. Although the land that tree crops are cultivated on are still considered part of the "common pool" of community land, the trees themselves can be owned by households, providing long term de facto rights of control over land that was once held in common (Wilk 1997). Under the rapid expansion of cacao under commercial development, customary rights to owning cacao trees have been extrapolated to legitimize the privatization of cacao lands. While the particularity of tree ownership had a negligible effect on the availability of land under customary cacao management regimes, it has been greatly magnified with the commercial expansion of cacao, greatly altering the landscape of southern Belize.

Since the 1980s development groups have even been able to register as land holding cooperatives within formally communal land (Wilk 1997 Page 202). In the village of San Jose, land holding cooperatives including Green Creek, Golden Valley, the Western Group and Bol's group have partitioned lands surrounding the village for the exclusive use of the households that are members of the group. This enclosure of formerly common areas has been exacerbated by the planting of long term crops such as cacao, which increase the total amount of land under cultivation, rather than directly replace acres dedicated to shifting cultivation. As Mopan farmers have increasingly annexed agricultural land through the planting of cacao plantations, this *de facto* enclosure has been legitimized by the post-colonial Belizean state by issuing private 50 acre leases within formerly communal areas.

Long term rights to lease crown land is based not only on payment, but also through active use. Ten years after a piece of land is first leased, the lease holder must show proof of "improving" the land in order to renew the lease in perpetuity. Activities such as clearing brush, felling timber, building a structure or planting permanent crops like cacao all allow farmers to claim improvements on leased parcels. Although the yields of Belizean cacao are far below world average, one of the reasons for the

massive expansion of cacao groves across southern Belize has been an effort by individuals to lay claim to formerly common areas.

Today, the land tenure situation in San Jose is a mix of colonial era reservations with private leased land. Much of the farm land within a two mile radius of San Jose is considered reservation where any official member of the village can farm. Almost all farmers work the reservation lands, though the village lands committee is trying to reserve reservation lands for those without lease. Beyond that line, about 85% of farmers in San Jose have leased farms ranging in size from 10-50 acres. This leased land is either privately held or part of large collective land holding groups within which people farm smaller plots individually. On leased lands, farmers grow cacao, corn, beans, rice or have pasture for cows.

As thousands of acres of land have been converted from shifting agriculture to permanent cacao, the meanings and practices surrounding agricultural land have become increasingly contentious. In Maya communities throughout southern Belize, tension over the future of agricultural land has led to increased social inequality and conflicts both within and between villages. In San Jose, many "progressive" villagers have embraced the new cultural meanings of agricultural land propagated by the Belizean state, development organizations and protestant missionaries. These modern values of the landscape attempt to create an amoral and fungible valorization of the landscape rendered as resources. Among those Mopan who have embraced privatization, agricultural land is disembedded from its social and religious context and integrated into the domain of capitalist market relations in the form of alienable property (see Polanyi 2001). While some cacao growers have embraced privatization as a means of economic betterment, others have seen it as socially divisive and cosmologically dangerous. The rise of private property ownership has been opposed by village elders and traditionalists in some communities who have won legal recognition from international courts for the recognition of communal ownerships (TMCC 1997; Wainwright 2008; Wilk 1997 Page 169). They believe that agricultural land remains an important locus for communal decision making, social work groups and ritual obligations to the guardian spirits of nature.

The introduction of competing moralities about the value of land has caused an increase in land conflicts and boundary disputes between indigenous villages. This tension has been driven in part by competing notions of spatial geography between indigenous land tenure practices and those of the Belizean state. While the old ways of milpa farming was not always harmonious and conflicts occurred over boundary lines that could result in injury or even death, the shifting nature of these boundaries made these conflicts short term in nature and limited in scale. In contrast, the introduction of new systems of geography of land based on survey (*p'is lu'um* = literally "to measure land") has exacerbated

latent tensions within and between communities over rights of use and ownership of agricultural land. Villagers with experience navigating government bureaucracy and access to scarce cash have been able to lease blocks of formerly commons land and transform them into semi-private property. The introduction of private leases "fixes" the boundaries of farms on the landscape by enclosing the former commons. The demarcation of blocks of leased land overlaps and contradicts existing systems of land allocation with national prerogatives, rather than natural features. The demarcation of boundaries through the issuing of national leases has created new divisions between local haves and have nots, as some are able to utilize the spoils of development to lease blocks of formerly common land.

In 2011, a border dispute simmered with the neighboring village of Santa Cruz. Santa Cruz and San Jose were approximately two miles apart and for many years, their agricultural lands were divided by a crooked little creek which flowed between them. Despite the proximity of the two villages, their land tenure practices had diverged markedly in recent years. While the people of San Jose had increasingly adopted the practice of leasing land around their cacao from the national government, Santa Cruz rejected leased lands and the village was at the forefront of the Belizean Maya communities fighting for recognition of communal land tenure (TMCC 1997). The problem arose when San Jose farmers began to survey blocks of land for commercial cacao groves near the creek. Because the geography of state leases privileges right angles and straight lines, the land tracks were squared off, leaving an irregular sliver of river-bottom land between the cacao fields and the boundary creek. Now farmers from both San Jose and Santa Cruz have attempted to plant rice on the disputed plot. Farmers from San Jose claim that the land on their side of the creek has always belonged to the San Jose reservation, regardless of how other farms have been divided up. In contrast, those in Santa Cruz argue that the new survey blocks now mark the edge of San Jose's domain and that the long narrow splinter of river bottom was abandoned when their more "progressive" neighbors adopted the non-local practice of standardized survey grids. 130

As the story above illustrates, the proper demarcation and use of the landscape continues to be controversial in indigenous communities. State and NGO development policies can have a direct impact on changing indigenous understandings of the landscape, by promoting the agronomic and efficient management of cacao in contrast to the holistic environmental cosmology of *Kustumbre*. In the following section, I explore how the development of a modern Belizean cacao industry has been as catalyst for the radical reorganization of indigenous environmental values and practices. Changing

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>130</sup> Although the farmers of Santa Cruz are less involved in commercial cacao development than their neighbors in San Jose, they have converted in large numbers to Protestantism, exposing them to modern western ideals of land and nature.

Mopan environmental relations can be tangibly seen by the transformation of the landscape of cacao groves. This is not only a change in land use patterns but also reflects a larger imposition of non-local, hegemonic values within the guise of development. As the values of development have become mainstream in Mopan communities, understandings of nature as an objectified environment comprised of quantitatively managed characteristics increasingly replace holistic and qualitative relations with nature.

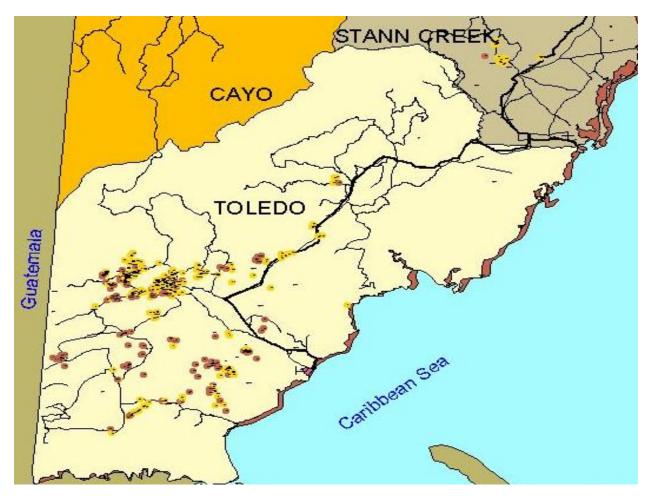
## Agronomic Management of the Cacao Landscape

Across southern Belize, recent development projects have been undertaken to "improve" indigenous agriculture, making it more economically beneficial and environmentally sustainable. Development interventions are positioned as "technical" solutions that attempt to solve the problems inherent in peasant agriculture through the proper application of technology combined with changing the inefficient/unhealthy behaviors of the target population. The social improvement promised by development is predicated on the scientific mastery of the environment and society which seeks "to make the terrain, its products and its workforce more legible – and hence manipulable – from above and from the center" (Scott 1998 p 2).

Before widespread market integration, Mopan agriculture was focused primarily on the cultivation of maize, beans and rice for domestic consumption. This indigenous agricultural regime was seen from the perspective of development as unprofitable both for individual farmers and the state tax revenue and commerce. In the early 1980s, agricultural development projects began to replace this "peasant" agricultural paradigm with a new agricultural regime focused on cash crops such as cacao, citrus and annatto. Vast tracts of land, labor and capital have been funneled into the production of agricultural commodities for export, transforming landscapes and livelihoods. As Belizean Maya cacao farmers have expanded commercial agriculture, "land and labor are reallocated to meet new priorities" in pursuit of profits, reconfiguring both the natural and social world (Wilk 1997 Page 177; see Mintz 1985).

Since the 1980s, there has been a major reorganization of the southern Belizean landscape as thousands of acres of cacao have been planted. Seedlings were distributed to farmers with the intention of converting areas previously used for shifting cultivation with permanent crops such as cacao. Other crop regimes in Mopan villages were changed to accommodate the expansion of cacao. In an effort to protect cacao seedlings from damage, the village of San Jose has banned free roaming pigs, resulting in the transformation of the community's diet (see chapter 3).

Over the past 35 years, more than a million seedlings have been distributed to farmers throughout the region, though many have been lost to all manners of disease, blight, fire and neglect. Today there are more than 210,000 actively producing cacao trees in the region, on  $\sim$  700 acres. In addition to those actively producing trees, there are nearly another half a million cacao plants that are either too old, too young or not actively harvested.



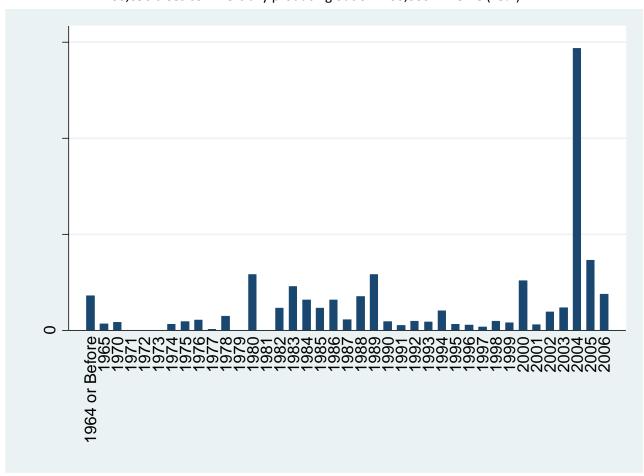
The Distribution of Belizean Cacao Farms in Toledo (TCGA)

The following graph depicts the number of commercially producing cacao trees in Belize, according to the year they were planted. The ebb and flow of commercial cacao development projects can be seen in the number of cacao trees from different eras. While cacao trees can live for 100 years or more, most of their production declines after twenty years unless natural or artificial interventions cause new instances of fruit production, such as pruning, orchard rehabilitation, or hurricanes. Despite their age, approximately 19,000 cacao trees planted before 1980 are still in production, or 9.4 % of total

trees in production. The remaining 90.6% of producing cacao trees were planted beginning in 1980, with two major impulses. Between 1980-1989, there was a major expansion of cacao in the district with financing from the DFC (Development Finance Corporation) to take advantage of the market at Hummingbird Hershey's. Cacao trees planted during the 1980s formed the 2<sup>nd</sup> largest decadal cohort, with 63,608 trees in production in 2009 (31.7%). The market collapse of Hummingbird Hershey's in 1991 led to a sharp decline in the planting of cacao trees in southern Belize and only 17,300 cacao trees (8.6%) planted between 1990-1999. Since 2000, there has been a major expansion of acreage under cacao production, much of which has been undertaken within the "Maya Gold" project for the revitalization following the devastation of hurricane Iris in 2001. Even though many of these trees are just beginning to bear fruit, 100,944 cacao trees planted between 2000 and 2006 make up the lion's share of commercial cacao trees in Belize (50.2%).

The Expansion of Commercial Cacao in Southern Belize 2009 Trees in Production





Graph bar tree, over(year)

year	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
≤ 1964	7 <b>,</b> 239	3.61	3.61
1965	1,350	0.67	4.28
1970	1,700	0.85	5.13
1974	1,240	0.62	5.74
1975	1,865	0.93	6.67
1976	2,200	1.10	7.77
1977	250	0.12	7.89
1978	3,000	1.49	9.39
1980	11,635	5.80	15.19
1982	4,650	2.32	17.50
1983	9,113	4.54	22.04
1984	6,325	3.15	25.20
1985	4,672	2.33	27.52
1986	6,303	3.14	30.66
1987	2,225	1.11	31.77
1988	7,050	3.51	35.29
1989	11,635	5.80	41.08
1990	1,830	0.91	41.99
1991	1,000	0.50	42.49
1992	1,950	0.97	43.46
1993	1,760	0.88	44.34
1994 1995	4,075	2.03	46.37
1995	1,300 1,150	0.65 0.57	47.02 47.59
1997	750	0.37	47.59
1998	1,900	0.95	48.91
1999	1,585	0.79	49.70
2000	10,345	5.15	54.86
2001	1,210	0.60	55.46
2002	3,820	1.90	57.36
2003	4,760	2.37	59.74
2003	58,682	29.24	88.97
2005	14,618	7.28	96.26
2006	7,509	3.74	100.00
Total	+   200 <b>,</b> 696	100.00	

Belize has not only experienced an expansion in terms of absolute numbers of cacao trees, but also in their density, placement and management on the landscape. In Mopan agricultural *Kustumbre*, cacao was either harvested from feral cacao groves in the forest or harvested from a few trees within kitchen gardens. Feral cacao grew is scattered clumps within the high forest while kitchen gardens only had a handful of trees close at hand for everyday use. While the Mopan harvested cacao from both of these areas, these trees were not planted in actively managed groves. Rather, farmers shaped these

cacao producing areas out of the existing environment conditions. These cacao trees were naturally big and bushy, with tall dark canopies shading a tangle of trunks that didn't produce much fruit. In this paradigm of production, not much cacao was needed to meet local needs and so, cacao production was minimal and irregular. One farmer recalled how his parents used to take care of their cacao trees in the era before development...

The old generation never measure how much feet between each cacao when they planted. They just planted by making a hole with a machete or a stick, and then putting a couple of seeds in the ground. That way at least one will grow so if more than one tree came up, they didn't mind it. That's why if you go to the old cacao trees, some of them have three or four trunks coming out of the ground together. At that time, they didn't know how to prune the cacao so the plants grew big and bushy. But the old people didn't mind. They just cleaned (weeded) a bit under the trees and just went to the farms to harvest. (Lucas)



**Unmanaged Cacao** 

1

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> The importance of initial conditions in human/environmental relations is "one of the principles of chaos theory" (Damon 2006; see Mosko and Damon 2005)

Even today, some Old Testament elders continue to practice this low intensity form of cacao cultivation with a few trees surrounding the home for domestic consumption and selling whatever meager surplus they produce to the global market. Although commercial cacao has been marketed as a development intervention that allows elderly villagers to earn a low intensity income, the hard labor needed to combat cacao infected with Monillia makes it difficult for these older cacao farmers to produce significant quantities for commercial sale.

In contrast to the "unmanaged" cacao of the old ways, the advent of commercialization of cacao has led to a major reorganization of the landscape of cacao farms. Rather than collected seed being planted with a digging stick, cacao seedlings are now started in large (+8000 seedlings) centralized nurseries of across the region. Agronomists select specific varieties of high yielding, disease tolerant varieties for propagation and large scale distribution to member farmers.



TCGA Cacao Nursery

Through agricultural training, extension officers promoted a more efficient planting of cacao trees to replace the apparent "haphazard" arrangement of trees on the land. Rather than a scattered distribution of plants, development professionals encouraged Belizean Maya farmers to plant monoculture plantations of cacao trees with close spacing (one tree every 10 - 12 feet) to maximize the yields per acre. Unlike the two traditional types of Mopan cacao areas, kitchen gardens and feral cacao, new commercial cacao "plantations" are large monocrop areas (usually over 2 acres), averaging ~ 300 trees per acre.

The commercialization of the Belizean cacao industry not only changed the distribution of trees on the landscape, but also the types of cacao that could be planted in these areas. The local variety of cacao, known as *Criollo*, has been grown in southern Belize for more than 2000 years. *Criollo* cacao produces light colored cacao seeds of a high quality that are highly sought after by chocolate producers. While *Criollo* grows well in the dispersed forest groves which were common before the commercialization of cacao, the changing geography of cacao orchards brought by development has necessitated the use of new varieties more amenable to monocrop agriculture. While *Criollo* cacao is ideally suited to the cool understory of the forest, under modern monoculture, *Criollo* seedlings wither and die in the heat. In order to plant cacao orchards in a modern efficient manner, agronomists have replaced local *Criollo* varieties with new hybrid varieties of *Trinitario* cacao imported from Costa Rica. Rather than planting seeds from their harvested fruit, cacao farmers are instead encouraged to plant improved seeds from extension services so they would know they were planting high quality genetic material.

The new *Trinitario* varieties of cacao were chosen because they were high yielding trees which had been bred to thrive in the close conditions of tightly spaced commercial groves. Today, *Trinitario* cacao dominates the Toledo landscape with only a few *Criollo* trees growing feral in the forest reserves. Some traditionalist farmers have even tried to bring back the older *Criollo* varieties by planting seedlings in their farms. They claim that *Criollo* seeds are superior to the imported varieties because they not only produce high grade chocolate, but also in that they have a deeper root systems than the *Trinitario* and so are better able to tap into groundwater reserves in times of drought. Despite this experimentation, *Criollo* trees grow poorly in closely spaced orchards and most farmers eventually adopted the nonlocal *Trinitario* variety in order to produce cacao on a commercial scale.

Commercial cacao farmers now evaluate their trees for its productive attributes and manage their crops within the paradigms of scientific agriculture, detached from the former spiritual concerns of *Kustumbre*. These values privilege principles of yield maximization accompanied by an agronomic

perspective that describes crops in terms of quantifiable properties such as high-yielding, low oil, and strong flavor. Cacao trees are now selected based on their productive characteristics, rather than as holistic entities.



**Pruned Cacao** 

In these "modern" cacao groves, cacao trees are actively managed to maximize production. During the 1980s, farmers were encouraged to liberally apply fertilizers and pesticides to their farms in order to increase yields by bringing the peasant agriculture of traditional cacao farmers up to modern standards. When the market for Hummingbird Hershey's folded and was replaced by the Green and Black's organic standards, farmers were told that the use of chemical inputs was no longer acceptable. Instead they would have to manage their cacao organically by ingenuity, scientific breeding and hard work. Although their contract with Green and Black's requires the organic cultivation of cacao, this is not a major inconvenience since most small-scale cacao farmers lack the capital to purchase chemical pesticides and fertilizers (see Steinberg 2002). Today, extension officers extol the virtues of organically managed cacao, both to combat Monilia and boost production. Green and Black's provides technical assistance to Belizean Maya farmers to help them comply with theses international standards (see Emch 2003 p 128).

Under modern agricultural management; thick, untamed groves are remade into carefully pruned, meticulously managed orchards standing as the material embodiment of cultural

transformations underway in San Jose. Trees are pruned so that only a single trunk remains and the bushy canopy of intercrossed leaves and branches is thinned. When cacao trees are radically pruned, the plant reacts to this loss by producing a flourishing of fruit as the nutrients that would have maintained a dense canopy are redirected toward reproduction. Reducing the trees canopy has the added benefit of reducing the spread of Monilia by reducing humidity and increasing sunlight in cacao groves. The chart below organizes these changes to the cacao landscape within different development eras.

**Comparison of Different Cacao Management Strategies** 

	Feral Groves	Kitchen Gardens	Hershey's Era – "Modern"	Agronomic Cacao, Organic
			Agronomic Cacao	
Era	Pre-Columbian – 1980s	Pre-Columbian  – Present	1977 – 1992	1992 ->
Landscape	Feral trees scattered in a tropical forest	Diverse assemblage of productive food plants near the house. Few trees	Managed environment. Efficient spacing, 300 per acre. Only cacao and shade trees.	Managed environment, Efficient spacing, 300 per acre, Only cacao and shade trees.
Canopy	Closed canopy, low light	Closed canopy, low light	Pruned	Open canopy, more light
Height	Tall, natural growth	Tall, natural growth	Short	Short prune, manageable height
Growth outcomes	Growth for leaves, less pods	Growth for leaves, less pods	High yields from fertilizer and pesticides	Less leaves, more energy for more pods, natural compost
Pruning Regimes	Unmanaged	Minimal Management	Technical management	Single trunk, cut chuppons, structural pruning, cut Monilia pods
Investment	Low labor inputs	Low labor inputs	Highest Investment, Medium Labor Inputs	Medium investment costs, High Labor Investment
Returns	Low yields	Low yields	Highest Yields	Medium yields
Environmental Impacts / Sustainability	Sustainable	Sustainable	High Impacts from Fertilizers, Pesticides	Lower Environmental Impacts because Organic Certification
Ownership	Trees are heritable property, not land	Cheil as owners, Humans as respectful petitioners	Humans as owners of land during era of increasing privatization and enclosure	Humans as owners of land during era of increasing privatization and enclosure

Despite the increased yields that have come from actively managing and pruning cacao groves, it was the development of a commercial cacao industry and its recreation of the landscape that created

the conditions in which Monilia could become an epidemic. Monilia is not as devastating to a small number of cacao groves scattered in high bush under wild conditions. Under traditional cacao management practices, low density on the landscape buffers cacao trees from infection. At the same time, the amount of cacao needed for home use and ritual offerings was small so losses from disease would not have been as devastating.

Development-led initiatives to maximize yields and "best practices" about how to efficiently use natural resources led to the creation of dense groves of cacao where Monilia could fester. In order to modernize the Belizean cacao industry, the low density, low yield paradigm of Mopan environmental Kustumbre was largely replaced with new large monocrop cacao plantations. During the 1980s, agronomists working with Hummingbird Hershey's recommended planting trees at 10 ft increments to maximize land use. Since Monilia had not yet reached Belize at this time, the dense canopies caused by tight planting were not considered a problem. With the advent of the disease, the close spacing of trees planted during the 1980s has produced an ideal habitat for Monilia to thrive in the dark, humid understory of efficiently planted groves. The intensification of commercial cacao produced a large numbers of cacao in close proximity to each other so that once a single farm is infected, the disease quickly spread throughout the country. Even as development creates the conditions in which Monilia can thrive through the unexpected consequences of agronomic development, it subsequently attempts to correct these problems through further technological solutions.

## Carbon Gold (story) – A "Modern" Cacao Grove

Toward the end of my stay in San Jose, I heard about a new cacao development project called "Carbon Gold" that was beginning a pilot study in the village as part of TCGA's response to Monilia. Over the previous few months, TCGA sponsored pruning teams armed with chainsaws had been experimenting with pruning various cacao fields, with the hope that opening up the canopy would decrease Monilia infection rates. In the footsteps of the pruning initiative, a development project named "Carbon Gold" had begun a program to turn the pruned cacao limbs into organic biochar fertilizer which could be buried in cacao fields to raise productivity. Carbon Gold is a NGO (nongovernmental organization) which aimed to monetize organic "carbon credits" for indigenous and marginal communities by creating charcoal in large kilns. 133 These credits could then be sold in global carbon markets in Europe, and now in California as well, to offset corporate industrial pollution. While

 $^{
m 132}$  Carbon Gold is certified organic by the Soil association of the United Kingdom 133 www.carbongold.com

the profits from this venture were small, they would cover the costs installing the kilns in remote villages which would be able to provide a continuous supply of organic biochar fertilizer for indigenous cacao farmers.

A few weeks before, the four of Carbon Gold's kiln had arrived in San Jose and were slowly being set up in some of the larger cacao growing areas surrounding the village. One morning, I went to see one of the farmer training sessions that the TCGA was putting on to show cacao farmers how to operate the new ovens. I parked my bike at the edge of the farm where one of the ovens had been installed and made my way up the winding path through the newly pruned cacao trees. As I crested the hill, I noticed a thin wisp of grey smoke rising out of the cacao fields. Unlike the usual thick, hot black smoke I was accustom to seeing billowing from burning milpas, this was light, almost a shimmering vapor.

Winding amongst the reaching branches of the cacao, I reached the clearing and found a group of about fifteen of San Jose's cacao farmers standing around the still smoking hot kiln. The kiln was five feet tall and approximately the same diameter in width. The kilns were made out of welded iron and were surprisingly complex with air tubes feeding the center fire, a firebox to start the heat, and a separate inner ring where tinder is fed in to keep the heat at a precise level. On one kiln, the conical lid and chimney had been removed to load the oven with short logs that were stacked inside to be "cooked" at high temperature to make biochar.



www.carbongold.com

Along with the assembled San Jose farmers were two British engineers from Carbon Gold who had designed and built the kiln, and had come to oversee its first test fire in the cacao farms of San Jose.

Their clothes were covered in soot and when they took off their glasses, they had rings of ash around their eyes. Their hair was wild and their long gray beards were singed by the embers.

The experts buzzed around the kilns, checking and testing them as they explained their operation to the assembled group. They told us how the kiln is lit with a small flame in a firebox and the heat goes through tubes and begins to cook the wood into charcoal. The logs used in the production of biochar must be cut to a standard length and dried over a period of three months to allow excess moisture to evaporate without letting the wood rot completely. According to the engineers, the trick of making good charcoal is that you don't want the wood to burn, you want the water to evaporate out and the wood to turn into carbon. So oxygen (a combusting agent) is your enemy and you need to seal up the kiln so that no air leaks out. To accomplish this, they recommended a variety of "low tech" solutions like packing the seams with clay and sand. These materials are both ideal high temperature materials but also cheap and ready at hand in cacao farms. The engineers told how you can tell the status of your burn by the color of the smoke coming out of the chimney. White smoke means the heat is evaporating out of the water from the wood and turning it into charcoal. Black smoke means that there is an air leak in your kiln. This oxidization of flammable materials under high heat causes fire, and instead of charcoal you end up with ashes. This is an undesirable outcome. Blue vapory smoke means that the process is finished and you can let your oven begin to cool. After a day and night of cooking, you let it rest and then remove the lid.



As they explained the process, the engineers removed the lid from one of the kilns which had been cooling from a recent burn. As soon as the air rushed into the newly opened kiln, the charcoal

burst into flames. Quickly, five gallon buckets of water were brought up from a nearby creek to quench the fires. Once it had been extinguished the newly doused charcoal was shoveled out of the oven and laid out on tarps to dry in the tropical sun. After the biochar was dried, it could be crushed and then sprinkled around the roots of the cacao trees to provide fertilizer to improve yields.

It was interesting talking to engineers about the design process of the kilns because they believed in field-testing their designs in the actual conditions, rather than just on paper. Despite the large size of the kilns, the engineers said that these were the smallest ones they had made as of yet. They were accustomed to making really big kilns and the challenge was to design one small and portable enough that could still accommodate a worthwhile load of charcoal. At the current design, each burn produces ~400 lbs of biochar per load, meaning it would take five full loads to reach the ton of biochar needed to fertilize the field. Any smaller would mean too many loads and too much of farmers time, since the time consuming part isn't the loading, but the actual burn which takes up to two days by the time the oven finally cools down. They started out designing the first prototype and made ten kilns and field tested them in different conditions to see how they would perform in actual use. They gave a number of examples of ways the kilns had been modified over time through farmer testing like changing the height to accommodate shorter farmers or to make the kilns round so they could be rolled/dragged to distant fields over rough terrain.

The story they told was one of using engineering and science to make the world a better place. But despite their technical abilities, the engineers lamented how past project had run into problems as they kept facing "cultural" challenges that kept farmers from effectively using the kilns. One major problem was that the gasoline used to run the fire box bower for hours on end was an expense that many farmers were unwilling to stomach without definite proof of the returns. In addition to cash expenses for the cacao farmers, the production of biochar also required a ready supply of carefully dried firewood. While the kilns worked best with dried wood to 18% moisture content, the logs in this cacao field had been pruned too long ago to make the efficient production of biochar worthwhile. Fungus had already broken down the soft tissues of the wood, making it difficult to produce the required steam heat. In order to find enough suitable wood, heavy logs had to be hauled from across the farm to a central location. To meet this derivative problem, the engineers proposed a system of cable cars system to haul logs, although this solution was never implemented due to costs and feasibility. The use of biochar on cacao trees near the village also required a time consuming extra step of pulverizing the charcoal to prevent thieves from stealing the valuable material for cook fires.

While many of the cacao farmers assembled in the cacao field that day expressed interest in the Carbon Gold project and seemed impressed by the ingenuity of the contraption, they also voiced wary skepticism about the projects long term future. They had seen numerous development projects come and go in San Jose, and rarely was it the "technical" aspects of projects that had been their demise. Rather, it usually had more to do with whims of some far away donors or fickle markets which usually left poor farmers over-exposed when projects collapsed.

# **Post-Development and Self-Justifying Technical Solutions**

Carbon Gold is just one of the many development projects that have come to San Jose over the years in attempts to solve the various ills identified in the Belizean cacao industry. As cacao has shifted from a low quantity sacred crop to an export commodity, it has increasingly fallen under the gaze of agronomic experts who have attempted to "improve" the crop through selective breeding, management practices and grafting. The shift towards an agronomic emphasis in cacao cultivation has resulted in a growing emphasis on selecting plants that have desirable features, such as disease resistant or high yielding, rather than a holistic understanding of the tree as an indivisible living being. In response to the devastation of commercial cacao production by Monilia, development groups such as the TCGA have responded with technical solutions including selective breeding, pruning teams and biochar kilns to minimize fungal growth conditions. While these activities aim to mitigate the impact of the disease, they also justify the further involvement of development.



Cacao grafting training in San Jose (TCGA)

While development discourses claim that intervention are needed to fix the problems of a troubled reality, in contrast post-development theorists claim that development inevitably lays the foundation for future "problems" that can be solved through further technocratic (non-political) solutions. This provides the raison d'être (reason for existence) for a new round of self-perpetuating development interventions which continually justifies its own existence (Escobar 1995 p 47). Rather than achieving the erasure of underdevelopment, post-development scholars argue that the development apparatus instead seeks a radical reorganization of the natural and social world to conform to the expectations of capitalist modernity. Post-development theorists claim development should not be seen as global philanthropy, but instead as...

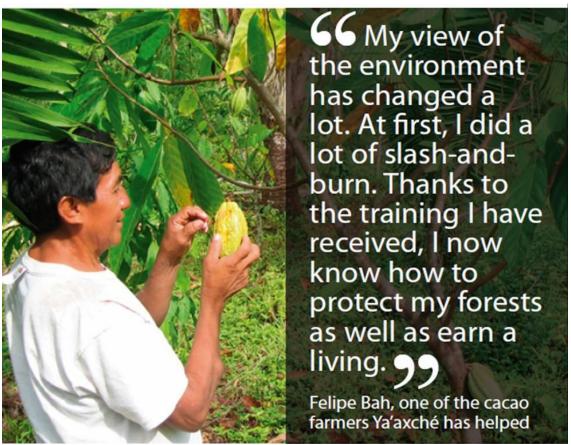
'a set of practices, sometimes appearing to conflict with one another, which require —for the reproduction of society—the general transformation and destruction of the natural environment and of social relations. Its aim is to increase the production of commodities (goods and services) geared, by way of exchange, to effective demand (Rist 2002 p 13).

This reorganization is facilitated through rational management of natural resources, informed by scientific knowledge of development professionals (Scott 1998 p 4-5). True to post-development theory, authors such as Ferguson problematize the creation of self-evidenced developmental 'truths' from which policies, programs and projects take meaning. Scholars of post-development argue that the framing of poverty and suffering as the object of technical intervention "de-politicizes" development, so that scientific authority and expert knowledge are framed as the only legitimate models for modernization in a post-colonial future (Gilman 2003 p 8-9; Scott 1998). In this way, the development discourses obscures the power relations and inequalities within the modernizing project, instead emphasizing neutral, technical problems (such as isolation, lack of technology, deficit in agricultural resources) that developmental institutions are designed to address through an ever increasing web of development projects (Ausdal 2008 p 564; Ferguson 1990 p 87-8; see Gilman 2003 p 10; Peet 1991; 15; Wainwright 2008; see Foucault 1975).

The implementation of technical development solutions creates "a deepened intimacy, a more intricate mesh" between society and technology (Latour 1999 pp. 195-196; Ivakhiv 2002: 400). The modern impulse to divide of the world into distinct spheres of science, religion, and nature, transforms disease from an issue of spiritual relationality to one of scientific problem solving. Within this modernizing ideology, technology and science overshadow spiritual explanations for natural problems. While New Testament cacao farmers pray to Jesus to heal their sick crops, they have also adopted the

Protestant maxim that "God helps those who help themselves," with the resources and expertise of development. Thus human agency and reason replace faith and spiritual relationality as the dominant mode of human-environmental interaction.





While projects are planned and funded far away in the centers of global power, it is often local development personnel who implement these transformations through regular trainings and workshops in targeted communities. In this section, I explore how agricultural extension training plays a key role in the dissemination and legitimization of outside environmental values. Faced with the threat of Monilia and other cultural and biological "challenges" to maximizing cacao yields, the TCGA and CATIE (Centro

Agronómico Tropical de Investigación Enseñanza) have implemented a series of monthly "farmer training" classes. As part of the CCP (Central America Cacao Project) in 2009, more than 440 indigenous families in Belize took part in an eight session training course (16 hours) which covered topics ranging from cacao biology to post harvest. These classes are facilitated by local Belizean Maya extension officers, trained in agronomic principles. The head of Green and Black's Chocolate supply chain, Neil La Croix, explained the importance of these extension officers by saying...

"We also have extension officers who are really key, they are essential farm advisors, they link the farms and they are responsible for passing on training and key advice, it's a really key role."

(Neil La Croix – Head of Supply Chain)

Over the past 35 years, Belizean Maya farmers have been inundated with hundreds of hours of agronomic training about "best practices" for cacao. In my time in southern Belize, I attended more than 20 farmer training sessions on a variety of topics including disease prevention, pruning and canopy management, "organic" certification requirements, fermentation and drying of the beans post-harvest, grafting and nursery management. While many of these extension courses only run for the life of the projects' funding, together they form a long-term institution of development ideology for the creation of a modern view of scientific nature in indigenous communities. Even as individual projects have come and gone, the underlying mission of development remains a constant narrative. Through field schools and classroom learning, farmers are exposed to scientific discourses about plant biology and pathology. Indigenous people have been recruited by outside agencies to work as agricultural extension officers in their own communities to spread the message of scientific cacao production. Indigenous extension officers provide a vital link in the transmission of knowledge, translating scientific explanations of the world into locally meaningful concepts. For example, at one cacao training I attended, the Mopan extension officer described the grafting process in the local language as "lut' päk'al" (to join/"twin" plants). During this training, he talked about selecting budwood from high yielding trees. The extension officer explained the scientific agronomy lingo presented in the lesson by calling high yielding trees sakol (hard working) in contrast to sakan (lazy) trees that grew bushy, but yielded little fruit. These two terms are a key binary in Mopan life and being sakol is the number one requirement for a marriage partner and all children and pets are told to not be sakan, but rather sakol.



A TCGA extension officer teaching a field school in San Jose on the selection of budwood for grafting.

The interpretation of scientific agriculture into terms meaningful for small scale farmers is one of the most important jobs of a cacao extension officer. One of these extension officers expressed pride about his work as an intermediary between the TCGA and its member farmers...

"I'm very proud of the TCGA, they train all of the farmers how to prune, how to harvest and how to maintain their cacao fields. The TCGA plays a very important role. In 2001 we were struck by hurricane Iris and we suffered as all our shade trees were knocked down, but we managed to get back to where we are now because the TCGA supported the farmers with technical information and so now within 2 to 3 years we are back to normal."

### (Eusebio Salam – Cacao Farmer and Extension Officer) 134

Despite the agency that various actors have in the social imaging of Monilia, these value laden discourses are contextualized within a larger web of unequal power relations between indigenous people, the state and NGOs. Development projects are encouraged by Modernist conceptions of the environment which are backed by a steady stream of outside money. The influx of non-local resources

http://www.greenandblacks.com/assets/media/transcripts/The%20TCGA%20doc%20-%20video%20transcript.pdf

legitimizes the claims of scientific agronomy at the expense of traditional environmental knowledge based on spiritual relationality (see Faust 1999). The hegemonic mentality of modernizing development often "excludes the necessary role of local knowledge and know-how" that comes from practical experience, what Scott calls "metis," as "they try to fix what isn't broken" (Greider and Garkovich 1994; Scott 1998 p 6). Through agricultural training, local environmental knowledge is replaced by formal education presented by development "experts" intent on modernizing the Maya and their farms (see Faust 1999 Page 21). In his 'postcolonial' perspective, Mitchell considers this type of expertise as not only embedded in colonialism and imperialism, but working to format social relations (1991 p 118). In these discourses, scientific agricultural knowledge is presented as technical and apolitical while indigenous knowledge is viewed as "backwards, ignorant, and the cause of their poverty" (Faust 1999 Page xxiv). At the same time, indigenous cultural knowledge and values are further undermined by slander from Protestant converts who consider the old ways to be "backwards" and reject them as "progress" (see Faust 1999 Page 47).

An example of this replacement of environmental knowledge was evident in an agricultural training session hosted by the Toledo Cacao Growers Association which I attended. During this course, farmers were given a knowledge assessment "pre-quiz" about Monilia, a fungal disease that had decimated local cacao. As I took the quiz, I found the testing experience strange for a number of reasons. First, farmers were asked to select the cause of Monilia from a multiple choice list composed of the choices "a) fungus b) virus c) bacteria d) I don't know." Within the possible range of correct answers, traditional cosmological explanations for agricultural disease such as a bad breeze (k'ak'as ik) or witchcraft were conspicuously excluded. Rather than a product of spiritual malady, envy or wrath, disease now becomes a concern of agronomic science and the target of development interventions. Second, the multiple choice questions (a foreign format favored by schools) were all written in very technical, "jargon" filled English, rather than Mopan. This linguistic choice seemed strange for the occasion since it was not the first language of either the extension officer or the participants, and some of the ladies present didn't even speak English at all. The questions were all written from a very agrotechnical perspective with the liberal use of terms like autoshade, and forestry planifcation, that weren't clear within the local idiom of Mopan environmental Kustumbre. This language further reinforces the goals of the development to replace local agricultural knowledge with modern scientific perspectives.



Villagers watching cacao training videos (TCGA)

Extension officers not only promote western environmental values in their training workshops, they also actively police the implementation of agricultural standards set out by organic and Fair Trade certification. In order to sell to the TCGA, a cacao farmer must register their field, and they must pay a onetime application fee of \$10bz. Every year, each farmer in the country is visited by one of twelve TCGA extension officers who inspects the conditions of the cacao to ensure that no chemical fertilizers or pesticides contaminates are found within their fields in accordance with the standards of Fair Trade and Soil Association Organic Certification. Farmers must be within Fair Trade and Organic compliance for three straight years in order to be eligible to sell to the TCGA, and failure to meet these standards can result in probationary from the organization. Non-compliance with organic and Fair Trade standards can result in the suspension of sales by that farmer until violations are rectified, for fear of contaminating the rest of the cacao beans in the warehouse. Violations of non-local standards can have a devastating effect on a household's economic situation, as the loss of a market for their cacao can jeopardize a household's economic prospects. Record keeping is a vital part of the organic and Fair trade certifying practices, necessitating the surveillance of all producing members. In their annual

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>135</sup> Even when farmers are not actively selling cacao, they are inspected by the TCGA in order to keep the three-year compliance current. Because of the compliance requirement to sell cacao, nearly all farmers with cacao in Toledo and Stann Creek are registered with the TCGA in order to have the opportunity to sell any surplus cacao.

inspections, extension officers track the number, age and condition of cacao trees that each farmer possesses in order to fulfill the oversight requirements of organic certification. The systematic collection of data from every cacao farmer in the country allows development organizations like the TCGA to create a "panopticon" database from which ever cacao farm in the country can be analyzed and compliance verified (Acre and Long 2000). Ironically, the production of "traditional" organic cacao depends heavily on modern techniques of surveillance to prove its wholesome nature to 1<sup>st</sup> first consumers.

Despite the best efforts by development professional to instill modern agronomic paradigms in indigenous cacao farmers, the success of their efforts has been mixed. Some traditionalists attempt to integrate new agronomic techniques for cacao with the old ways "to improve production while following the environmental ethics" embedded in *Kustumbre*. (see Faust 1999 Page 32-33). These farmers test the advice of extension officer on their crops through small scale experimentation, and then adopt *ad hoc* those that show favorable outcomes, rather than complete agronomic development package. Resistance to the wholesale adoption of scientific "best practices" has lead to the uneven adoption of agronomic techniques such as grafting, pruning, and spacing so that neighboring cacao fields can take on drastically different appearances. While one cacao farm may be efficiently spaced with radically pruned trees, a neighboring farm can look overgrown and feral in comparison.

While farmers conform to agricultural practices required for organic certification, the acceptance of these ideas often appears to be "superficial" to development professionals. To outside agronomists, indigenous cacao farmers cling to the inefficient farming practices of the past, resistant to the seemingly obvious advantages of modern agricultural. Development officers lament the "cultural challenges to improved productivity" as many households continue to practice low intensity peasant agriculture (TCGA 2010 p 8). The former director of the Toledo Cacao Growers Association, Gregor Hargrove expressed this sentiment that...

The Maya don't seem amenable to change. The farmers know what they must know about farming cocoa—about the soil, the plants, the weather conditions—but their collective wisdom comes to them naturally, through instinct and practical experience. They have no knowledge of the science of organics or of the fair trade A-B-C labeling requirements, nor are they much interested in learning systems they don't really understand. All the farmers understand is that there is a market for their beans if they grow them a certain way. 136

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 $<sup>^{136}</sup>$  http://markettorrent.com/community/viewtopic.php?f=10&t=7992

Even though farmers adhere to the certification requirements of the distant global market, some remained skeptical about its monopoly on truth. While development programs have achieved a major reorganization of both the landscape and environmental habitus, this transformation of Mopan environmental knowledge is incomplete as the causes and cures for Monilia remain unsettled. Old Testament elders say that if the people had never abandoned the ways of their ancestors/*Kustumbre*, Monilia would never have taken hold. They claim that the old ways of dispersed plantings and harvesting from forest groves prevented diseases like Monilia from gaining a foothold in the region. Similarly, the economic and social impacts of the disease in the old system of *Kustumbre* would not be as devastating when a only minimum amount was needed for domestic consumption and ritual offerings.

As Monilia has ravaged cacao production across southern Belize, I heard a variety of counternarratives explanations for the coming of the disease that contradicted the official explanations given by extension officers. Some offered theories that the disease had been spread from Costa Rica via the winds of hurricane Iris, which devastated the region in 2001. Still others believed that the disease was the outcome of a much more sinister plot. They claimed that since the 1980s, airplanes from the United States and the Belizean government had sprayed Belizean Maya farms with chemical defoliants to halt the production of illegal marijuana. Some farmers believe that the substances sprayed by these flights, along with over-flights from commercial airliners, have dispersed harmful substances which cause Monilia. A retired leader of the TCGA and cacao farmer explained this counter theory to me...

During the olden days there's no such disease in the cacao. Some old folks say that we have Monilia now because the planes that fly over and drop harmful things on the cacao. That's what some believe. (Pablo)

Still others felt the disease was the result of moral failing in the community. They claimed that the disease had been caused by rise of "sinful" behavior and immorality and now the people were being punished for their failure to uphold respectful (*tzik*) behavior. As one farmer commented...

If you don't respect what God gives you, God will punish you. I have read it in the Bible. That is why so many people's cacao has the disease nowadays. I have read the Bible and it says that God are punished for their sins. (Tom)

Another cacao farmer echoed this sentiment saying...

They do not follow Law by committing sin. So that's why the disease come in to the cacao. (Felipe)

In a variety of narratives, cacao farmers offer contested visions of the causes and morality of Monilia. These discourses serve as a form of resistance to the imposition of foreign understanding of nature based on scientific paradigms, challenging development's legitimacy as the sole purveyor of truth. Despite these dissenting views, the old ways of Mopan environmental *Kustumbre* have not emerged as a counterpoint of resistance to the mononaturalism of development discourses. These neotraditional counternarrative are delegitimized by well funded, authoritatively backed discourses of scientific agriculture which label indigenous explanations as nothing more than flights of fantasy or idiosyncratic beliefs of eccentric old farmers.

In my many conversations with cacao farmers about the causes of Monilia, theories about causes for Monilia were rampant - sin, planes or even microscopic fungus. But none claimed that the disease was the result of neglected ritual relations with the spirit owners. Disparaged and vilified by Protestant charges of fetishism, disease is no longer seen as punishment for the failure to renew ritual relations. Instead, this previous taken for granted causal chain has been delegitimized, creating the space in which these alternate explanations for Monilia could emerge. Backed by vast steams of resources, the mononaturalism advocated by development agencies had emerged as an alluring "modern" explanation to the misfortunes of Monilia that can be solved with technical ingenuity and scientific practices.

#### Epilogue: Don Owen Lewis and Memories of Development

My time in Belize came to a fitting end when I met Don Owen Lewis on the last full day of fieldwork. I already said my goodbyes in San Jose and was on my way out of the country when I stopped by the aged colonial official at his home in the village of Big Falls. Lewis is a central figure in the colonial history of development among the Toledo Maya and figures prominently in four decades of ethnographic accounts of the region, (see Wainwright 2008 164-9; Schackt 1986 p 132-3; Wilk 1997; Osborn 1982; Fry 2009). So when I had the opportunity to meet him before I left Belize, I jumped at the chance to hear his first-hand accounts of the ups and downs of development.

I met Lewis on Sunday afternoon, while he rested in his living room, hidden away from the tropical sun. He was hard of hearing and no longer able to work much on his ranch but enjoyed having visitors. He was a favorite of the archaeologists and ethnographers passing through this part of the world and enjoyed entertaining guest with his salty/curmudgeonly denouncements. His house was a well stocked with all manner of maps of Belize, books about the Maya, archaeology, and agriculture, along with stacks of papers and six decades of treasures and memorabilia of his life in Belize. In our

conversations, Lewis came across as the archetypal colonial gentleman with his remembrances filled with a mixture of both nostalgia and critique for his work.

Don Owen Lewis began his career as the Indian liaison officer in charge of development for the Maya of southern British Honduras. Lewis came to southern Belize in 1954 in service of Queen and country to become the only colonial Indian liaison officer for the Ke'kchi Maya villages in the far south of the territory. Stationed in a remote corner of the colonial empire, Lewis was single-handedly responsible for implementing a wide variety of development projects which aimed to incorporate the Maya into the colony including "a police station, a school, a farm demonstrator's house, and an airstrip and supplying medicine to the sick" (Wainwright 2008 p 168-9). He also was instrumental in the transformation of Maya agricultural systems by "encouraging the planting of more to commercial crops and livestock; 'planting coconut groves, planning oranges, planting cacao, bringing in cattle, the cattle business" (Wainwright 2008 p 168-9). Despite his years of work, once independence was achieved in 1981, he lost his job because the new post-colonial government of Belize viewed him as a colonialist. But he during his service, he had fallen in love with the area and so he settled into retirement with his wife, children and grandchildren at his ranch in the newly established village of Big Falls.

As we talked, I told him about my interest in the Mopan's changing relationship with their cacao, its history as the object of development and its renewed role in indigenous social life. I told him of all the cacao development projects that had I had seen - Carbon Gold, grafting of monillia resistant varieties, the construction of drying centers, the buying wet beans, agricultural extension classes - and wondered what he thought about cacao's future in Belize.

I had been warned that Lewis had become "opinionated" in his old aged and he was not afraid to launch into lengthy diatribes to speak his mind. That day, Lewis lived up to his reputation and launched into a denouncement about the prospects of a market for Belizean organic cacao. He called it a "scam" that was doomed to failure since the fertility of the land was in decline, disease was rampant and there was no way to make decent money at it. He said that despite the many projects intended to commercialize cacao and the guarantee of an unlimited market, Lewis thought cacao remained nothing more than a "peasant crop" for the Maya that took the whole family to work and would never be viable on a large, commercial scale. Instead, cacao was just the excuse for a never ending steam of projects that never really amounted to much beyond the short term goals of funding agencies and some local employment. In the end, he remained unconvinced about commercial cacao's future and its ability to lift the Maya out of poverty, despite his decades as an advocated for development.

I could have stayed and listened for hours, but soon it was time to hit the road, so I said a fond farewell to old Don Owen Lewis. Despite his blustery start to our conversation, by the end, he decidedly warmed up to me. As we said farewell, he wished me well and sent me on my way, over bumpy roads and across the sea towards home.

### Conclusion

Throughout this chapter, I have explored the expansion of commercial cacao as a window into the transformation of Mopan environmental relations. Many of these projects have their roots in a reaction to colonial policies which created the reservation system to enclose the Toledo Maya. In the context of this colonial history, a central objective of the post-colonial Belizean state and development organizations has been the privatization of these communal land holdings into *de facto* and *de jure* private property for individual households. The expansion of acreage under commercial cacao has instrumental in this process as hundreds of acres have been converted from shifting cultivation into permanent cacao groves. Boundary lines are more defined and oversight of land is more integrated with non-local programs of agricultural monitoring and surveillance. Modern cacao groves promoted by development organizations are densely packed to make efficient use of the landscape, rather than scattered feral groves or kitchen gardens from which the Belizean Maya traditionally harvested their cacao.

Today, the future of commercial cacao in southern Belize is filled with promise and fraught with peril. While the expansion of cacao acreage has created new economic opportunities, this radical reorganization of the landscape has also created the ecological conditions which have allowed the fungus Monilia to fester. Rather than merely a natural disaster, I have argued Monilia is also a social problem that threatens the goals of development and the livelihoods of indigenous cacao farmers.

Cacao projects that were originally promoted as "easy money" by development agencies have become hard work with the newly required pruning and field maintenance regimes. The changing nature of cacao work and the inability for many cacao farmers to maintain their cacao groves has led to conditions in which Monilia could fester and spread infection throughout the region. But rather than call into question the methods and goals of the development project, the spread of Monilia has instead been the rallying cry for further interventions. Through the case study of Monilia, I have shown how development perpetuates itself with a constant stream of technical, rather than political, solutions to the problems facing the "underdeveloped" populations of the world. These interventions all too often

lead to unsustainable solutions that perpetuate future interventions by development organizations, while extending surveillance and control over the targeted population.

The privatization of social services in the post-colonial, neo-liberal state has shifted the enactment of developmental policy to non-governmental organizations. Agricultural extension training presented by indigenous development personnel are an integral "on the ground" link in the modernization of Mopan environmental knowledge. These programs have attempted to transform indigenous animistic understandings of nature to the mononaturalism of the west that privileges technical mastery over nature.

Today, the radical reorganization of the cacao landscape by development has radically altered the landscape of southern Belize and created the conditions in which diseases such as Monillia can flourish. In this context, I argue that the hegemonic mission of capitalist development is reinforced by Protestant environmental values which attempts to replace sacred relational nature with a mundane landscape. The prevalence of New Testament ideology in village discourse prevents the old spiritual ways from acting as a political counter-narrative to capitalist development. This modern way of life emphasizes rupture and novelty as the price of modernity. Fear of appearing mixed minded and backwards prevents a return to the old rituals of relationality and sacrifice as a solution to the problems of new agricultural diseases such as Monilla. For converts, the technical mastery of nature becomes a proclamation of faith against the fetishism of *Kustumbre*. In this paradigm of New Testament modernity, the ways of the past are made to seem quaint, antiquated, and ineffectual superstitions that are ill equipped to deal with modern problems. The debasement of *Kustumbre* by both Protestantism and development make it difficult, if not impossible, for the Mopan to go back to the old ways after the adoption of a linear notion of progress.

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#### **Chapter 10 – Conclusion**

# **Summary of Dissertation Argument**

Throughout my dissertation, I have explored how the Mopan's changing relationship with cacao speaks to larger issues of social, environmental and spiritual relations. Cacao's deep history and spiritual importance make it an ideal focus for examining culture change and continuity, hegemony and counternarrative. For centuries, cacao has been an important part of Mopan daily cuisine and an important part of social events both large and small. Similarly, ritual sacrifices of cacao were made to the spirits of the land and the dead. Proper sacrifices were thought to woo the favor of fickle spirits in the same way that sharing cacao beverage creates and strengthens social relations between humans.

Although cacao is well suited to cultivation in southern Belize and has played a central role in Mopan *Kustumbre* for hundreds of years, in recent decades its importance has changed as it has become a commercial commodity. Over the past 35 years, there has been a massive expansion of cacao acreage making cacao the leading cash crop in southern Belize. Throughout my dissertation I have explored both the how and why of cacao's transformation from a sacred crop to a commercial commodity.

Before entering the field, my understanding of the cause of this change privileged market integration of indigenous people and the power of the post-colonial state desiring legibility, integration and control over its population as the primary causes. In this scenario, decolonized Belize enacted neoliberal market policies in the agricultural sector to create a cash economy of capitalist producers and consumers among the previously marginal indigenous populations of Toledo. The opening of new roads and markets provided the necessary infrastructure for commercialization to occur, allowing cacao from far flung, remote Belizean Maya villages to trickle into global commodity chains. Development funds replaced state agricultural and marketing projects as the primary means of agricultural intensification.

While recent scholars of Belize have focused solely on "development *qua* capitalism" (Wainwright 2008), once I began my fieldwork, I realized this hypothesis did not fully explain the changes occurring around cacao. What is interesting about the particular case of cacao in southern Belize is that early colonial attempts to commercialize cacao in Toledo were unsuccessful, so this transformation wasn't inevitable. Instead, the modern Belizean cacao industry emerged in the late 1970s, just a few short years after the coming of Protestant missionaries to the region.

In southern Belize, both Protestantism and development were late colonial projects, begun in earnest on the eve of independence to create modern subjects capable of post-colonial self-rule. In the last decade of British colonialism, Protestant missionaries brought a new gospel to San Jose and

established a number of competing Protestant sects within each village. Before the 1970s, the Maya of southern Belize were "all of one mind" in the practice of the old ways of Mopan-Catholicism. Protestant theology condemned the Old Ways of *Kustumbre* as spiritually dangerous, and the formerly sacred status of cacao was debased.

I argue that religious conversion in indigenous villages such as San Jose has created the conditions in which it was possible for cacao to become reimagined as a mundane crop subject to capitalist development in the span of a few short years. Protestant conversion destabilized previously uncontested beliefs about society and nature in Mopan Kustumbre, created an opening in which cacao could be repurposed as a commodity. I suggest that the 'New Testament' world view promulgated through evangelism provides a cultural narrative consistent with the goals of high modernist development. Rather than competing hypothesis, there is an important synergy between capitalist development and religious change as vehicles for the values of western modernity.

My dissertation explores the complex relationship between Protestantism and development by tracing and historicizing the social life of cacao, a once sacred plant at the heart of Mopan spiritual ecology that has become repositioned as a secular commodity bound for the world market. Using the desacralization and commodification of cacao as a case study of larger patterns of change, I argue that Protestantism and development reinforce each other and enhance the latent possibilities within one another, encouraging a reconfiguration of society in line with the hegemonic western modernity. While each are powerful entities on their own, capitalist development and Protestant conversion are not disparate phenomenon but share historical roots in Western culture. Rather than a direct colonization of indigenous society, development and Protestantism seek to create post-colonial hegemony of western values/practices through consent, rather than force.

# **Society**

The commercialization of cacao in southern Belize has been accompanied by large scale reinventions of Mopan social, spiritual and environmental relations. Similarly, Protestant missionaries encourage a complete transformation in the lives of converts toward modern ideals. These modern institutions attempt to change local value systems as a means to promote the adoption of outside material practices, legitimized within an alien morality/cultural logic. The imposition of western values explicitly challenges the principles of hierarchical respect and social holism which lie at the core of Mopan social and spiritual life. As an important symbolic and material implement in the enactment of

*Kustumbre*, cacao has become a central vehicle by which Protestants and development agents enact a radical reorganization of both material practices as well as the underlying values of Mopan life.

Although Protestantism and development occupy purportedly distinct spheres of "religion" and "economy" in Western consciousness, they share an underlying mission of spreading modern values through changing fundamental aspects of everyday *Kustumbre*. Protestantism and development both advance the modernizing process by promoting a new outlook on life, with different values, bodily comportment, and encouraging rupture from the past. Backed by powerful outside interests, Protestantism and development each seek to break apart previous holistic social cosmologies and impart values central to the modernizing project such as individualism, the demystification of nature, and the separation of a holistic cosmology into discrete domains. Even as individual development projects and Protestant churches rise and fall, their larger mission of each is resilient as new iterations rise and multiply to take their place, normalizing their presence in Mopan life.

In both Protestantism and development, "modern" individualism is the foundation of both saving souls and consumerism. Protestant conversion has laid the ground work for adoption of development by religiously sanctioning an individualistic Weberian capitalist ethic and condemning indigenous spirituality. Protestantism demanded rupture with the past as a demonstration of the convert's new found "Christian modernity," challenging the notions of respectful hierarchy and social holism at the heart of the old ways of Mopan *Kustumbre*. Protestant theology promotes individualism in which conversion is a matter of personal choice and faith, rather than a concern for moral holism of the community. This emphasis on the individual as the locus of salvation promotes an ethos in which differentiations in wealth are valorized as blessings from Jesus to those who live a moral (Protestant) life. This value system is in marked contrast to notions of "limited good" and the "expectation of reciprocity" within *Kustumbre* wherein inequality is the result of personal selfishness that threatens the harmony of the social whole. In contrast to the Limited Good of *Kustumbre*, the prosperity gospel taught by Protestant preachers legitimizes economic inequality and "modern" Weberian Capitalism as a tangible display of Jesus' favor (or disfavor) to their more conservative neighbors.

I argue that the valorization of Weberian individualism by Protestantism provides the moral foundation in which development projects for commercial cacao could take root. Backed by outside power and resources, development ideologies directly challenge the notions of social holism found within *Kustumbre*. For many cacao farmers, development allows for a breaking apart of the limited good of *Kustumbre*, and replaced it with one in which individuality, inequality and social difference has become the norm in Mopan communities. Development normalizes this inequality as a byproduct of

differential capitalist involvement, rather than a cosmologically/spiritually dangerous force of social disintegration. Development initiative privilege a capitalist mentality based on maximizing the investment on returns, rather than the values of stability and social reproduction which are central to the peasant agricultural household. The ideology of economic individuality embedded within capitalist development is congruent with Protestant theology which privileges personal salvation over group spiritual health.

The rise of commercial cacao has been a major factor in growing inequality as certain actors are able to leverage their positionality to capture the spoils of development. Cacao farmers are encouraged to invest money and time in their fields for a greater calculated return in the future. In the context of these new social values, New Testament believers engage in commercial cacao projects more readily and on a larger scale than their Old Testament counterparts. The profits from commercial sales increasingly insulate individual households from expectations of reciprocity, creating noticeable differences in wealth between individuals in the village as well as growing inequalities between villages across the region. Even as the *käkäh* drink has been replaced by store bought alternatives, it has become repositioned as a valuable commodity that has become the leading source of formerly scarce cash income among the Belizean Maya. This income has altered material practices and social priorities, providing the means to build bigger houses, send children to high school, and has created a new range of consumer choices based on seemingly individual desires. As the material spoils of development are captured by those who adopt more "modern" ideals of Weberian Capitalism, their new found material wealth legitimizes both the mission of both Protestant conversion and capitalist market participation to their more conservative neighbors.

While visible social inequality was previously held in check through fear of *obia /pulyah* (black magic), Protestant condemnation of indigenous spirituality and accusations of witchcraft/demon worship has undermined the enforcement of economic equality by fracturing the social community. Indigenous spirituality have become a fault line in Mopan communities between "New Testament People" – Protestants and younger Catholics who reject ritual practice - and Catholic elders born before the coming of Protestant missionaries who continue to practice "Old Testament" ways. These differences between these groups have not coalesced into stable factions (cf. re Cruz 1996), but instead Old and New Testament have become indigenous discourses about generational change and the rupture brought by modernity. While a few "old heads" continue to practice Old Testament ways, membership in this group of traditionalists has diminished in recent years as age and conversion have taken its toll. Protestant valorization of text, along with increased rates of high school education, has worked in

tandem to undermine the authority of Old Testament elders, whose positions as the proveyers of truth and social morals were based on the oral tradition of *Kustumbre* passed down from the ancestors.

Anxiety over Mixed Mindedness has lead to a disconnect in the transmission of intergenerational knowledge as young Mopan people (both Catholic and Protestant) purposefully "forget" *Kustumbre* in an effort to be modern, causing a disconnect in the transmission of intergenerational.

The sundering of the spiritual holism has divided Maya communities along denominational lines, with Protestants refusing to participate in many areas of social life. Protestants no long participate in the *Cargo* hierarchy and have established labor exchanges with other converts, separate from their Catholic neighbors. Through religious schism, social occasions for the drinking of cacao at fiestas and collective labor, have fallen into decline. At the same time, the increasing labor required by new cacao diseases and "improved" agroforestry management regimens (such as pruning and weeding) has created a market for wage labor within the village, challenging indigenous notions of the equivalency of labor and collective labor. Even as labor exchanges have declined due to a growing individual work ethic and religious schism, development provides the framework for new forms of sociality as the "development group" has become an important venue for the mobilization of factional support, and displays of prestige.

Protestantism and development each provides new leadership opportunities within indigenous communities. In rival churches and development groups, traits such as public speaking, small scale democracy, record keeping and accounting are celebrated. Protestant theology provides a religiously sanctioned body of modern practices and habits which are also essential skills for taking advantage of the "money in the sky" provided by development. Protestantism's claim of textual primacy over ritual lends a sacred prestige to literacy and writing in general, helping to legitimize the countless written documents employed by development such as strategic plans and grants. By disarticulating political decision making from ritual obligation, Protestantism creates a sphere of the political in which new criteria for leadership emerge such as literacy and the ability to navigate nonlocal bureaucracy.

For many Mopan, one of the major draws for religious conversion and development is its association with a "modern" identity, linked to the resources and prestige of the global core. Both Protestantism and development make impressive displays of material efficacy, commanding vast resources from global donors and channeling them into targeted interventions. Their ability to successfully attract wealth and novelty legitimizes their missions to target populations. Beyond meeting the spiritual needs of its congregations, Protestant missionaries also provided a variety of material and social rewards for converts. Missionaries brought modern medical assistance to remote villagers, while

traditional healing practices utilizing cacao were debased as witchcraft. Similarly, Protestant churches have been the conduit for a flood of printed materials and new literacy programs to indigenous communities.

No longer an instrument of ritual and sociality, in recent years, cacao has taken on a new role as an important symbol of Belizean chocolate in presentations by outsiders and the Belizean Maya themselves. Both corporate advertisers and Maya organizations attempt to connect the mass produced "Maya Gold" chocolate with the indigenous käkäh drink that was formerly at the heart of Maya sociality by emphasizing connections to an ancient way of life and agricultural practices based on indigenous environmental ethics. Even as global corporation and local business interests utilizes images and discourses of Maya identity to sell Belizean chocolate, Mopan and Q'eqchi' Maya also invoke similar tropes towards the revitalization of an ethnic identity within Belize and to a global audience. While Protestant condemnation of Kustumbre has caused a decline in the social and ritual uses of cacao, it has been repositioned as a marker of authentic Mopan ethnicity along with culture wear, marimba and harp music, the fagina and neo-traditional houses. In many ways, Maya modernity emphasizes the secularization of material culture, while spiritual aspects are relegated to the past. Formerly sacred domains, such as the fiesta of San Jose or the drinking of cacao, have been secularized as "Maya culture," devoid of spiritual efficacy. The emphasis on the tangible markers of ethnic identity, rather than indigenous spirituality, allows for the reinterpretation of indigenous culture in the context of secularized tradition which seeks to move beyond the divisions of religious schism in these communities.

Despite the power and wealth of modernizing institutions, local people who are conceived of as the targets of these interventions exercise agency to contest and re-imagine their own possible futures. In their encounters with the outsiders who come as agents of development or missionaries, indigenous people contextualize these changes from their own cultural perspective, creating meaning within the context of local needs and desires. Rather than simply imposed from the outside, local people exercise agency by choosing or refusing participation in these group for their own reasons. Participation in development can bring the promise of environmental, financial security as well as cultural renaissance. Or it can serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy in which certain groups are positioned as "marginal" and "underdeveloped" in need of outside assistance or salvation. When local people participate in projects, their involvement often takes place on their own term, much to the chagrin of development workers who are confounded when community support for their projects dries up or local people offer counternarratives to their carefully prepared presentations.

In the same way, those who are the target of Protestant missionaries convert for reasons important to them. Some convert to Protestantism because it offers the chance to break free of past ritual and social obligations, giving them protection from evil spirits and sorcery by the power of the true Savior, Jesus. Conversion offers many spoils ranging from medical assistance, economic resources and leadership positions/prestige which are actively sought out for their local value. At the same time, some village elders reject these new doctrines, in a reaffirmation of the social and cosmological holism of the "old ways." Rejecting the beliefs of outsiders can be a social statement about their own morality, and the willful abandonment of foundational beliefs by younger generations. Conversion and development group allows for totemic differentiations within Maya society which are enacted within global narratives/dramas.

## **Nature**

In addition to profound changes in Mopan society, modern institutions have also transformed indigenous relations with nature. Although cacao was previously thought of as a "God Food" blessed by the *Chaaco'o*, conversion to Protestant Christianity in recent decades has been the catalyst for the desacralization of cacao for many Mopan. Protestantism and development each seek to replace existing indigenous environmental cosmologies, realigning local values into accordance with hegemonic mononaturalism of the West. Nature is imagined as a collection of resources to be managed, rather than the gifts from the spirit owners of the local landscape.

Protestantism challenges previous indigenous environmental values by vilifying the spiritual pantheon of Maya-Catholicism and belittling material practices such as cacao associated with ritual. Protestantism aims to expose these rituals as pagan "fetishism" which falsely attributes agency to the natural world. Protestant churches emphasized the authority of text over the embodied, collective ritual experience which Mopan Catholics employ to create social relations with spirit beings. Protestant values promote an "objectivist" world in which the realm of inert "environment" is sundered from "religion" which is oriented towards the worship of a personal Jesus who has granted humans dominion over the earth.

The transformation of Mopan cosmology has separated environmental misfortune from ritual responsibility. Among Protestant converts, farmers no longer consecrate their farms with offerings to the spirits, just as hunters no longer "pay" the spirit owners with copal incense when they pray for game. Only the worship of Jesus and a more distant *Dyos*/God remain as legitimate sources of spiritual power. By praying to Jesus to heal their crops or for help when they are lost in the woods, responsibility

is disassociated from acts of spiritual respect. Humans no longer have the spiritual agency to form relations with spirits who provide assistance in bringing forth a bountiful harvest in activities such as hunting, farming and fishing, relying instead on keeping faith with Jesus.

In this new cosmological paradigm, cacao has fallen from it former its place as a paramount emblem of sacred sociality, profaned by allegations of fetishism and idol worship. Mopan Protestant converts claim that they no longer "worship the things of this world," but rather the "one who made the world." The masters of nature and ancestral spirits are no longer revered, but instead reimagined as "evil spirits" sent to lead the devout astray.

Protestantism's emphasis on disempowering fetishism and dominion over nature is congruent with environmental ethics of development. Protestantism seeks to objectify the natural world by stripping it of agency, so that believers are no longer mystified by fetishism and superstitions, leaving nature ripe for capitalist development. The demystification of nature reconfigures the relational landscape of Mopan *Kustumbre* into a collection of natural resources ripe for maximization and efficient management. As the spiritual owners of the wild cacao have been vilified by Protestant ideologies, ownership of cacao is increasingly shifted from the *Cheil* to capitalist smallholders. Human domination of nature through capitalist development not only provides material wealth, but also is a public proclamation for New Testament people that they no longer fear retribution from the spirits of nature.

Yet this demystification is incomplete and the Mopan have been unable to completely banish the spirituality of *Kustumbre* to a forgotten past. Just as the former spirit masters of the cacao (the *Cheil*) are now reimagined as illegal and treacherous *Xateros*, the traditions of *Kustumbre* are now seen by converts as grotesque and dangerous vestiges of the past. Outbreaks of witchcraft speak to the unsettled tension in the rejection of *Kustumbre*. Cultural practice (as play) without belief is dangerous and threatens both the individual with demon possession as well as collective notions of a "modern" Mopan identity.

As cacao's sacred symbolism has declined, many Mopan increasingly view cacao as the object of agronomic improvement and as a fungible commodity which can be alienated for profit. In contrast to the environmental relationality of Mopan *Kustumbre*, development privileges agronomic values which encourage the efficient monetization of non-agentive natural resources into fungible commodities, maximized within a paradigm of scientific rationalism.

Over the past thirty five years, development agencies have promoted cacao plantations as an environmentally sustainable alternative to shifting agriculture practices. Under the mantra of conservation, thousands of acres of land have been converted to cacao plantations, transforming the

landscape of the region. Extension officers encourage cacao farmers to prune their trees, shaping them to fit a preconceived archetype based on the recommendations of agronomists. Agricultural extension services act as conduits for the transmission of dominant values, seeking to replace the supernatural explanations of nature with scientific causation. This demystification of the environment parallels Protestant environmental ethics, reinforcing modernizing notions of nature and enhancing the appeal of adopting non-local value systems.

Land is increasingly seen as seen as individual property in which farmers' practice efficient spacing of cacao, demarcated by state sanctioned leases. This transformation of the landscape has been part of efforts by the colonial administration, and later the Belizean state, to "settle" the Maya through the use of permanent cacao agriculture. The goal of these programs has been to replace colonial era reservations characterized by communal land rights for shifting agriculture with permanent cacao plantations bounded (and taxed) by state lease and subject to agronomic monitoring/surveillance. This process aims to separate out distinct realms of human agricultural activity from the "wilderness" of national forest reserves, bounding Maya communities and making them legible to the gaze of the non-local institutions.

While the commercialization of cacao has been one of the most successful development projects in Southern Belize, the future of the industry has come under threat with the rise of the cacao fungus Monilia. Since 2004, Monilia has devastated cacao production in the region, causing social tension over the spread of the fungus between farms. The emergence of Monilia as a cacao epidemic provides an ideal case study of the interaction between the technical mastery of development and religious change.

In both Protestantism and development, environmental calamities are no longer the manifestation of disrespected spirits or a lapse in relationality. Rather, they are constructed as a technical problem which can be solved/managed through the application of resources and ingenuity. Under carefully managed technocratic regimes to improve marginal people's environmental health and security, nature becomes less threatening and subject to human dominion. Increasingly, New Testament farmers turn to the technical solutions offered by development, such as chain saws for pruning and biochar kilns, in order to manage disease and improve their cacao. For converts, mastery of nature becomes a proclamation of faith against the fetishism of *Kustumbre*. Whereas before, problems with cacao such as diseases could be mitigated through sacrifice, Protestant condemnation of the Old Ways has delegitimized these beliefs as pagan superstition and preventing a return to the rituals of *Kustumbre*. In this new paradigm of New Testament modernity, the ways of the past are made to seem

quaint, antiquated, and ineffectual superstitions that are ill equipped to deal with modern problems.

The debasement of *Kustumbre* by both Protestantism and development make it difficult, if not impossible, for the Mopan to go back to the old ways after the adoption of a linear notion of progress.

I argue the abandonment of the old ways of cacao cultivation has created the conditions in which Monilia could emerge as a social threat. The transformation of the landscape into cacao monoculture plantations creates unnatural conditions that incubate disease and allow it to spread rapidly in the dense groves planted efficiently to maximize yields. Even as development creates the conditions which allow outbreaks of agricultural disease to occur, it also sets out to ameliorate what it defines as "problems" through the application of technical solutions. In this way, development creates the conditions for its own existence and sets out to solve the problems of its own making.

### **Future Research Directions**

The conclusions of my dissertation point towards future research directions. A fruitful line of future inquiry would be to demonstrate the relationship between Protestantism and cacao development with a statistical analysis of the correlation between commercial cacao production and Protestant conversion. During my fieldwork, I was able to collect data on all 728 cacao farmers in Belize including production totals, number of trees and the years that these trees were planted. At this time however, data on religious affiliation of individual households was unavailable. While census data can provide the percentages of church membership on the level of the village, a more fine grained data analysis would be possible with the addition of religious affiliation on the producer level. When I conducted my research in 2010-2011, there were 19 cacao producing villages in Belize. This small sample size makes it difficult to definitely rule out the impact of other factors on cacao production such as elevation or a prior development involvement. Correlating data on religious affiliation with previously gathered data on cacao development at the household level creates a much greater sample size (n=728) and would allow for a more robust analysis for demonstrating the significance of this relationship.

Another promising avenue for potential research is a long-term study of the ongoing impact of Monilia. In 2010-11, Monilia was a recent introduction to the region and both the causes and remedies for the disease were still contentious topics among cacao farmers. Although yields had fallen due to the disease, new agricultural techniques claimed to offer increases in production. A follow-up investigation of Monilia will allow for a diachronic study of whether novel environmental changes to commercial production have become part of local values systems or remain the domain of outside expert knowledge. It would also provide an excellent point of departure for examining how environmental

disasters are incorporated into the mythos/narrative of a development project, and become the catalyst for future interventions.

A third fruitful area for continued study is the resilience of indigenous cosmology in the face of hegemony. Despite these claims of rupture in both Protestantism and development, old beliefs which have supposedly been left behind as the superstitions of the past have reemerged in new forms. Protestantism purports to offer converts a new life, free from fear of witchcraft and uncertainty over ritual relations with the unpredictable spirits of *Kustumbre*. In spite of these claims of demystification, witchcraft has become a renewed concern and vilified environmental rituals are still feared for the power. Similarly, while development draws on claims of scientific mononaturalism to discredit indigenous beliefs, this process has been incomplete as cacao farmers continue to express belief in the power of *k'inam* to effect plants, and fear the reemergence of the owners of wild cacao (*Cheil*) as the *Xateros*. Future ethnographic inquiry into the way that indigenous environmental beliefs are reimagined in contemporary contexts shed light on how imposed structures which change the landscape and supernatural are made meaningful through continued cultural dynamism.

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#### **Mopan Terms**

Mopan terms are groups by chapters in which they first appear. Spellings have been regularized for each following instance of the term.

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Chapter 1
Spirit owners - (yum)
The "old ways" / tradition - (Kustumbre)
Ancient days – (uchb'en k'in)
Respect / to honor (tzik)
'We are used to them' – (sukaho'on tii)
Happy in the social heart – (ki uy ool)
The immaterial, social heart - (ool)
Biological heart - (päsikal)
Heat - (k'inam)
Spirit/shadow - (pixan)
Breath - (ik)
Blood - (k'ik')
I am happy in my heart to know/remember you - (Ki inw ool a k'altikech)
"My friend" or literally – one who shares the same social heart as me (inw et ool)
My heart is straight – (toh inw ool)
God - (Dyos)
"Those of the forest" - (Cheil)
Evil spirits / Bad breezes / literally – "very bad wind" - (k'ak'as ik)
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#### Chapter 2

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Gods of the mountains and plains - (witz hook)
Peccary Creek - (Ha Wari)
Theobroma bicolor - (balamte)
Land - (lu'um)
Local community - (kah)
Milpa fields - (kol)
Forest - (k'aax)
"God food" - (Santo Hanal)
Mother -(na)
Chapter 3
Cacao – (käkäh)
Cast iron comal - (xämäch)
Older small pottery comal – (sok)
Stone mortar and pestle - mano (ka') and metate
Bottle gourd or calabash – (luuch)
Drink it - (Uk'ik)
Is the cacao drink good? – (Ki wa a Käkäh?)
Very good - (top ki)
"I am happy in my heart" – (Ki inw ool)
Black water drinks such as chocolate or coffee – (box ha uk'ul)
Corn gruel - (atole, or laab')
Meat - (bäk')
Tortillas - (wah)
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corn tamales – (pooch)
Drink - (uk'ul)
Salt - (u taab'il)
Snack - (k'uxuk)
Visiting - (sut)
Corn wine – (chicha / balche)
Chapter 4
Haunted - (sab'entzil)
Black magic / dark sorcery – (obia / pulah)
Ceiba tree - (yaax che)
Copal incense - (pom)
Sun - (K'in)
Great Mother – (Nohoch Na)
Moon - (uh)
The remote creator god among the pre-Columbian Maya – (Hunabku)
Snake rock - (kan tunich)
Feral cacao groves - (kuchil käkäh)
"Grandfathers of the Land" / hill gods – (Mam)
The lords of lightning, thunder, rain, wind - (Chaakoob')
"Lord of the Forests" - (yumil k'aax)
"Lords of the Animals" - (yumil ba'alch'oob)
"Lords of the Milpa" / plantation – (Kuh)
Corn - (ixi'im)
Forest / woods - (che)
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Water - (ha)
Half woman-half snake who lures unwary men in the forest to their deaths - (Xtabai)
Bigfoot-like Sisimito - (Mahanamatz/Mahanamao)
Bad spirits of dead witches/sorcerers - (chel)
Older brother - (suku'un)
Younger brother/sibling - (itz'in)
Youngest sibling - (t'up)
Chapter 5
The heat of human sexuality -(k'inam)
Star – (Xulab)
Shaman / bush doctor – (ilmah)
Spiritual "soul loss" - (susto)
Sweet tortilla - (ch'uuk wah)
Chapter 6
"Christians" / "Mopan humans" - (Kristiano)
"Cultural clothes" - (Indian nok')
Chapter 7
Conversation - (tzikbal)
"Old heads" / elders - (uchben winik / uchben pol)
The devil - (Kisin)
"Lord of the animals" - (u yum a baalche')
Unholy / evil - (k'as)
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One, two, three - (hun, ka, ox)
To learn by doing / literally "to steal knowledge" - xuch tukul
No good - (ma ki)
New Day – (Tumul K'in)
Chapter 8
Old days – (uchb'en k'in)
Chapter 9
Survey / literally "to measure land" – (p'is lu'um)
Grafting / literally "to join/twin plants" – (lut' päk'al)
Hard working – (sakol)
Lazy - (sakan)
                                         Spanish Loan Words
Chapter 1
Mayor – (alcade)
Chapter 2
Detached ranch - (alquilo)
Peasant farmer – (campesino)
Godparenthood – (compadrazgo)
Traveling merchants from the Alta Verapaz region of Guatemala – (cobaneros)
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Embroidered women's dresses – (huipiles)
Chapter 3
Cacao fat - literally "lard" – (Manteca)
Godfather / godmother - (Compadre / Comadre)
Chicken soup – (caldo)
Religious brotherhoods (cargos)
Hand cranked corn grinder – (molina)
Tortilla dough – (masa)
Chapter 4
Religious work, service or burden - (Cargo)
<u>Chapter 5</u>
Catholic saints - (santos)
<u>Chapter 6</u>
Village collective labor - (Fagina)
<u>Q'eqchi' Terms</u>
Chapter 2
God of the "hill and valley" - (tzuul-taka)

# Chapter 4

Moon – (po)

## Yucatec Terms

## Chapter 3

Bride price – (*muhul*)

## Chapter 5

Yucatec ritual for "calling of the rain gods" -(Ch'a' chaak)

Yucatec ritual for "feeding the field" – (hamlicol)