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**PERFORMANCE AND THEATRICALITY AMONG THE  
HIGHLAND MAYA OF CHIAPAS, MEXICO**

By

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis introduces the reader to two Maya theater groups who reside and work in the highland town of San Cristóbal de las Casas in the state of Chiapas, Mexico. What follows is an analysis of how indigenous theater, in the context of these two groups, addresses contemporary social issues, reinterprets history, and is used to invent new cultural traditions. One theater group, called FOMMA, is an all-female theater group who performs works regarding social problems that affect women in highland Maya communities. These problems include domestic abuse, alcoholism, an absence of pre-natal care, and a lack of education regarding contraceptive options. FOMMA's theater addresses these problems by becoming a stage for social activism, where parody is used as a theatrical tool that critiques current social norms by calling audience attention to the exaggerated characters that embody these issues.

Lo'il Maxil is another Maya theater group that uses the stage as a platform for the preservation of Maya cultural traditions. This group dramatizes oral and written Tzotzil, Tzeltal, and Quiché Maya myths and folktales in order to (re)create history. By performing aspects of shared cultural memories to their indigenous audiences, the members of Lo'il Maxil open up a dialogue with the communities they perform in to enact social changes. These changes include an increase in literacy in indigenous Maya languages by the members of highland communities and an increased awareness of the importance of preserving highland Maya cultural heritage in the face of globalization.

Through the use of theater, both groups espouse their particular agendas while coinciding on a common goal of creating new cultural traditions. These 'new' traditions may include an increase in education and job opportunities for indigenous women, an increase in literacy and computer competency, and an emphasis on the importance of cultural maintenance and preservation. The promotion of change encourages and maintains an atmosphere of social activism where both audience members and actors are involved in crafting a new tradition of what it means to be 'Maya' in the twenty-first century.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### Introduction

The rain has subsided but loud droplets continue to collide with a plastic blue tarp strung from two brick walls which serves as a makeshift cover for the concrete stage. It is early in the afternoon on a humid summer day in the southern Mexican city of San Cristóbal de las Casas when a single woman, wearing a colorful *huipil* (a white smock with floral embroidery) appears from behind a white tarp and shuffles her way onto the stage. She is pregnant, and as she begins to pace back and forth she grimaces with pain. Today the audience is composed of tourists and academics that huddle under brightly colored umbrellas or crouch in the alcoves hidden by the hoods of their raincoats, but tomorrow they may be Maya. They are listening and watching as another woman appears on stage. She is the mother of the pregnant woman, who tells her daughter that she should rest. The pregnant woman, who is experiencing the agonies of labor, lies down on a white blanket while her mother tends to her. The daughter's husband, as played by a woman, then appears on stage. He is obviously drunk and chides his wife and her mother for not having dinner cooked for him. The women argue that because the man spends his wages at the cantina they have no money to buy food to prepare for him. Still he shows no remorse, nor any concern for his sick wife. He aggressively yells at both at them, kicks at a chair, and leaves. The sick woman looks up at her mother with fear, fear of her husband and fear of her impending death. She then goes into labor and dies. Her infant daughter lives but the sick woman is taken away by Death. As she takes Death's hand, she looks back at her mother and her newborn child and wishes a better life for her daughter, one that is free of poverty and abuse and full of love. The audience remains silent as the woman who died in childbirth is escorted offstage. So begins FOMMA's production of *Viva la Vida*.

When I witnessed this production of *Viva la Vida* during the summer of 2006, it was my first exposure to Maya theater. Theater, which embodies the act of performance, can be defined as what "occurs when one or more human beings, isolated in time and/or

space, present themselves to another or others” (Fiebach 2002: 36). In San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, theater takes place when two groups of highland Maya people, both men and women alike, utilize their cultural backgrounds, their knowledge of Maya history, and their interest in performance to create theatrical works that both entertain audiences and provide social commentary on social and political issues. During the summer of 2006, I conducted research in the city of San Cristóbal de las Casas with members of the groups FOMMA and Lo’il Maxil. Although the foci of the productions of each group differ, their existence represents a very public expression of what they believe it means to be Maya, and more generally, how they perceive the indigenous experience.

Maya theater, as performed in San Cristóbal, includes the use of the diverse cultural backgrounds of each of the players, who hail from various hamlets surrounding San Cristóbal that have their own unique cultural traditions, rituals, languages, and ways of dress. It also includes the use of their collective knowledge of Maya mythic, folkloric, and recorded history to create plays that emphasize shared cultural memories. Additionally, Maya theater is created when the players utilize their collective interest in the performance medium to entertain audiences and make plays that also provide social commentary. This thesis is an analysis of two important characteristics of highland Maya theater: theater as a means to promote awareness and social change and theater as a (re)creation of history. I argue throughout this thesis that when theater is used by these groups as a platform for social activism and as a space for the presentation and reinterpretation of Maya history, these practices become catalysts for the invention of ‘new’ cultural traditions.

The groups create new cultural traditions in several ways. The women of Lo’il Maxil and FOMMA, for example, use their basic participation in a theater group and parody to turn the stage into a political platform where they address social problems that affect social life in highland Maya communities. FOMMA’s works bring awareness to how domestic violence and alcoholism negatively affect the lives of indigenous women and their families, and the members of the groups illustrate their message theatrically through the use of male masks and the exaggerated portrayals of men. The use of parody represents an aspect of social activism in the performances of FOMMA because it draws

the attention of the audience to the exaggerated character on stage. When attention is brought to the actions of that character, which may include the abuse of a spouse, drunkenness, or an air of cultural superiority over indigenous people, a message is sent out to the audience calling for social change and cultural awareness. In either case, the use of parody in the performances does not, in my opinion, simply function as blind entertainment. Theater is also used as a space for the preservation and reinterpretation highland Maya history. This is achieved through the dramatization of oral and written Tzotzil, Tzeltal, and Quiché Maya myths and folktales, which allows for what I call a '(re)creation' of history. When history is used by the theater group Lo'il Maxil, the result is a performance of cultural memory which gives indigenous audiences an education and appreciation of their mythic and historical ancestry. Theater provides a way for the troupes to use of history as another tool for cultural expression.

By using theater as a political platform and as a space for reinterpreting history, the troupes of San Cristóbal also open up a dialogue for the creation of new cultural traditions. Both FOMMA and Lo'il Maxil achieve this by raising public awareness about various issues that are of importance to the respective groups. FOMMA, for example, performs plays that call for an end to domestic violence, while selected works of Lo'il Maxil champion an increase in literacy and an education in highland Maya folkloric traditions. Cultural maintenance for both groups revolves around the creation of social and educational spaces for adults and children alike who want to become literate in Tzotzil, Tzeltal, or Spanish. Lo'il Maxil, for example, distributes bilingual pamphlets to audience members during performance, while FOMMA provides literacy workshops for anyone, regardless of age or gender, who has an interest in education. Both groups look to the past for answers to the questions of the future and the problems of the present in highland Maya communities. Their work prompts public awareness about social problems, emphasizes the importance of cultural maintenance and preservation, and encouraging a kind of social activism which could lead to the creation of 'new' cultural traditions.

### **The Invention of New Cultural Traditions**

When Maya theater uses the genre of theater as a form of social activism or as a way to (re)create history, they invent various new cultural traditions that comprise a

whole made from the many parts that represent their conception of 'Maya' identity. Wagner (1981: 51) noted that "without the conventional distinctions that orient the actor in his world, that tell him who he is and what he may do and so give his acts a conventional masking and a conventional motivation, invention would be impossible." These conventions, or cultural constructs, provide the structural perspectives from which the actors in both theater groups derive, manipulate, and invent new cultural traditions that often call these conventions into question. Through theater, the Maya players craft a new Maya identity as a text that they continue to rewrite and revise in reference to texts, whether oral, written, or performed, which concern issues found in the domestic or political spheres or based upon mythic or recorded history.

By addressing these issues, Maya theater deconstructs the realities of highland Maya social life, provides social alternatives for the indigenous members of their communities, reinforces a sense of pan-Maya solidarity, and critiques the normative social constructs held in place by the concept of 'tradition.' As Eric Hobsbawm (1983: 1) noted, traditions "which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented." Therefore, the entire concept of 'tradition' is a fluid notion open to interpretation and, in the case of the highland Maya theater groups, open to reinvention and (re)creation. Invented tradition, by definition, is "a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behavior by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past" (Hobsbawm 1983: 1). Although invented traditions may call upon historical references or a general cultural memory of past mythic or historical events as is used by Lo'il Maxil, they make a largely fictitious connection to the historical record. This is due to the fact that "all invented traditions, so far as possible, use history as a legitimator of action and to cement group cohesion" (Hobsbawm 1983: 12).

The invention of new cultural traditions, by being a way to resuscitate identity awareness among highland Maya people or a way for indigenous women to confront and overturn patriarchal social norms that allow for the institutionalization of domestic abuse, intrinsically create tensions. These tensions are inherent because the invention of new traditions "embodies the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the

modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant” (Hobsbawm 1983: 2). Therefore, when Lo’il Maxil creates plays that reinvent history, they also call upon the available historical record for their sources. Another example of why tensions are created in Maya theater occurs when FOMMA creates plays that critique patriarchal social norms while simultaneously operating as members of highland Maya society within those patriarchal constructs.

When the invention of new traditions in highland Maya theater occurs through the utilization of the historical record, political and social realities, and mythic folklore, the resulting performance undergoes a process of hybridization. Pete Sigal (2000: 8) noted that hybridity is “the mixture of cultural traditions, formed as a result of colonial power and its interaction with the traditional power relationships of the dominated groups.” Cultural traditions are mixed in the case of Lo’il Maxil because they use particular events taken from the historical record, aspects of pre-colonial and post-colonial mythic history that they feel fits with their broader mission, the Spanish language, Catholic imagery, and the performance medium of stage theater itself. All of these ‘borrowed’ characteristics are then combined (or hybridized) with aspects of highland Maya cultural heritage, including the clothing, customs, language, traditions, rituals, and folkloric history in order to construct the entity that is known as ‘Maya’ theater.

Hybridization occurs in FOMMA’s work as well when they use the medium of stage theater, the Spanish language, and aspects of the Catholic sinner/saint dichotomy in their works. This dichotomy is a hybrid notion according to Sigal (2000: 61) because “by late colonial times, a hybrid, specifically colonial, desire was created in which the Maya believed sexual desire to be formed in the hearts and minds of the warriors and in the ideas and perceptions of sinners.” In FOMMA’s work, there is a strict differentiation between the female characters who are eventually vindicated or ‘saved’ from their negative domestic situations and the negatively portrayed male characters, who eventually chastised for their abusive or violent actions by the conclusion of the play. There is a clear demarcation in the works of FOMMA between the woman as ‘saint’ and the man as ‘sinner’ that both reinforces the colonial construction of desire while simultaneously contradicting that notion by showing how women do not have to conform to Catholic ideologies where women are taught to be submissive and deferent to men.

FOMMA also includes indigenous cultural elements in their theater, including the use of traditional dress, religious themes, and indigenous language that combine with non-indigenous characteristics to create a hybridized activist Maya theater.

When Maya theater invents new cultural traditions, they do so using a hybrid medium and subject matter that helps promote indigenous identity awareness, addresses negative social realities, and displays solutions to those issues by combining a theatrical definition of what it means to be ‘Maya’ with a call for social activism as structured by the specific goals of each troupe. These aspects of the theater of Lo’il Maxil and FOMMA are representative of what Augusto Boal (2006: 6) defined as ‘invisible theater’: “the theater of the oppressed, in all its forms, is always seeking the transformation of society in the direction of the liberation of the oppressed. It is both action in itself, and a preparation for future actions...it is not enough to interpret reality; it is necessary to transform it!” In order to understand why these two troupes create new cultural traditions as well as how they achieve this goal, it is first necessary to provide an introduction to them.

### **The Theater Groups of San Cristóbal**

My fieldwork in Chiapas focused on two different theater groups. One group, known as Lo’il Maxil (Monkey Business Theatre), performs works concerning Maya creation myths and other stories about the folkloric and political history of their people. The second group, called the Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya (FOMMA), focuses their works on education regarding the importance of indigenous women’s rights to health care and literacy and addresses issues of domestic violence against women. Members of the indigenous communities which surround San Cristóbal participate in both groups.

Lo’il Maxil evolved out of a Maya writer’s collective called Sna Jtz’ibajom, which was established in 1983 by Juan de la Torre Lopez, Anselmo Pérez Pérez, and Mariano López Méndez (Frischmann 1994: 216). Sna Jtz’ibajom, meaning “house of the writer” in Tzotzil, was established in light of the flurry of anthropological activity going on in the highlands during the 1960s and 1970s known as the Harvard Project. During this time cultural anthropologists and linguists intensively studied the cultures, traditions, and languages of highland Maya communities making this region and its Mayan pueblos of Zinacantán, Chamula, and Tenehapa “the most minutely studied ethnic area in all of

Mexico” (Frischmann 1994: 216). This environment of intense outside academic interest provoked the future founders of the Sna cooperative to beg the question: “Why should just outsiders be involved in writing down our native folktales, and learning to read and write in our language?” (Frischmann 1994: 217).

Sna Jtz’ibajom is a nonprofit organization dedicated to “the preservation and promotion of local traditions, and its activities include the publication of stories and poetry, occasional radio broadcasts, exhibitions of photographs taken and developed by its members, and theatre – dramatizations of folktales, Maya history, and contemporary social issues” (Underiner 2004: 49). When I conducted fieldwork with Lo’il Maxil, the troupe consisted of eight members, four women and four men. The most interesting aspect of the group was not so much the equal representations of men and women as it was the high amount of regional cultural diversity present in the troupe. There were representatives from three different Maya hamlets including Tenehapa, Zinacantán, and Chamula. Each town has different styles of dress (*traje*), language, and other cultural traditions; however, their united multi-cultural cause to aid members of their communities through the medium of theater reflects “the region’s more general movement toward a pan-Maya solidarity” (Underiner 2004: 50).

The founders’ interest in maintaining their Maya cultural traditions as well as actively reminding people in their communities of the importance of these traditions inspired them to create Sna Jtz’ibajom with the advice and support of Dr. Robert Laughlin who, along with his wife Miriam Laughlin, currently serve as Sna’s American advisors. The work of Sna Jtz’ibajom revolves around cultural preservation as well as public education in the Mayan communities surrounding San Cristóbal. Tamara Underiner (2004: 49) observed that “in addition to providing weekend literacy programs, the group is also dedicated to the preservation and promotion of local traditions, and its activities include the publication of stories and poetry, occasional radio broadcasts, exhibitions of photographs taken and developed by its members, and theater.”

As of 2006, Lo’il Maxil “has created fourteen plays that dramatize ancient beliefs and the problems past and present that still confront the Mayas” (Sna Jtz’ibajom informational brochure). The Lo’il Maxil troupe was formed in 1985 as a traveling puppet theater that was originally intended to promote literacy education in Tzotzil and

Spanish. By 1989, Sna's "writing abilities and experience in traditional narrative laid the foundations for new dramaturgy" and Lo'il Maxil made the transition from a puppet theater to live theater with the help of their first director, Ralph Lee, an artistic director of New York State's Mettawee River Company (Frischmann 1994: 220). Lo'il Maxil focused its early efforts on creating works based on local folktales, legends, and mythical tales taken from sources such as the *Popol Vuh*. This mythic narrative has been analyzed in detail by Dennis Tedlock (1996: 25), who observed that the *Popol Vuh* was authored by "members of the three lordly lineages that had once ruled the Quiché kingdom" who "worked in the middle of the sixteenth century, and the scene of their writing was the town of Quiché, northwest of what is now Guatemala City." The authors worked under circumstances of colonialism, and this element of the narrative is interesting because they address this issue with the opening passage of the text: "And here we shall take up the demonstration, revelation, and account of how things were put in shadow and brought to light by the Maker...we shall write about this now amid the preaching of God, in Christendom now" (Tedlock 1996: 63). The *Popol Vuh* can be considered an exercise in Mayan cultural preservation, similar to the plays performed by Lo'il Maxil. Their play repertoire includes productions of *El haragán y el zopilote* (*The Loafer and the Buzzard*), *¿A poco hay cimarrones?* (*Who Believes in Spooks?*), *Herencia Fatal* (*Fatal Inheritance*), *Dinastía de jaguars* (*Dynasty of Jaguars*), *De todos para todos* (*From All, For All*), *Danza para la vida* (*Dance for Life*), and *Cuando nació el maíz* (*When Corn Was Born*). All of these works are directly derived either from the *Popol Vuh* or from traditional Tzotzil oral folktales.

FOMMA, the other Maya theater group I interviewed, was founded as a "space where women empower themselves and their culture as they represent the often traumatic experiences they have lived, and imagine alternative realities" (Marrero 2003: 291). FOMMA, which is an acronym for "Fortaleza de la Mujer Maya" (The Strength of Mayan Women) produces plays that address domestic and social issues which affect the rights of indigenous women. FOMMA's plays concentrate on issues of domestic violence, rape, child abuse, women's rights, divorce, and education about contraception. It was formed out of Sna Jtz'ibajom in 1994 when two of the female members, Isabel Juárez Espinosa and Petrona de la Cruz Cruz, broke off from Lo'il Maxil because of "the

pressure of differential gender role expectations and their own dissatisfaction with their prescribed roles as (passive) bearers of Maya culture” (Underiner 2004: 54). Dissatisfied with their restricted participation in Lo’il Maxil, the two women formed FOMMA in 1994 exclusively as an all-woman group. They currently offer programs for women and children in literacy, art, health, and nutrition in addition to theater, and have gained financial and community support by Mexican, U.S., and international governments as well as other theater artists from the United States (Underiner 2004). The work of FOMMA is oriented toward education regarding the social realities that indigenous women face, including situations of domestic violence, alcoholism, poverty, and the effects of campesino life on rural women and children (Underiner 2004). Most recently, their works “explore women’s growing participations in international markets, local politics, and domestic culture” (Underiner 2004: 55). FOMMA speaks as a Maya voice for women by often offering scathing critiques of dominant socio-cultural frameworks which often subjugate and silence important female cultural perspectives. They also serve as an outlet for social activism which includes an initiative to educate the public about the negative repercussions of domestic violence.

### **Methods**

My interviews with the members of Sna Jtz’ibajom and FOMMA were conducted at both the headquarters of Sna Jtz’ibajom and at the headquarters of FOMMA. I was given consent for interviews by the members of Lo’il Maxil and conducted my interviews with them in a group setting. I divided the troupe according to gender, and interviewed the four male members on July 20, 2006 and the four female members on July 21, 2006. The reason I divided the group in this way was in order to gain different perspectives on the social meaning of their work and performances as well as their personal experiences with the group and as purveyors of Mayan cultural heritage. My division of the group in this way allowed me to include additional questions for the men regarding their participation in the ritual cargo system, which is an important social practice among the highland Maya.

The interviews with FOMMA were conducted in a slightly different manner because I was only able to meet with one of the members during my time in San Cristóbal. However, the interview I conducted with Isabel Juárez Espinosa was



**Figure 1: Downtown San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas, Mexico**

important because she is not only a member of FOMMA but also one of its founders. I met with Isabel on July 24, 2006 and asked her similar questions to the ones given to the women of the Lo'il Maxil troupe. On July 25, 2006 I had the privilege of meeting with Doris Difarnecio, who serves as FOMMA's summer seasonal director. Doris provided me with an outside perspective as to the cultural importance of the social message provided by the FOMMA troupe as seen through the lens of someone who teaches the nuances of the medium of performance.

I conducted the interviews with a Sony™ VOR micro-cassette recorder M-540V and recorded each interview on a separate micro cassette tape. The interview questions I asked revolved around their personal backgrounds, their experiences with the respective theater groups they are involved in, their reasons for joining a theater troupe, and their thoughts regarding the ways in which Mayan identity could best be maintained. The complete list of questions is listed in **Appendix A**. The types of questions I asked reflected my interest in understanding the personal histories of the group members and how they, as individuals, decided to join Sna Jtz'ibajom and FOMMA and why they believed their cause is best represented through the use of theater. The following section



**Figure 2: A View of San Cristóbal de las Casas from the road to Zinacantán**

recounts the ten interviews I conducted with the members of FOMMA and Sna Jtz'ibajom and also includes my interpretations of their responses.

**Location Background: San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas**

It is important to give a geographical and cultural background for the city that the Maya players inhabit in order to understand the social and cultural context within which these groups are performing. San Cristóbal de las Casas is located on the eastern side of the state of Chiapas in the northern highlands area known as the *tierra fría* or 'cold country.' San Cristóbal is located about two hours east of the state capital, Tuxtla Gutiérrez, and as of 2005 boasted a population of 166,460 people according to INEGI, the Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía y Informática (INEGI 2007). This colonial city was founded in 1528 by the conquistador Diego de Mazariegos and was originally known as Villa Real de Chiapa (Van den Berghe 1994: 11). Resting in a highland valley at 7,000 feet above sea level, San Cristóbal has captured the accolades of Mexican tourist guidebooks for decades, earning descriptions as a "small, seldom visited jewel" that has preserved much of its colonial past: "Its streets are steep and cobbled; its stone houses untouched by time" (Podorson 1961: 83). Although guidebooks provide a

highly romanticized description of San Cristóbal, this highland city has functioned as an important central market for the surrounding Mayan hamlets of Chamula, Zinacantán, Tenehapa, San Andrés, and Aguacatenango among others since the colonial period and is nestled in a green cloud-covered valley that does provide the impression of a pristine colonial setting. San Cristóbal is not, however, “untouched by time” because it bustles with international tourists and markets with Mayan vendors that are framed by *ladino* owned storefronts lining the cobbled streets.

There is trade in both the buying and selling of *ladino* (a local word meaning *mestizo*, or someone of mixed Spanish and indigenous heritage) and Mayan merchandise to an increasing number of international tourists. In Chiapas generally and San Cristóbal specifically a phenomenon of “ethnic tourism” has altered the economic relations of both Mayan vendors and their *ladino* competitors. Ethnic tourism is defined as an “active search for ethnic exoticism” which is a direct product of post-colonial modernity embodied by “travel motivated primarily by the search for the first hand, authentic and sometimes intimate contact with people whose ethnic and/or cultural background is different from the tourist’s” (Van den Berghe 1994: 8). These tourists not only purchase the trinkets and souvenirs of the Mayas but search for an ‘authentic’ experience of the Other by visiting the nearby Maya hamlets and municipios surrounding San Cristóbal. The Maya, as embodied Other, exploit the opportunity provided by this brand of tourism by “modifying their behavior and their cultural artifacts in response to tourist demand, and seek to derive economic benefits from literally making a spectacle of themselves” (Van den Berghe 1994: 15).

San Cristóbal is a multi-faceted city which serves as a point of convergence for Mayas, *ladinos*, white foreign tourists, and countless others. This city, noted as the “third most important city in Chiapas,” has been described as a “conservative, racist local society; migrant Maya expelled from bordering communities for economic, political, and/or religious reasons; Central American refugees fleeing from the economic, military, and political crises; Europeans and North Americans in search of different lifestyles; and *mestizos* who have migrated from larger Mexican cities” (Freyermuth Enciso and Fernandez Guerrero 1995: 970). For a city with such intense cultural convergences, it is unsurprising that the theater groups Lo’il Maxil and FOMMA flourish in this urban and

culturally cosmopolitan environment. San Cristóbal also functions as a stronghold for the Zapatista movement, which briefly took over the city in January 1994. Politically as well as socially, the *ladino* inhabitants of this city are well aware of the indigenous population which surrounds them since the events of 1994.

### **Why Maya Theater Thrives in San Cristóbal**

San Cristóbal functions as a gateway for the introduction of non-indigenous ideologies due to its highly cosmopolitan population, consisting of both *ladino* and international residents, and its status as a global tourist attraction. Mayas who come to the city as vendors or students are exposed to a wealth of ideas and commodities that are not found in their own hamlets, creating a tension between the retention of Maya cultural traditions and an acceptance of hegemonic cultural introductions. As a direct result of globalization, being ‘Maya’ in the 21<sup>st</sup> century means being multi-cultural due to the exposure of younger generations to a plethora of mestizo and international social principles and cultural practices in cities like San Cristóbal. For the contemporary highland Maya of Chiapas, “ethnic self-identification operates within a complex cultural matrix of competing, complementary, and more-or-less official discourses” (Underiner 1988: 351).

The Maya theater groups of San Cristóbal thrive here because of their awareness of the importance of addressing what is known as “identity politics” which are defined as “the collective sensibilities and actions that come from a particular location within society, in direct defiance of universal categories that tend to subsume, erase, or suppress this particularity” (Hale 1997: 568). Both Lo’il Maxil and FOMMA use performance as an embodiment of their Maya indigenous identity. Theatrical themes regarding the prestige of Classic Maya civilization or the effects of globalization and capitalism on the lives of women in indigenous communities are both ways in which these groups portray the importance of cultural preservation as well as a sense of pan-Maya solidarity. Richard N. Adams (1989:123) observed that “the failure to exterminate or assimilate a conquered people inevitably leaves a population of divided identities.” During the Conquest period, the Spanish assumed inherent hegemonic superiority over the indigenous peoples of Mesoamerica. However, this presumption was not shared by the indigenous groups who were affected by the Conquest. Native autonomy was preserved

during this period through revolts and through theater, which still is used today. In Guatemalan Maya communities “the Dance of the Conquest, and that of the Moors and the Christians, keeps alive the Indians’ rejection of the conquest” (Adams 1989: 123).

Liberation theology may also be a reason why Maya theater thrives in San Cristóbal de las Casas. This movement centers on “promoting a new consciousness, sense of self-worth, and capacity for action among poor people” (Levine 1988: 241). During the late 1960s, Catholic theologians set new ‘modern’ guidelines for the church’s role in its countries of influence, which include many countries in Latin America as well as Mexico. At this time, some Latin American countries experienced “intense social and economic transformation, and notable changes in the character of political rule” that affected the church’s social doctrine (Levine 1988: 248). In response, theologians introduced liberation theology where “by stressing the centrality of population insight and experience, they turned discourse away from traditional stress on inter-elite contacts and negotiations toward solidarity and shared experience with repression’s victims” (Levine 1988: 250).

This new ‘liberation theology’ addressed and continues to address important issues that negatively affect the lives of indigenous people in Latin America and more specifically, Chiapas, Mexico. Levine (1988: 249) noted that liberation theology addresses the promotion and defense of human rights in Latin America, provides a critique of injustice and abuses of power, and protects oppressed groups and individuals by providing aid services to them. These issues are also addressed in the plays of both Lo’il Maxil and FOMMA, but whether or not a connection between their works and the liberation theology movement exists is unclear. What is obvious is that their missions do share parallels despite the lack of evidence for a direct correlation between troupes and theological movement in that they both advocate the defense of human rights, the right to equal access to healthcare and educational opportunities, and an emphasis on supporting a critique of social norms.

### **A Few Words on Previous Research**

My fieldwork with the theater groups FOMMA and Lo’il Maxil during 2006 was preceded by the work of Dr. Tamara Underiner, who worked with both troupes and included them in her book, *Contemporary Theatre in Mayan Mexico: Death-Defying*

*Acts*. This book provides synopses of some of their plays as well as detailed discussions of their respective missions and histories. She also situates the two groups within a larger context by including their work in a comparison to the work of other Maya troupes scattered throughout the Yucatán Peninsula. Her work provided me with some of the details regarding the historical background of both troupes that were not discussed in the interviews I conducted with them. The ways in which my thesis is unique regards how I look at Lo'il Maxil and FOMMA specifically. In the case of Lo'il Maxil, I contribute a detailed argument regarding how their theatrical works are not only public presentations of Maya history but a reinterpretation and (re)creation of that history as well. My discussion of how FOMMA uses parody and mimesis, which is defined by Taussig (1993: 19) as "the ability to mime, and mime well, in other words, is the capacity to Other" as tools to overturn patriarchal social norms by taking power away from men on the stage is also an important contribution. The previous research conducted by Underiner and others helped me coalesce these arguments, which are outlined in detail in the following chapters. It is my sincere hope that this thesis will also be beneficial for future anthropological studies of performance and theatricality among the Maya of Chiapas, Mexico.

### **Chapter Outline**

Props, costumes, dialogue, action, drama, and stage space are all used by the Maya players in ways that convey a variety of messages to their audiences. As I learned when I watched the plays of Lo'il Maxil and FOMMA, attendees are more than passive spectators; they become participants in the movement for social change in the case of both groups and witnesses to history in the 'remaking' in the case of Lo'il Maxil. Although my experiences were in a tourist context, this aspect of player-audience intimacy flourished in the works of both Maya theater groups. It becomes more than simply 'putting on a play' when women wear the masks and clothes of men and act out scenes of domestic violence or when women and men, dressed in the *traje* (traditional clothing) of their highland villages don jaguar masks while circling a copal-burning censer as part of a theatrical performance. In the following chapters I explain how these groups use theater as both a platform for social activism and as an instrument for a

reinterpretation of highland Maya history in order to promote the invention of new cultural traditions.

Chapter Two is an introduction to the theater groups FOMMA and Lo'il Maxil. I outline the interviews I conducted with members of both groups, beginning with the talks I had with the men of Lo'il Maxil. The comments and opinions of the women of the group follow this section. After the overview of the interviews with the members of Lo'il Maxil the perspectives of FOMMA are addressed. This section begins with the interview of one of the founding members of the group and ends on an interview with a seasonal director who joins the group during the summer months.

Chapter Three addresses the role of women in Maya theater. This chapter outlines how women in both Lo'il Maxil and FOMMA become social activists by their very participation in a theatrical group. Theater, as used by FOMMA, is also construed as a kind of social activism because of this group's specific criticism of domestic violence against women. The members use parody as a way to draw the audience's attention to characters that function as representations of the pertinent social problems afflicting highland Maya communities. In this way, the members of FOMMA create a kind of activist theater which is used to cultivate social awareness.

Chapter Four outlines how history is incorporated into the theater of Lo'il Maxil. In this chapter, history is used by the troupe as a maneuverable theatrical entity which they use as an apparatus for connecting with the people in their communities. The chapter opens with various academic interpretations of history in order gain a reference point for how Lo'il Maxil remains or departs from these kinds of definitions. The next section is devoted to how the group (re)creates history and a subsequent section outlines how they use theater as a performance of cultural memory. Lo'il Maxil does not merely rely upon recorded history for their performances, but also incorporates the use of mythic and folkloric history is the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter Five shows how myth and folktale function as both entertainment and catalysts for the invention of new cultural traditions. A synopsis of the structural analysis of an excerpt from the 16<sup>th</sup> century Quiché Maya text the *Popol Vuh* is included in comparison with a structural analysis of a Lo'il Maxil play taken from a Tzotzil folktale. This comparison outlines the important theme of sowing, which relates to the cyclical

cosmology held by both the modern and ancient Maya. I analyze these myths in order to show how they not only included as part of the larger canon of Maya 'history' but also how they are used to transfer the message of cultural preservation.

Chapter Six offers conclusions as to what theater is used for by the Maya of Chiapas. I intertwine evidence from the previous five chapters in order to show that theater, in its various forms, is used by the two groups as a way open up a dialogue for the creation of new cultural traditions. *Lo'il Maxil*, for example, creates new traditions where increased literacy in the highland Maya languages despite pressures to learn Spanish, where women become active purveyors of Maya culture in the public sphere, where the indigenous languages or *lengua materna* is maintained, where there is an increased social value in learning local folklore, and where Maya history is celebrated, not obscured. FOMMA also creates new traditions where women adopt theatrical roles that would typically be performed by men, where the social positions of women are altered from passive to active, where domestic abuse is not tolerated, and where indigenous literacy in the native languages is valued. These traditions are addressed in detail in the chapter.

## CHAPTER TWO

### AN INTRODUCTION TO FOMMA AND LO'IL MAXIL

#### Introduction

During my field research in 2006 I conducted interviews with members of Lo'il Maxil, FOMMA, and with a seasonal director from the United States who joins FOMMA during the summer. The group interviews with the members of both FOMMA and Lo'il Maxil provided insight into the cultural dynamics which structure the operation, goals, and genres of theatrical works created by the two groups. The interview with the seasonal director was helpful because it provided more of an outside perspective of the group FOMMA and offered a glimpse as to why this troupe utilizes theatrical directors from outside the local community. Additionally, responses to certain questions in the interviews provided me with an understanding of the social responsibilities specifically imbued by gender roles in highland Maya communities. For instance, I noted a distinct difference between the verbosity of the men as compared to the women of the Lo'il Maxil troupe. All the men appeared to give more detailed, explicit answers and tended to talk for longer periods of time than did the women, who were less loquacious. Even more striking was the difference between my interview with the women of Lo'il Maxil and the interview with Isabel Juarez Espinosa, who is a co-founder and member of FOMMA, who spoke candidly about her role in theater and in the broader context of community. These differences between the talkativeness of the women in the two troupes may be a reflection of the patriarchal social organization present in highland Maya communities, which also influences the genre of the plays FOMMA performs. These issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Despite internal differences between the goals and the gender composition of the two groups, both FOMMA and Lo'il Maxil serve as significant and strong voices for their respective highland Maya communities. Both groups share the goal of providing educational opportunities for members of their communities by offering literacy programs. This education also includes reviving aspects of traditional Maya culture through the production of plays. The theatrical works of both troupes serve as a way to sustain highland Maya customs and languages through public awareness of their

continued cultural importance. There are also important differences between the two groups. FOMMA, for example, succinctly focuses the topics of their plays social issues and problems currently affecting highland Maya communities. Their plays often specifically address the plight of indigenous women, the problem of domestic abuse, contraception education, and the role of alcoholism in all of these issues. Lo'il Maxil does not make plays that directly address these issues, but they occasionally perform works that address social relations between Mayas and *ladinos*. How and why these two groups formed is the subject of the next section, which explores the social foundations that led to the use of theater by select highland Maya individuals who felt their communities and culture needed a public, internationally recognized voice. The following is a summary of the interviews I conducted with the members of Lo'il Maxil and FOMMA during the summer of 2006. Their words and descriptions of the meaning of their work provide the best insight into the reasoning behind the creation of these groups as well as why they use theater as their chosen performance medium.

#### **A Conversation with the Men and Women of Lo'il Maxil**

My first interview, which was with the men of Sna Jtz'ibajom, provided me with a good initial background about the creation of Lo'il Maxil because one of the original founders of the troupe, Juan Benito de la Torr  Lopez, included his thoughts as part of the group interview. Juan Benito de la Torr  Lopez grew up in the Tzotzil municipality of Zinacant n, which is about a half an hour's bus ride from San Crist bal. During 1981 and 1982, he joined with other members of his pueblo in common concern for the future of indigenous culture and decided to "attempt to spread the word about indigenous culture" (Interview 2006). In 1983 Juan and several others officially founded Sna Jtz'ibajom (The Writer's House). The other current members of Lo'il Maxil have been a part of Sna Jtz'ibajom for different amounts of time; Diego Mendez de Guzman, a Tzeltal-speaking Maya from Tenehapa, arrived a year after Juan helped establish the collective. Another member, Crist bal Guzm n Mendoza, was invited into the group by Diego and joined because "it is important for people to learn their traditional language" (Interview 2006). Jos  Leopoldo Hernandez of Chamula, the fourth male member, has been working with the Lo'il Maxil troupe since the year 2000.

The male members also expressed that processes such as globalization have negatively affected the transference of cultural traditions to the younger generations because of the influx of Western technologies and ideologies that counteract their efforts at preservation. One member noted that this is a big issue for them because “while we are trying to maintain the culture by presenting our works to young people these same students are adopting Western ways” (Interview 2006). Despite the impact of globalization, the men of the Lo’il Maxil troupe contended that one could still maintain their “unique cultural traditions” while interacting with people from outside the community. The male members believe that there are several key elements that can help maintain indigenous identity, elements that appear in the works of Sna Jtz’ibajom regarding the preservation of Maya cultural history. Some important elements they mentioned were: the continued celebration of traditional festivals in the pueblos because they represent a “special mix of both Maya and Catholic traditions,” the preservation of myths and traditional stories, and the retention of traditional Mayan customs and ceremonies including such pre-Hispanic rituals as the rain ceremony (Interview 2006).

Additionally, I included questions regarding the men’s thoughts on the impact of the Zapatista movement and the work of Commandante Marcos, who serves as the non-indigenous leader of that movement. The Zapatista Rebellion occurred on New Year’s Day, 1994 when “a few hundred men and women of the Ejército Zapatista Liberación Nacional (EZLN) blocked the Pan American Highway between Tuxtla Gutiérrez, the state capital of Chiapas, and San Cristóbal de las Casas and the road to Ocosingo, declaring war on Mexico’s Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI)” (Nash 1995: 7). This most recent rebellion in Chiapas arose out of long-standing complaints by the Maya regarding the infraction of their social, economic, and political rights, and the rebels responded by blocking major roadways and briefly capturing municipal buildings in San Cristóbal, Altamirano, Las Margaritas, and Ocosingo. The men of Lo’il Maxil commented that Commandante Marcos “approaches the social problems that plague indigenous communities” and fights for peace and for better education for children in Chiapas (Interview 2006). Their comments were positive about the overall impact of Zapatismo in highland Chiapas.



**Figure 3: Copal Use during a Lo'il Maxil Performance**

The men of *Sna Jtz'ibajom* also participate in the cargo systems of their respective communities. The cargo system is an important part of the religious and social life of highland Maya communities, and men play key roles in maintaining the traditional customs, traditions, and ceremonies through their positions in the cargo system. The cargo is “a burden or responsibility carried out to serve one’s community” (Kovic 2005: 136). Although women participate in cargo activities, it is the men who primarily hold the formal administrative offices. All of the men in the troupe have participated in this system, and they agree that “it’s a very important responsibility that provides an education about traditional customs” (Interview 2006). The men noted that there are both religious and political positions and that the positions held alternate depending on the kind of cargo participation. The men also remarked that the participation of women in the cargos is very important because it reflects the dualistic nature of Mayan deities. The members noted that “their (female) importance is representative of the importance of both

male and female gods in traditional Maya religion; without participation by both men and women natural disasters would happen and the rains would not come” (Interview 2006).

Women are also an important part of the Sna Jtz’ibajom writer’s cooperative. Their contributions to the troupe aid the efforts of conservation of Maya languages and customs through the use of theater. I interviewed the four female members of Lo’il Maxil on July 21, 2006 at the Sna Jtz’ibajom headquarters in San Cristóbal. The female members of Lo’il Maxil are divided as much as the men are in terms of the languages they speak and the communities they hail from. The members include Socorro Gómez Hernández, who is a 23 year old Tzotzil speaking woman from the pueblo of Chamula, María Margarita Pérez de la Torre, who is Tzotzil speaking women from the community of Zinacantán, María Rosenda de la Cruz Vásquez, who is also a Tzotzil speaker from Zinacantán, and Lilia Jiménez Guzmán, a 29 year old Tzeltal speaker from the pueblo of Tenehapa. All of the women were either personally invited into Sna Jtz’ibajom or knew people who already worked there and joined their organization. Regarding the purpose of their work for their communities and for themselves, the women agreed that a pertinent aspect of their work is preserving the *lengua materna*, the indigenous language or languages which they feel are being lost because of increased migration into the cities and exposure to Western social and cultural influences. Lilia noted that “more than anything my work is to preserve the culture because, although I know that young people are not learning the traditional ways and that it’s inevitable, preserving the customs is important in order to keep the traditions alive despite social changes” (Interview 2006). María, Socorro, and María agreed that language preservation is the most important part of their work “so the culture is not lost” and that through theater “their work is a way to teach young people visually about the language and customs” (Interview 2006). The preservation of the customs and the language are the best ways, according to the women of Lo’il Maxil, to maintain Maya cultural heritage.

The women understand that globalization and the introduction of Western social influences into highland Chiapas affects the transference of cultural traditions from the older to the younger generations. However, they commented that one can maintain an indigenous identity while also participating in the globalized world. Globalization has had an interesting effect on the women of the Lo’il Maxil troupe because “we get

exposed to different languages and learn some words in other languages; it's good because we learn things from each other because we are from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds" (Interview 2006). What the women refer to here is their specific interactions with the other group members who come from different highland Maya communities. This, in their terms, is the experience of globalization; better transportation between communities as well as exposure to mediums of communication such as the internet have allowed them to converge in San Cristóbal and establish relationships with people who do not necessarily share their specific cultural background. There is no sense of cultural segregation within the group because they have the common purpose of educating and communicating with highland Maya communities at large.

In another sense, the impact of globalization has broader implications for an indigenous person. According to the women of Sna Jtz'ibajom, globalization has created an outlet for migration to other areas of Mexico or the world in order to find more diversified employment opportunities. The women remarked that "as people leave the pueblo and work in the city or internationally (especially in the United States), they get another 'vision' and the culture changes; but if the traditional customs are maintained indigenous identity is not lost" (Interview 2006). Indeed, the most important factors for maintaining indigenous identity according to the women include retention of the language, the culture, the clothes, and the fiestas. However, the women noted that Maya culture is not static because there are important changes occurring in their communities which may threaten certain Maya cultural traditions. Regarding the changes they see happening around them, the women noted that "the clothes are changing, which has to do in part with new religions coming in that do not have the same fiestas or rules we do; it causes problems because people may want to maintain traditional customs but the new religion has different ideas of appropriateness" (Interview 2006).

This observation is reflected by the women's interpretations of the meaning of their work. Socorro, for example, commented that the purpose of her work "is to preserve the *lengua materna* and the traditional customs" while she likens her personal involvement to "a learning process" because "there are many things about my own culture and traditions that I don't necessarily know" (Interview 2006). María Rosenda de la Cruz Vásquez observed that the Tzotzil language (which is her *lengua materna*) "has

changed so much so preserving it, along with the customs and traditions, is very important” (Interview 2006). These sentiments of cultural preservation through maintenance of the customs and the language were unanimous among the women of the Lo’il Maxil troupe. There is a shared sentiment regarding the importance of maintaining Maya cultural traditions despite social and linguistic differences found among highland Maya communities. However, when asked if they felt a connection with other indigenous groups elsewhere in Mexico, North America, or South America, the answer was negative. The women remarked that they did feel a connection with other Maya groups in Chiapas specifically, but outside of the state boundaries they did not indicate any level of connectedness with other indigenous groups in Mexico or beyond.

When asked about the work of indigenous activist Rigoberta Menchú, a Quiché Maya woman from northern highland Guatemala who has advocated the important issue of human rights in that country, the women remarked that her work was interesting because “she is a fighter; she is the first indigenous woman to fight for indigenous rights” (Interview 2006). Some of the women have read Menchú’s famous autobiography *I, Rigoberta Menchu* which advocates themes of “colonialism, religious syncretism, testimony and advocacy, diversity, community and the individual’s role within it, and concern for the rights of indigenous peoples and women” (Reichardt 2001: 244). The women of Sna Jtz’ibajom relate to her as a fellow indigenous person and as a Maya woman.

Regarding the effect of the Zapatista movement and the work of Commandante Marcos on the indigenous communities of highland Chiapas, the women’s opinions were positive. They commented that “it’s good because before indigenous people were marginalized; Marcos’s work helped indigenous people know their rights and it helped people have respect for indigenous people” (Interview 2006). Zapatismo has, in the opinion of the women, helped indigenous communities as well as the rights of indigenous women because it has “helped strengthen women” (Interview 2006). This viewpoint is accurate because in many ways, Zapatismo has provided outlets for indigenous women by allowing them positions of power within the movement. The Zapatista movement enabled the females who participated to express the importance of issues such as women’s rights. The movement facilitated the emergence of a markedly feminine

revolution because “the insurgent ideology of Zapatismo had taught them to question and analyze their own exploited position within dominant power structures” (Marrero 2003: 323).

### **FOMMA Perspectives:**

#### **An Interview with Isabel and a Coffee Shop Chat with Doris**

The theater group FOMMA uses the stage as an outlet for both the analysis and critique of social constructs which negatively affect the lives of indigenous women. In order to get a perspective on the social importance of this work, on July 26, 2006, I interviewed Isabel Juárez Espinosa, who is a co-founder of FOMMA, at the troupe’s headquarters in San Cristóbal. Isabel, who is from Aguacatenango, has completed secondary education, is currently learning English, and speaks Tzeltal, Tzotzil, and Spanish. The intention of her work is to help indigenous women in the surrounding indigenous communities. She noted that “the theater is important to us because it helps us communicate with the women of these communities regarding health rights and the rights of the children” (Interview 2006).

Isabel herself has traveled internationally with FOMMA and interacted with ‘Westernized’ cultures before but continues to wear the *traje* (traditional clothing) of her pueblo and speak her native Maya language. Perhaps because of her international travels, when asked if she feels a connection with indigenous peoples in other countries and continents she answered in the affirmative. This response is the opposite of the opinions of Lo’il Maxil’s female members, who did not feel related on any level with indigenous groups outside the boundaries of the state of Chiapas. When asked about the Zapatista movement and Commandante Marcos, she commented that “overall their work is good, but many people interpret what they are doing differently” (Interview 2006). The indigenous people of Chiapas, she commented, “have mixed feelings” about the tactics of Marcos because “he began a lot of military maneuvers and assaults on highways” (Interview 2006). Although the general strength of communities has increased, Isabel remarked that there were several compounding factors which negate other positive results of Zapatismo. She noted that “the Zapatistas themselves aren’t bad, but there is increased political division in the communities themselves about the issue” (Interview 2006). Furthermore, “Zapatismo has only partially helped communities and has brought the

international eye down into the communities making the Mexican government more watchful and aware of what the people are doing” (Interview 2006). Her opinions regarding the Zapatista movement differ somewhat from those of both the male and female members of the Lo’il Maxil troupe.

Isabel also spoke about her involvement with FOMMA, beginning with the creation of the group during 1993 and 1994. She commented that international and local financial support in Chiapas allowed the group to grow and that various other groups of people have supported FOMMA’s efforts financially since its inception in the mid-1990s. Isabel noted that “more than anything, we want to help the indigenous woman, because these women don’t necessarily work, they have children, and they need social and financial support” (Interview 2006). Additionally, “through FOMMA we address this and other situations including education, health issues, helping people learn to write their names for instance is very important” (Interview 2006). Regarding the future of her work and that of FOMMA in general, Isabel remarked that their theatrical works “are important as a way to help change individual ideas and thoughts about domestic situations and helps men learn respect for women because the theatrical works teach the importance of equality in the home” (Interview 2006). She has witnessed positive results of her work in the people she interacts with in indigenous communities as well as those who come to their headquarters in San Cristóbal and attend the offered workshops. Isabel commented that “my work helps people see and gives women strength because the theatrical works provide an analysis of the common domestic situations in highland Maya communities” (Interview 2006).

For another perspective on FOMMA, I interviewed Doris Difarnecio on July 25, 2006. Doris is a seasonal director for FOMMA who began working with the troupe in 1999. She began her involvement with the troupe in collaboration with another director who was working in Chiapas with Sna Jtz’ibajom at the time. Doris noted that she “has always wanted to work with indigenous women” and, after hearing that FOMMA had broken off from the Sna Jtz’ibajom cooperative, she knew she “wanted to share my skills as an actress and educator” (Interview 2006). Doris is exclusively invited to join the members of FOMMA during the summer months and spends the remainder of the year working for the Board of Education in New York City.

Doris informed me of some of the activities of FOMMA that occur during the year. She commented that there are other directors or artists who come, including Amy Trumpeter, an artist who creates puppets and masks which are used by the troupe. Doris also emphasized many of the points noted by Isabel Juárez Espinosa including the importance of using the skills learned through the production of theatrical works in order to “help other women who might come to the headquarters of FOMMA so they can learn to write, read, and act” (Interview 2006). According to Doris, the women of FOMMA travel internationally and “enjoy telling the academics or whomever about their struggles” (Interview 2006). When the plays are performed, Doris commented that “it’s all about strengthening the community from the inside out and when they perform plays they empower themselves while simultaneously empowering the community” (Interview 2006).

She also spoke about the effects of globalization on the indigenous communities of highland Chiapas by taking a less individual and more community oriented perspective. Her responses were primarily negative: “cell phones, computers, and the plastic materials used for other products have all infiltrated into the communities due to globalization and these products are not properly disposed of because the concept of recycling does not exist in these communities” (Interview 2006). Another negative outcome of globalization according to Doris surrounds changes in diet because “the eating habits have changed toward starchy and unhealthy food products” (Interview 2006). Despite some obviously negative impacts of globalization, Doris commented that “continued dialogue within indigenous families regarding traditions, rituals, and cultural heritage serve as a reminder to the members of highland Maya communities that traditional ways are still important” (Interview 2006).

Regarding her personal involvement with the members of FOMMA, Doris emphasized the highly positive experiences she has shared with them. She “loves it” and remarked that “it is a mutual process of learning because the women of FOMMA learn technical theatrical performance skills from me while I learn important life lessons from them” (Interview 2006). Doris has, to date, created seven plays with the members of FOMMA and has accompanied them on trips to Brazil, New York City, Argentina, and Boston. She declared that “every year is an experience and a surprise for me because I

am reminded of how committed and dedicated they are” (Interview 2006). She is honored to work with the women of FOMMA and describes them as “powerful women who are not afraid to talk about their traumas” (Interview 2006). Doris intends to work with the troupe for as long as she is invited with aims of returning to San Cristóbal during the summer of 2007.

## **Conclusion**

Maya theater in highland Chiapas is representative of many different perspectives on individual and community experiences. The players in both troupes noted that there is a great importance in preserving Maya cultural traditions, which include language, dress, folktales, and ritual practices, and creating social awareness about community issues. FOMMA delivers poignant social messages through their theater, which expound the importance of providing equal job opportunities for Maya women. They also advocate the necessity of addressing social problems at the community level, which is why their plays often display blunt messages about the negative affects of domestic violence and alcoholism. Lo’il Maxil focuses most of their work on reenactments of highland Maya folktales and oral histories by performing them live and recording them on paper by publishing them for a larger audience. The members of Lo’il Maxil are aware of the prominence of the problem of language retention in their respective home communities, as well as the influence of globalization on highland Maya cultural practices, but do not perform plays that address issues of domestic violence as FOMMA does.

Certain aspects of globalization have, however, been welcomed by the troupes. FOMMA and Lo’il Maxil use computers, the Internet, audio/video recording devices, and other attributes, but they do so in order benefit the missions of their respective groups, thereby acknowledges the fact that some aspects of globalization are useful. Both groups also utilize directors and coordinators from outside the local community, which is the role that Doris Difarnecio and Robert and Miriam Laughlin play in the continually evolving stories of both theater groups. The insights and opinions I received from the members of Lo’il Maxil and FOMMA are an allusion to the importance of theater for them in terms of public awareness, cultural preservation, as well as cultural invention. The following chapter explores the first main characteristic of Maya theater – how the stage functions as a political platform when performance becomes social activism.

## CHAPTER THREE

### WOMEN AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM IN MAYA THEATER

#### Introduction

Theater serves an important function for the female members of Lo'il Maxil and FOMMA because they can, through performance, express social grievances and promote viable alternatives to the problems found in their communities. Lo'il Maxil is generally focused on resolving issues of cultural maintenance and language preservation within the Maya communities but they have produced at least one play which comments on the socio-economic and cultural tensions between the Mayas of the highland hamlets surrounding San Cristóbal and the *ladinos* who make the city their home. FOMMA, however, uses theater more as an expression of their discontent regarding the treatment of women by men in their communities, employers in the cities, and by the government at the local, state, and even national levels. The works of FOMMA do address the importance of Mayan cultural maintenance, but that goal is an undercurrent to their primary, or what I term 'political,' platform which addresses the importance of equal rights for indigenous women. Although the plays of Lo'il Maxil themselves may be more nuanced in their calls for social activism (which is explored in Chapter Four), the women who participate in Lo'il Maxil and FOMMA as well create a kind of political platform simply out of their involvement with the group. The women who participate in Maya theater also utilize parody as a powerful technique in their performances.

Parody specifically becomes a tool for social activism in the performances of FOMMA. These parodies, albeit highly exaggerated through the use of masks and sometimes outrageous costumes, have two important goals. The first goal is an attempt to draw attention to characters in the performances that may embody negative social realities in the communities in order to heighten awareness. The second goal involves the internalization of the characterization by the players in order to exhibit control over these social forces that normally dominate social situations in Maya communities. This important aspect of parody is a way for the members of FOMMA to portray theatrically the possibility of control over the seemingly desperate situations within which indigenous women often find themselves. Finally, Maya theater becomes a political platform when

the players from both groups use the stage to cultivate awareness about the importance of literacy and cultural preservation in the age of globalization. Both groups take an active stand concerning these issues, thus reiterating the utility of theater as more than a means of entertainment.

### **The Roles of Women in Maya Theater**

Women who participate in Lo'il Maxil and FOMMA traverse a boundary line which is defined by patriarchal Maya and Catholic gender roles. Among the Maya of highland Chiapas, as elsewhere in Mexico, women are generally instructed to be obedient and generally submissive to men, which include husbands, fathers, and siblings. Christine Eber (1995:70) noted that both fathers and mothers instruct daughters that they have "duties" to their husbands but "when men are jealous or demanding and do not fulfill their responsibilities to them or their children, women know that the obedience required of them as wives, daughters, and sisters is unfair." Another observation of the status of women is expressed thus: "In contemporary Mayan society, it is considered extremely dangerous for a woman to venture out by herself, to 'strike out on her own'. Her sexuality invites male aggression and her lack of escorts renders her helpless to defend herself against such attacks" (Steele 1994: 239). The women of FOMMA and Lo'il Maxil use theater as a political platform in the sense that their involvement with the groups contradicts patriarchal norms by challenging them through performance and script writing.

The first female members of Sna wrote and performed in a microcosm of this kind of social environment that echoed patriarchal cultural values. Although the broad mission of Sna Jtz'ibajom is progressive, the members still conform to Maya social norms and ideologies. Therefore, the original female members of Lo'il Maxil, Petrona de la Cruz Cruz and Isabel Juárez Espinosa, experienced an atmosphere of subjugation that did not allow them to express themselves as independently as they desired.

The tension sparked by intra-group jealousy regarding the women's successes and international recognition as playwrights in their own right led to the eventual defection of both Isabel and Petrona from Lo'il Maxil in 1993. These women had broken down the boundaries traditionally prescribed for their gender by writing their own plays, receiving invitations for participation in the International Women's Playwrights Conference, and



**Figure 4: Socorro Gómez Hernández of Lo'il Maxil as a Mythical Jaguar**

obtaining the Premio Chiapas award which is given annually by the state government to a leading artist or writer (Steele 1994). These achievements coupled with the independent nature of the two women resulted in the creation of a new and independent theater group. The formation of FOMMA reflected not only intra-group tensions within the Sna Jtz'ibajom collective but the growing atmosphere of tension regarding the larger issue of women's rights within highland Mayan communities; rights for women was a key issue of the Zapatista movement which began in 1994, the same year that Petrona de la Cruz Cruz and Isabel Juárez Espinosa left Lo'il Maxil. The role of FOMMA in the changing cultural milieu of highland Chiapas reflects the reasons why the founding members departed from Lo'il Maxil. FOMMA's San Cristóbal headquarters serve as a sanctuary for women and as an environment of assertive opportunities for females who have suffered the negative consequences of a patriarchal cultural and political environment by including classes in literacy, theater, bread-making, dressmaking, and weaving.

These aspects of female social roles in highland Chiapas are directly addressed by the women of FOMMA, who use theater to comment on the negative social situations occurring in highland Mayan communities. These women therefore take a very active role in the production of theater by creating a platform where they take a politically

charged stance against female subordination. Founders Isabel Juárez Espinosa and Petrona de la Cruz Cruz continuously challenge conventional social norms by producing plays such as *Viva la Vida* and *Una mujer desesperada*, which was originally intended for production by the members Lo'il Maxil in 1991. This play concerns maternal death, spousal abuse, and female suicide and “powerfully depicted the suffering and despair caused by domestic violence and incest in the Mayan community, and by the inadequacy of the indigenous legal system to uphold justice in such cases” (Steele 1994: 120). *Una mujer desesperada* was never performed by Lo'il Maxil, and a combination of professional jealousy and tension in reference to the infraction of traditional gender roles by the original female members of Lo'il Maxil led to their departure and the eventual staging of *Una mujer desesperada* by members of FOMMA.

The women of Lo'il Maxil also participate in the female Maya social revolution, but in a different way. The works Lo'il Maxil performs today continue to focus on Maya cultural heritage by serving as a voice for the “traditionalist movement” which follows “a more purely Mayanist agenda in the efforts to preserve and promote Mayan culture” (Steele 1994: 120). However, the women who currently participate in Lo'il Maxil, including the four women I interviewed during the summer of 2006, cross traditional social boundaries simply through their participation. The women of Sna Jtz'ibajom are playwrights, actresses, and serve as assertive purveyors of Maya culture. These attributes are in direct conflict with traditionally prescribed gender roles and refuse the constrictions of a patriarchal culture which deems women “subordinate to men sexually, socially, and politically by virtue of their biological femaleness” (Marrero 2003: 315).

Female members such as Socorro Gómez Hernández and María Rosenda de la Cruz Vásquez have written plays about the social dynamics and cultural issues affecting their home communities of Chamula and Zinacantán. In *El comerciante y el greñudo*, Gómez Hernández relates the story of a man who leaves his family and community to sell corn in the city and encounters a man who plans to steal his maize in order to make himself rich (Gómez Hernández 2004). In *Una niña ciega*, de la Cruz Vásquez tells the story of a young blind girl from Zinacantán who could mysteriously only see at night; her family thought her a burden and decided to leave her alone in a house so that she would die of hunger (de la Cruz Vásquez 2004). Both works illustrate the cultural importance

of survival; in the case of the blind girl, her own family was the negative force she had to fight against in order to survive. In the story of the merchant, he had to fight for his family's survival by selling grain in the city and evading dangerous characters who could potentially steal his livelihood from him.

These two scripts reflect patterns of social organization found within Mexican indigenous communities since the colonial period. The script by Socorro Gómez Hernández illustrates a cultural truth: that in Mayan society it is common for the man to leave the village in order to make money as a vendor or wage laborer in order to support his family. Historical evidence from the colonial period in Mexico reveals that this trend is a reflection of the patriarchal social system in that men “had greater freedom of movement and expression, visiting local taverns, traveling more often to the fields, to regional markets, and to the neighboring Spanish capital” (Taylor 1979: 108). The plays of FOMMA and the published short stories of the women of Lo'il Maxil reveal that this trend is still an institution in Mexican and Maya society. The story of the blind girl by María Rosenda de la Cruz Vásquez analyzes another aspect of the influence of a patriarchal system specifically regarding the treatment of women. The young girl, unwanted by her parents, is banished to die alone of starvation, which reflects patriarchal ideas of female passivity and submissiveness. The fact that she was restricted inside of a home serves as a metaphor for the more general status of indigenous women in that “women's mobility and contact with life outside the home was more restricted than men's” (Taylor 1979: 108).

Both scripts show that the women who participate in the Lo'il Maxil troupe display assertiveness through the act of script writing as well as challenge the patriarchal social order through their works. The current female members of Sna Jtz'ibajom demonstrate basic facets of the *campo de acción* (field of action) which “refers to the control that women develop over different areas of their everyday space, as determined objectively as well as by the definition that women themselves give to this space” (Freyermuth Enciso and Fernandez Guerrero 1995: 972). The fact that in recent years Sna Jtz'ibajom has published plays by their female cohorts indicates a trend toward an acceptance of women as proactive and influential members of not only the theater troupe but of highland Maya society in general. Perhaps the abrupt departure of the original

female members in the early 1990s and the subsequent creation of FOMMA in 1994 provided the male founders and members of Lo'il Maxil with a fresh perspective regarding the important roles of women.

### **Parody as a Tool for Social Activism in the Works of FOMMA**

The use of parody in Maya theater is a way for the players to combine their mission of social activism with artistic creativity in order to expound messages of social change and heighten public awareness about important issues affecting highland Maya communities. Parody, as used by Lo'il Maxil and FOMMA, has what I argue to be two distinct goals. The first concerns an attempt to draw audience attention to the characters in the performance that the players see as embodying negative attributes of highland Maya social life. The second goal is more subliminal and involves the use of mimesis as a means to internalize the represented characters to gain power over these embodiments of the negative social forces that are realities of everyday highland Maya life. This representation is a tool for social activism because it shows the audience and the players themselves that the power of these social forces can be overturned and used by members of highland Maya communities.

Parody as a way to draw in audience attention occurs in two works by FOMMA, *La Mujer Desesperada* and *Viva La Vida*. I attended a performance of *Viva la Vida* during my stay in San Cristóbal and obtained a script of *La Mujer Desesperada*; my observation was that the male figure reappears as a dominant symbol in both performances. The male figure in both works is characterized as a drunk, abusive man, and in *Viva la Vida* appears as a highly exaggerated caricature, complete with dirty oversized clothes, a masculine swagger, and slurred speech. Older men in the play *Viva la Vida* are portrayed through the use of masks and exaggerated actions. Both represent a personification of personal negative social experiences and a reaction against institutionalized patriarchal subordination. Parodies such as these are used to draw the audience's attention to contextually important characters in the play. As theater researcher Laura Edmondson (2007: 2) has observed with regards to how important the audience is to the success of the production in Tanzanian theater: "audience reactions intensified this sense of excitement. Enthusiastic spectators called out advice to the characters in the full-length plays or joined in the *ngoma* as an expression of ethnic



**Figure 5: An Example of FOMMA’s social message**

identity.” Edmondson (2007: 3) also argued that there is a “transformative potential” in Tanzanian popular performances which hinges on audience participation and also appears in the performances of FOMMA in terms of their use of parody as a way to connect with their audiences.

When parodies of negative characters such as the drunk and abusive husband are made the audience, being drawn to the character because of his exaggerated expression, becomes hyper-aware of what sort of social message the troupe is promoting. This is an example of how theater reflects social life and “also reveals aspects of it which cannot be seen by observing it” (Peacock 1968: 236). FOMMA’s plays are way to provoke empathy in the audience and perhaps inspire some individuals to make important personal transformations. However, the audience connection may not be explicit, immediate, or obvious to the members of the troupe. Sometimes there is a direct connection when a new symbolic or social idea is presented in theater. In other instances there is “a sleeper effect where a person reacts negatively when first exposed to a symbolic medium but later changes his attitude to match that expressed by the medium” (Peacock 1968: 255). If the effect on the audience is not distinctly noticeable by the

actresses of FOMMA, a kind of disillusionment could befall the actor. Peacock (1968: 255) argued that “if the ideals expressed by the performance are novel – not yet manifest in society – then the artist or spectator may feel disillusioned when he turns from performance to society.” In either case, parody is used by FOMMA in an active search for that important audience connection. As Augusto Boal (2006: 6) argued, “all those present can intervene at any moment in the search for solutions for the problems being treated.” By connecting social life with theater, FOMMA searches for and proposes solutions to their audiences during every performance.

The plays *La Mujer Desesperada* and *Viva La Viva* are good examples of the important relationship which exists between social life and theater. Parody is an important tool for transforming a performance into a kind of social activism because it exposes the audience to the real connection between what is performed in the play and what occurs in social life. The women of FOMMA use theater to create stage dramas out of the social dramas they observe in their own lives and in their communities as a way to actively advocate social change. Social dramas are defined as “political processes that involve competition for scarce ends – power, dignity, prestige, honor, purity – by particular means and by the utilization of resources that are also scarce – goods, territory, money, men, and women” (Turner 1982: 71). These dramas, which in highland Chiapas revolve around indigenous rights, alcoholism, domestic abuse, women’s rights, and indigenous autonomy in the face of the capitalistic Mexican state, are what the women of FOMMA present theatrically with every one of their plays.

FOMMA’s plays embody the four major phases of the social drama. According to Turner (1957: 91) the first phase of ‘breach’ occurs when “the breach of regular norm-governed social relations occurs between persons or groups within the same system of social relations.” In *Viva la Vida*, for example, a breach occurs between the abusive husband and the pregnant wife when she openly criticizes him for spending their savings in the cantina. The second phase, that of ‘crisis’ occurs when “there is a tendency for the breach to widen and extend until it becomes co-extensive...the phase of crisis exposes the pattern of current factional struggles within the relevant group” (Turner 1957: 91). This occurs in *Viva la Vida* when the husband angrily storms out of the house, leaving the suffering pregnant woman with her mother, who speaks to her about how negative her

situation is. The third phase of a social drama is that of 'redressive action' which occurs when "certain adjustive and redressive mechanisms, informal or formal, are speedily brought into operation by leading members of the relevant social group" (Turner 1957: 92). In the play, the redressive action is primarily negative, because although the mother gives her daughter advice, the daughter's redressive action is her ultimate death during childbirth. The fourth and final phase of the social drama is 'reintegration,' which results in "the reintegration of the disturbed social group or in the social recognition of irreparable breach between the contesting parties" (Turner 1957: 92). This is represented as a mixed result in *Viva la Vida* because the mother dies, the father remains abusive, but the child survives, is raised by her grandmother, and finds a spouse who respects her.

Because Maya theater is an embodiment of real social dramas, parody emphasizes the audience connection by drawing their attention to characters that the FOMMA players believe have real social significance, thereby successfully transforming the social drama into a stage drama. This action creates a relationship of what Victor Turner (1982: 75) called reflexivity, or "a way in which a group tries to scrutinize, portray, understand, and then act on itself" which enables a reinvention of a new version of social life by the women of FOMMA for indigenous women in the highlands of Chiapas through the use of theater as social activism.

FOMMA also uses mimesis, where the players, by performing exaggerated versions of real social 'characters' that affect the lives of people in highland Maya communities, exhibit a kind of control over these forces. Mimesis is the idea that the copy "draws on the character and power of the original, to the point whereby the representation may even assume that character and power" (Taussig 1993: xiii). This idea transfers well to the role of parody and exaggerated characterization as a form of social activism found in Maya theater. FOMMA, for example, uses theater "as a medium for addressing problems such as domestic violence, rape, alcohol abuse, migration, and poverty as they affect the lives of women" (Marrero 2003: 292). Instances of mimesis occurs in plays written by one of the founding members of this troupe, Petrona de la Cruz Cruz, which focus on the harsh kinds of domestic abuse and general violence perpetrated against indigenous women that is excused by patriarchal societal organization in the Chiapas highlands.



**Figure 6: Masks as Mimesis during *Viva la Vida***

The play *Viva La Vida* uses parody as mimesis as a way to reproduce a fresh form of social life where women subsume social power from men. However, this assertion of authority through the use of the theatrical medium does not come without a social sacrifice. The portrayal of suffering women is reminiscent of the negative social experiences experienced by the female actresses themselves, and the male becomes an important symbol throughout the theatrical discourse and in real life as well. As mentioned earlier, the male in the play *Viva La Vida* becomes a symbol of neglect, abuse, and irresponsibility in the lives of women and their children. This play focuses specifically on the theme of maternal death, which results from the negligence of the main male figure to attend to his wife's medical needs. The husband character abused his wife while she was pregnant and spent his time and money in the local cantina while the wife's mother tried, with her limited monetary and social resources, to save her daughter and the unborn child. At the climax of the play, the wife dies in childbirth and the grandmother is left with the infant, who is raised in a positive environment and marries a man who does not have the same abusive qualities of her father.

FOMMA uses the stage for social and personal transformation and as a space where the Other is embodied, critiqued and as a result, controlled through mimesis. The

plays of FOMMA represent an exercise in alterity, of establishing a relationship between the indigenous female Self and the colonizing, intrusive male Other, and an experience of actually becoming that Other via the use of parody. FOMMA's performances encapsulate a broader struggle for indigenous female rights through a theatrical intersection of Mayan female Self with Mayan male Other. Spatial and cultural boundaries are transcended when the women portray men in the plays and "condemn the male characters' irresponsibility, drunkenness, greed, cowardice, and violence towards women, as contrasted with the female characters' integrity, valor, and solidarity with one another" (Steele 1994: 248). The use of parody and exaggerated characterization allows this condemnation to occur by forcing the female Self to 'become' male Other. This action becomes a form of social activism because female characters are vindicated and male characters are chastised for their abusive actions through the use of parody, thereby resulting in the call for social change and public awareness to the plight of indigenous women.

When women dress as men, it can be classified as an exercise in 'drag,' which "plays upon the distinctions b/t the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed" (Butler 1990: 137). Part of the nature of using drag as mimesis in FOMMA's work is revealing the myth of normative constructs of gender by deconstructing the socially accepted archetype of 'male.' According to Butler (1990: 138), "the parody is of the very notion of the very notion of an original; just as the psychoanalytic notion of gender identification is constituted by a fantasy of a fantasy" and that "the transfiguration of an Other who is always already a 'figure' in a double sense, so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin." By dismantling the construct of male identity through drag and mimesis, the women of FOMMA co-opt masculine power to show the women in the audiences that new social worlds can become a reality for them.

### **Conclusion: How Maya Women use Activist Theater to Cultivate Social Awareness**

For FOMMA, theater functions as a political platform for addressing social grievances relevant to the lives of women in indigenous communities by offering tangible ideas for social change. Through the use of theater, the women of FOMMA create a kind of 'hidden transcript' which allows them to voice their opinions within a social space

independent from the overarching influence and patriarchal domination of men. Their plays can be classified as hidden transcripts because they are “a declaration that breaches the etiquette of power relations that breaks an apparently calm surface of silence and consent, carrying the force of a symbolic declaration of war” (Scott 1990: 8). Indeed, their performances carry messages which speak out against the injustices dealt to many Maya women who feel they do not have a voice to make any changes in their situation, much like a declaration of war. At the close of the final act of *Viva la Vida*, for example, the members of FOMMA raised several signs which reiterated their social message. These signs, written in large red and black capital letters, said the following: “LUCHEMOS POR NUESTRO DERECHO DE VIVIR...NUNCA MAS...¡¡YA BASTA!! NO MAS MUERTE...DEBEMOS DE LLEVAR EL CONTROL PRENATAL LIBRE Y RESPONSABLEMENTE.” These signs function as banners of protest and discontent which, through the use of the stage, are a kind of social activism because of the powerful social messages that are conveyed to indigenous audiences.

However, the works of FOMMA are both representative of a hidden and public transcript because the troupe performs their theatrical works for non-indigenous audiences of academics and sometimes tourists in addition to the women of highland Maya communities, and has in the past been funded by governmental organizations. The paradox is that these women and the plays they create intentionally call hegemonic discourses into question, but are publicly funded by the same establishments they criticize. The women of FOMMA, despite their production of anti-establishment and anti-patriarchal discourses, participate in Mexican society at large in order to sustain their financial livelihoods. Their work is interesting because they promote a platform for social activism by expressing grievances and ideas for social change while also taking into account the social limitations that may influence the effectiveness of their message. As contradictory as this conundrum appears, FOMMA’s situation can be considered typical of subordinated groups: “Short of the total declaration of war that one does occasionally find in the midst of a revolutionary crisis, most protests and challenges are made in the realistic expectation that the central features of the form of domination will remain intact” (Scott 1990: 92). Nevertheless, their theater exposes some of the

unaddressed social problems present in highland Maya communities that negatively affect the lives of women.

The plays of FOMMA also create an atmosphere of social awareness by commenting on other social issues affecting highland Maya communities. Some such works include the play *Migración*, which addresses “the migration of poor, indigenous peoples to large urban areas” and *Amor en la barranca* which speaks to the important social issue of birth control and education regarding contraceptive options for traditionally Catholic families (Marrero 2003: 319). The performers of FOMMA represent a proactive social movement in favor of equal rights for women as well as public education regarding the negative effects of domestic abuse for families and communities as a whole.

Social activism, as what is produced through performance by the women of FOMMA, is a growing phenomenon among groups of indigenous women in El Salvador, Brazil, Chile, and even in other areas of Mexico. This trend reflects a shared experience among indigenous women of exploitation, pain, suffering, and marginality. Regarding grassroots indigenous female activism, Lynn Stephen (1997: 6) observed that “in many cases women who inhabit these positions have found ways of coping, of redefining marginality, of struggling and resisting, of encountering joy and happiness in human relations.” Grassroots organizations throughout Latin America and groups like FOMMA challenge patriarchal oppression by “confronting the systems of inequality that push them to the margins” (Stephen 1997: 6). While some of these organizations challenge patriarchy through outright political protest, FOMMA cultivates social awareness specifically through theatrical productions that use parody as a way to focus attention on key social issues. Maya theater as social activism is but one characteristic of how the members of Lo’il Maxil and FOMMA use performance. The women of Lo’il Maxil and FOMMA also achieve it through their simple participation in a theater group. The roles of women in Maya theater will be discussed again in Chapter Six in terms of how they influence the creation of new cultural traditions. In the next chapter, I explore the intrinsic role of history in the production of the plays of Lo’il Maxil, and how this relates to the preservation and revitalization of Maya cultural heritage.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **HISTORY AND THE PLAY**

#### **Introduction**

Just as theater is used as a political platform for social activism by the group FOMMA, Lo'il Maxil uses it as a way to present and reinterpret folkloric and recorded history in order to convey the value of preserving Maya culture to their audiences. As their promotional brochure illustrates, Lo'il Maxil is highly concerned with cultural preservation: "in Mexico, where racism continues to be prevalent, Sna's endeavors have brought a new awareness of the dignity and richness of Mayan culture" (Sna Jtz'ibajom promotional materials). 'History' for Lo'il Maxil can be seen as a maneuverable theatrical entity which they use as an apparatus for connecting with people in their communities by purveying the message that it is possible to be 'Maya' in the globalized world. Lo'il Maxil uses folkloric and documented history as a foundation for their performances that provide the foundation for a (re)creation of history through the utilization of cultural memory. As I will address in the concluding chapter of this thesis, this process of (re)creation also opens up a dialogue for the creation of new cultural traditions which emphasize elements of highland Maya cultural heritage that are obscured by the introduction of Western ideas, technologies, and cultural norms.

The goals of Lo'il Maxil's theater echo elements of "culture" theater, described by Boal (1998: 219) as that which "tackles issues from the people's perspective, that is, the perspective of permanent transformation, of anti-alienation, of struggle against exploitation, etc." These themes are present in the outlined objectives of the Sna Jtz'ibajom cooperative, which are followed by the Lo'il Maxil troupe and include: a reinforcement of the maternal language in both oral and written form, a promotion of bilingual education with a preference for literacy in the mother tongue, an attempt to "make known the essential aspects of autochthonous culture to the Spanish-speaking Mexicans so that they may appreciate and not denigrate it," and a support of the artistic and literary endeavors of other Indians (Frischmann 1994). The political platform of Lo'il Maxil is not unique to their work in highland Chiapas. In Canada, an indigenous theater group was created in 1984 (one year after the creation of Sna Jtz'ibajom)

consisting of Eskimo actors. This theater group, known as the Chevak Tanqik Theater, has been described as a “cultural heritage” program which interestingly has very similar goals to Sna Jtz’ibajom. A selection of their objectives is as follows: “to ensure the documentation and survival of Cup’ik history, traditional values, legends, myths, and dances, to encourage the speaking and a sense of appreciation for the first language, Cup’ik, to enlighten non-native audiences as to the issues that face indigenous peoples by promoting understanding, and to serve as an empowerment tool” (Weiser 1992:46). As with the Lo’il Maxil troupe, the Chevak Tanqik Theater group perpetuates a platform of social and cultural awareness not just for other indigenous people but for non-indigenous people as well. The objectives of both groups elicit a sense of pride in being native, whether that ‘nativeness’ derives from being Eskimo or from being Maya. Theater for both groups functions as both language and discourse; for the Lo’il Maxil troupe, their goal is to, through performance, spark social action within the indigenous spectator.

Theater becomes “language” when the actors “begins to practice theater as a language that is living and present, not as a finished product displaying images of the past,” and is discourse when “the spectator-actor creates spectacles according to his need to discuss certain themes or rehearse certain actions” (Boal 1979: 126). The theatrical works created and performed by Lo’il Maxil resuscitate identity awareness within indigenous communities, and can easily be categorized as a type of popular theater. The term “popular theater” characterizes theatrical works that “conform to the transformation-oriented perspective of the people, who are also its intended audience” and usually take place “in front of large concentrations of workers, in union meetings, in the streets, in the squares, in residents’ associations and other such places” (Boal 1998: 213). Undeniably, Lo’il Maxil targets highland Maya communities; their works have self-reportedly “reached hundreds of communities throughout Chiapas” (Sna Jtz’ibajom promotional materials). FOMMA can also be categorized as popular theater because of their work regarding social activism and the plight of indigenous women, but their works do not address the issue of history as Lo’il Maxil does. Lo’il Maxil performs for and within indigenous communities because, as Boal (1979: 105) noted, “the popular artist must abandon the downtown stages and go to the neighborhoods, because only there will he find people who are truly interested in changing society; in the neighborhoods he should

show his images of social life to the workers who are interested in changing that social life, because they are its victims.” It is within this context that Lo’il Maxil uses theater as a means to promote awareness about the importance of maintaining and preserving highland Maya culture and history in the face of social change.

### **The Role of History in Maya Theater**

In order to understand how Lo’il Maxil (re)creates history in its performances, it is important to uncover how history is defined academically in order to provide a comparison to how it is defined or (re)created in terms of Maya theater. The basis of this comparison hinges on the notion that Lo’il Maxil uses history partially as a response against inherent biases in the production of the historical record. These biases are examined by Trouillot (1995: 49), who argued that not all historical facts are created equally, which indicates a “differential control of the means of historical production.” Lo’il Maxil attempts to reallocate control of the historical means of production by creating a space where cultural performances about Maya pre-colonial and modern history can be performed. A ‘cultural’ performance is defined as “what we in the West usually call plays, concerts, and lectures...but they include also prayers, ritual readings and recitations...” that become “the elementary constituents of the culture and the ultimate units of observation” (Turner 1987: 23). The dramatization of traditional Maya myths from the *Popol Vuh*, folktales from the highland municipalities that surround San Cristóbal, as well as plays that address the Maya experience in terms of recorded history can be all be classified as such performances because they are a public portrayal of cultural history with the goal of bringing attention to important aspects of Maya culture through the use of theater.

It is obvious from the works the group chooses to perform that there is a great emphasis on how the Maya perspective has often been compromised and obscured in recorded history. These untold or underemphasized historical narratives are classified silences, which are defined as those instances during the production of the historical record when some people, things, or events are left absent from the sources and archives that compose ‘history.’ Trouillot (1995: 26) argued that silences are constructed differentially as the result of a series of unique processes which are essential to historical production: the moment of fact creation, the moment of fact assembly (the creation of

archives), the moment of fact retrieval (the making of narratives), and the moment of retrospective significance, which is the making of history. He observed that “any historical narrative is a particular bundle of silences, the result of a unique process” (Trouillot 1995: 27). Theatrical production becomes a way to confront the silences of the colonial and post-colonial historical record, and Lo’il Maxil does this not only by dramatizing folktales but by (re)creating Maya history. Theater is appropriate for Lo’il Maxil’s goals of cultural preservation, maintenance, and awareness because performances “are not simple mirrors but magical mirrors of social reality: they exaggerate, invert, re-form, magnify, minimize, dis-color, re-color, even deliberately falsify, chronicled events” (Turner 1987: 42).

What then defines ‘history’ as it is used within the academic realm? Marshall Sahlins argued that history consists of a series of events which occur within the context of a structural system. He argued that “once introduced into the human domain, given a definite cultural value, the natural phenomenon will assume some particular effect, as orchestrated by the relations of the particular cultural scheme” (Sahlins 2000: 299). Every ‘event’ begins as an incident, and only becomes a historical event when the social structure of a given society makes it culturally recognized. The definition of the event itself is not considered a general social phenomenon but is instead complex and culturally specific: “at once a sui generis phenomenon with its own force, shape, and causes, and the significance these qualities acquire in the cultural context, significance in the double sense of meaning and importance” (Sahlins 2000: 300). Furthermore, incidents are only categorized as events when they present a contrast, a resistance against, or a disruption of the social order. Historical events, as Sahlins (2000: 320) argued, cannot occur without social structure: “each is responsible for the existence of the other, yet neither can account for the characteristics of the other.” This is the way in which history functions as both a disruption and a reiteration of the pre-existing structural order.

History is also defined in terms of structures of political economy. Eric Wolf, in his treatise *Europe and the People without History*, argued that both individual and collective histories of all societies from the Age of Discovery until the present day are determined by the guiding hand of the capitalistic world system. He did not categorize history simply as a series of events but argued for academic recognition of the so-called

people without history, those indigenous and colonized cultures and societies who were often considered 'swept away' by the tide of European colonialism during the 1400s and beyond. Wolf (1997: x) argued that "the idea was to show that human societies and cultures would not be properly understood until we learned to visualize them in their mutual interrelationships and interdependencies in space and time." History, according to Wolf, is not determined by the European perspective alone because all societies, be they Native American or European, do not function as cultural isolates but were and continue to be historically connected by a capitalistic world system.

Sahlins and Wolf both perceived the individual and collective actions that define history as completely structurally determined. Wolf (1997: xiii) argued that "people do not always resist the constraints in which they find themselves, nor can they reinvent themselves freely in cultural constructions of their own choosing. Culture refashioning and culture change go forward continually under variable, but also highly determinate, circumstances." However, the structural system that dictates not only the course of history but what kind of "history" is recorded is constantly undulating due to the "mobilization of social labor" which is differentially experienced across cultures and across time but nonetheless determines the course of world history (Wolf 1997). Although the structure itself undergoes transformations over time, historical events are only considered slight perturbations of the established cultural order. Trouillot argued against this assertion by stating that history does not only occur because of structures, but is actively created and consumed and is, by definition, one-sided.

Although Wolf demonstrated that the indigenous, non-European Other has history, he does not show how historical 'silences' obscure important elements in the record accounts of past cultural events. Trouillot (1995: 146) argued that "the value of a historical product cannot be debated without taking into account both the context of its production and the context of its consumption," meaning that the researcher cannot presume that history is objective simply from the accounts that emerge in the historical record. Trouillot (1995: 49) also asserted that although "some peoples and things are absent of history, lost, as it were, to the possible world of knowledge, it is much less relevant to the historical practice than the fact that some peoples and things are absent in history, and that this absence itself is constitutive of the process of historical production."

Acknowledging individuals or historically disenfranchised groups facilitates a discovery of how people respond to the structural constraints of historical and cultural processes. The academic perspectives of researchers such as Sahlins and Wolf are important for understanding how history and culture influence one another, but there is also a need to acknowledge examples which contradict a hegemonic definition of history. Lo'il Maxil provides an excellent example of how individuals can collaborate and combine their cultural knowledge in a way that addresses this issue. As the group shows, their theater actually addresses (instead of succumbs to) the structural constraints which regulate production of the historic record by using history in a way that promotes an enlivened, not diminished, public awareness of the importance of Maya cultural preservation.

### **The (Re) Creation of History**

Theater is used by Lo'il Maxil specifically to recreate a markedly 'Maya' version of their cultural history in order to educate members of the highland Chiapas Maya communities in their cultural traditions. The integration of Classic Maya myths with local Tzotzil and Tzeltal folklore in their theatrical works functions as way for Lo'il Maxil to 'capture' their cultural heritage. Soccoro Gómez Hernández of Lo'il Maxil noted that she felt that there are many things about her own culture and traditions that she doesn't necessarily know, and by performing the troupe's collective knowledge of history onstage, she not only educates the public but educates herself as well. The sentiment of learning about their past is shared by other members of Lo'il Maxil, and this aspect of their theater is highly emphasized in the promotional pamphlets they hand out during their performances. These promotional materials, which are printed in English for the academic or international tourist audiences they sometimes perform for, express a great desire to not only understand their history, but to reenact it using theater. Members of the group noted in the pamphlet state that "theater is a way to express my culture," "to know more about my culture is to know more about myself," and that "theater gives me great liberty" (Sna Jtz'ibajom promotional materials).

The Lo'il Maxil troupe revitalizes and reinforces a sense of indigenous identity by using theater to reinterpret history. This is the value of using what Trouillot refers to as the historical product, which "cannot be debated without taking into account both the

context of its production and the context of its consumption” (Trouillot 1995: 146). For Lo’il Maxil, the context of production includes a syncretism of Classic Maya origin myths, highland Maya folklore, and the interpretations of these documents and oral histories by the actors themselves within the context of the theater. Consumption, Trouillot’s terms, occurs by the troupe itself and by the communities the troupe performs for. The value of the historical product (re)created by Lo’il Maxil is indispensable to their social cause because it serves their interest in cultural preservation. A promotional pamphlet published by Sna Jtz’ibajom reiterates the importance of producing a historical product that is palpable to the masses: “For over twenty years Sna has proven to fellow Indians and to the world at home and abroad that Mayan culture did not crumble with pyramids, but still flourishes today” (Sna Jtz’ibajom promotional materials).

Lo’il Maxil’s 1993 production of the play *¡Vámanos al paraíso!* (Let’s Go to Paradise!) provides an example of how the troupe addresses historical silences through the use of theater. The play focused on “the extreme abuses committed by lowlands coffee growers against indigenous peons: indentured labor, machete blows for ‘laziness,’ double hours, and filthy living conditions” (Frischmann 1994: 234). The problem of hacienda abuse in Mexico dates back to the 1800s but this play specifically addresses the abuses incurred by indigenous wage laborers on haciendas during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which were exacerbated by the so-called ‘progressive’ reforms of the Porfirio Díaz dictatorship of the 1890s and early 1900s. Under the Díaz regime, hacienda debt peonage was commonplace, especially in the lowland states of Chiapas, Tabasco, Yucatán, and Campeche, thereby enhancing the “annual flow of labor from highland to lowland” which “became a feature of Porfirian rural economy” (Knight 1986: 14). The flow of consensual labor from the highland areas to the *tierra caliente*, or hot lowland areas, was augmented by “forms of forced labor, penal servitude, and the ensnarement of nominally ‘free’ contract labor by the system of debt peonage which reached its harshest in southern plantations” (Knight 1986: 14). This uneven allocation of power is recorded in the historical record in terms of the negative economic and social results of the Díaz regime; however the *peones* do not speak for themselves in the history textbooks. These oversights are addressed in *¡Vámanos al paraíso!* from the perspective of indigenous persons who were subjected to the physical abuses outlined by the historical accounts.

Through the production of plays like *¡Vámanos al paraíso!* Lo'il Maxil (re)creates a kind of history where indigenous experiences are recognized and celebrated and not obscured by the annals of the historical record.

### **Theater as a Performance of Cultural Memory**

For indigenous groups like the Maya, aspects of their cultural heritage, including mythic and folkloric explanations of historical occurrences, are often disregarded as 'traditional' or 'local' knowledge. Local knowledge is defined as "the tacit knowledge embodied in life experiences and reproduced in everyday behavior and speech" of indigenous people that is often acknowledged as "static, timeless, and hermetically sealed" (Cruikshank 2005: 9). This knowledge, however depicted by outside observers, may be embodied in the cultural memory of indigenous peoples and can be relegated to the realm of historical silences. The theater group Lo'il Maxil combats the production of these silences by enlivening cultural memory and producing fluid and animate results through the use of theater. Lo'il Maxil as a troupe is not unique in its aim to perform history; the Canadian theater group Tlingit Naa Kahídi traveled from Alaska to Canada during 1993 presenting a popular local folktale that captured indigenous and non-indigenous audiences alike. Julie Cruikshank (2005: 152) observed that "clan histories endure and their performance engages contemporary readers and listeners because they continue to be rooted in general social concerns and dramatize areas of social life that seem problematic." This sentiment holds true for Lo'il Maxil's work as well because they use the re-enactment of history as a platform for addressing general social concerns which affect highland Maya communities.

Indeed, the Sna Jtz'ibajom collective as a whole "is documenting everyday life and especially religious ceremonies via radio programs and by still and video photography" (Sna Jtz'ibajom promotional materials). Lo'il Maxil, as the theatrical component of the collective, serves as an important manifestation of highland Maya cultural memory. The cultural memory is defined as "a practice and an act of imagination and interconnection" between individuals who have shared collective experiences, or memories, which are symbolized in their shared cultural heritage (Taylor 2005: 83). These collective or cultural memories such as those of conquest, slavery, and the like represent "a continuum between inner and outer, much as there is between the

live present and the living past, and a notion that individuals and groups share commonalities in both the here/now and the there/then, made evidenced through embodied experience” (Taylor 2005: 83).

The plays performed by Lo’il Maxil capitalize on the importance of indigenous cultural memories of Conquest and subsequent colonial and post-colonial social, political, and economic repression in order to transmit a message regarding the importance cultural solidarity through identity maintenance. A performance in 1992 by the troupe of their play *Dinastía de jaguars* (Dynasty of Jaguars) is a good example of the utilization of cultural memory because it uses the premise of the shared experience of Conquest in order to create rapport with their Mayan audience. The scope of the play spans for several centuries, “beginning with the mythical times of origin, through the Classic Mayan period, and up until the Spanish Conquest” (Frischmann 1994: 232). It addressed the social, religious, and political changes which occurred during these important historical periods in Maya history. This play, and others performed by the Lo’il Maxil troupe, serves as a reflection of the past and a reminder of the importance of remembering and inventing history in the present.

The members of Lo’il Maxil believe that plays taken from texts like the *Popol Vuh* and others which are written by the actors but are based on oral traditions, archaeological evidence, or historical sources are appropriate for their mission of cultural preservation and embody a kind of cultural memory. Their broad use of sources, from those that explicitly relate to the oral traditions of local highland Maya communities such as Zinacantán or Chamula to those that encompass the oral histories of other Mayan groups who are linguistically and culturally differentiated from the highland Maya illustrates the cultural and historical validity of what Diana Taylor defines as the “repertoire.” The repertoire allows for an enactment of embodied memory through creative gestures such as theatrical performance, which serve as an individual, unique “treasury” or “inventory” of information that is “usually thought of as ephemeral, non-reproducible knowledge” (Taylor 2005: 20). The history recorded in mythic texts like the *Popol Vuh* may not be their specific highland cultural history, but the inclusion of it in their works represents an encapsulation of general Maya cultural memories, which are then transferred to the public through the theatrical medium.

This action characterizes the nature of the repertoire, which in the case of Lo'il Maxil is used as a tool to combat the historical silences imposed by colonialism. Theater becomes an "embodied act" that "transmits communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next. Embodied and performed acts generate, record, and transmit knowledge" (Taylor 2005: 21). Colonial history is embodied by the "archive or the written texts which succeeds in "separating the source of 'knowledge' from the knower in time and/or space" (Taylor 2005: 19). The archive includes the "documents maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films" and other such media which serve as *the* record of historical events. The problem with the archive is that historical silences are often created within its depths, and these omissions are confronted by Lo'il Maxil via their use of the repertoire in theater. Therefore, Lo'il Maxil can utilize other non-local Maya cultural myths because they are representative of the general cultural memories of 'being' Maya, although these folktales and myths may not be part of their actual historical archive.

### **Conclusion**

When I conducted my interviews, a majority of the responses by the men of Sna Jtz'ibajom revolved around the importance of preserving and maintaining 'traditional' Mayan culture. Regarding the intention of their work, several members noted that the use of theater as a presentation aid is a crucial component for achieving their goals and that "the point of our work is for the community, the people, society; there are many elements of the cultural traditions that are being forgotten as times change because such factors as religion and society force these changes" (Interview 2006). Furthermore, the male members "feel as if it's our obligation to preserve the culture, to write something down that our children and the people of the community can use and look back to; theater is what allows us to preserve tradition" (Interview 2006). The (re)creation of history by the group achieves this goal.

Lo'il Maxil's works are used as a means to maintain, retain, and inform the public of the importance of preserving highland Maya cultural traditions. The Lo'il Maxil troupe's (re)creation of history reiterates a basic theoretical assumption that modern drama "presumes the individual spectator" by utilizing shared cultural memories of real historical events in order to connect with their audiences (Tuan 1990: 240). This

connection is further accentuated by the combination of Lo'il Maxil's interpretations of history as written by those in power with the mythic history of the Quiché Maya and local Tzotzil and Tzeltal folktales. The use of both genres reinforces their theatrical mission of promoting a sense of vitality in highland Maya culture and demonstrates that myths and folktales are an integral part of weaving the story of the *modern* Maya. In the next chapter, I address the use of myth in Maya theater by providing an analytic comparison between an excerpt from the *Popol Vuh* and a play created by Lo'il Maxil in order to illustrate how the group's use of folklore is related to their mission of heritage preservation and, on a larger scale, how it becomes part of the invention of new cultural traditions.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### MYTH AND FOLKTALE IN MAYA THEATER

#### **Introduction**

As I outlined in the previous chapter, highland Maya mythic and folkloric history is considered an important characteristic of Maya cultural maintenance by the members of Lo'il Maxil. In their plays, 'history' often exists in a folkloric and mythic context, and the group creates plays which dramatize 'local' highland Maya folktales and parts of larger bodies of mythology, including the *Popol Vuh*. Not only are folktales entertaining for audiences, they can also contain moral messages. The use of these folkloric and mythic texts is beneficial for Lo'il Maxil because it is a creative way to incorporate history into their message of cultural preservation. I discovered this after one of the founding members of Lo'il Maxil, Juan de la Torre López, was generous enough to email me the script of a dramatized version of a Tzotzil folktale. Although it was not the same work I observed during my time in San Cristóbal, it can easily be used in a comparison with the Maya mythic text the *Popol Vuh* which was used as inspiration for another work by Lo'il Maxil, entitled *Dinastía de jaguares*. There are shared themes in both these works which easily translate as a theatrically nuanced push towards a control of Maya history and cultural heritage which results, as will be discussed later, in an action that elicits the creation of new cultural traditions. A structural comparison between a story taken from the *Popol Vuh* and Lo'il Maxil's *Cuando Nació el Maíz* flushes out an important theme that relates well to the group's use of myth as a means for conveying their social message. It also illustrates the point that the group finds it appropriate to draw upon the large and diverse canon of *Maya* folkloric literature in order to raise awareness about the importance of solidarity, cultural maintenance, and the preservation of Maya traditions through theatrical interpretations of mythic history. Their use of a collage of "Maya" myths and folktales from various regions and time periods also helps solidify the notion that Maya theater is used as a way to create new cultural traditions.

In order to approach the study of a myth or theatrical script, one must first disentangle the seemingly arbitrary jungle of signs, metaphors, characters, plot lines, and events present within the story. Levi-Strauss's structural method helps organize a myth

by revealing a kind of dualism which encompasses both its timeless, supernatural elements as well as its historical cultural basis. Through a structural analysis of myth, folktale, or script, signs are rearranged in a way that provides a multi-dimensional view of specific cultural values, norms, and taboos hitherto overshadowed by mythical contradictions. Levi-Strauss (1963: 210) noted that “if there is meaning to be found in mythology, it cannot reside in the isolated elements which enter into the composition of a myth, but only in the way those elements are combined”. In the case of the Maya, a structural analysis and comparison of their creation myth with one of Lo’il Maxil’s plays provides a systematic way to uncover an important theme shared between them, and in so doing relate this theme to the overarching goals of the Lo’il Maxil troupe.

### **A Comparison between the *Popol Vuh* and *Cuando Nació el Maíz***

I have chosen an excerpt from the *Popol Vuh* entitled “How the Gods Made the Sky-Earth” as an analog for comparison with the Lo’il Maxil play *Cuando Nació el Maíz*. The oppositions I uncovered when structurally analyzing this portion of the myth are divided into three separate groups that can all, on various levels, be related to themes found in the play. A focus on the oppositions found in this selection provides a way of identifying key structural elements found in the myth and simplifies the comparison between it and *Cuando Nació el Maíz*. In the selection “How the Gods Made the Sky-Earth,” there is a cyclical pattern of creation and destruction present that can be subdivided into two realms of ‘supernatural’ and ‘earthly’ oppositions. The “supernatural oppositions” consist of two sets which refer to two different actions or events in the myth. The first set, entitled “The Empty World” is a set of supernatural oppositions that are only present at the beginning of the myth, when Plumed Serpent and Hurricane meet to decide how to create land and populate the world. The second set of supernatural oppositions, labeled “Creation” are only present in the myth when the first race of “people” (not necessarily meaning human people) was created with the help of Grandmother Xmucane and Grandfather Xpiyacoc. The third set of oppositions is part of what I termed the “earthly oppositions” which specifically refer to those oppositions found only on earth and during the cycles of earthly activity after the creation of first people. This includes the creation and actions of animals, mud men, wooden manikins, people, as well as the actions of the gods themselves. The final opposition present in this



**Figure 7: Lo'il Maxil Reinterpreting Classic Maya Mythic History**

set, regarding gods opposed to gods, represents the cyclical nature of the gods' role in the creation and destruction of life on earth.

The following conclusions are made after listing the oppositions: there is a conception of life and death as part of a cyclical transformation which reinvents itself infinitely and divine powers are seen as in charge of these forces of destruction and creation, but there must be an earthly mediator for these forces to manifest. Additionally, humans are seen as disconnected from the divine in a way animals are not, but nevertheless humans are aware of the cyclical pattern of life and death, dawn and night, and birth and decay as exhibited in nature by the changing of the seasons. This awareness of cyclicity is present in current ethnographic accounts of the Maya. For example, the Zinacantecan Mayas of highland Chiapas, Mexico perceive their world in terms of a quadrilateral cosmos, or cubical world, which rests upon the shoulders of the Four-Corner Gods (Vogt 1970: 3). The sun and moon cycle within this world, and both

circle the cubical world by passing through “Upper” and “Lower” worlds; this cosmological cyclical model “also influences the Zinacanteco view of and ritual treatment of their houses and fields” (Vogt 1970: 4). This ethnographic evidence reiterates the notion that a vital relationship exists between ‘ancient’ Maya cosmology and modern Maya cultural practices, one that Lo’il Maxil attempts to maintain through their dramatizations of mythic history.

The act of sowing is an important theme drawn out the structural analysis of this excerpt which can be compared to *Cuando Nació el Maíz*. In the *Popol Vuh*, sowing refers to the dawning of something new in the world created by the gods. Dennis Tedlock (1996: 31) noted that “there is a sowing of seeds in the earth, whose sprouting will be their dawning, and there is the sowing of the sun, moon, and stars.” Additionally, sowing refers to human beings, “whose sowing in the womb will be followed by their emergence into the light at birth, and whose sowing in the earth at death will be followed by dawning when their souls becomes sparks of light in the darkness” (Tedlock 1996: 32). Sowing is also the central theme in the Lo’il Maxil play *Cuando nació el maíz* (*When Corn was Born*) (see **Appendix 2**) which outlines a Tzotzil folktale about a man who is chosen by the gods to plant the first corn in the earth, thus giving human beings something to eat besides rocks. The characters in this story are produced as pairs, and the story itself has a dualistic nature, with the opening and ending scenes consisting of a grandmother telling her four grandchildren (two boys and two girls) about the when corn was born while the folktale itself dominates the majority of the play. The play includes several important binary oppositions that relate to the fundamental element of complementarity in the Maya system of value. Tedlock (1996: 59) noted with regards to the contemporary Quiché Maya of Guatemala that they “think of dualities in general as complementary rather than opposed, interpenetrating rather than mutually exclusive.” In *Cuando nació el maíz*, there are oppositions between rocks and corn, humans and gods, men and women, humans and animals, ignorance and enlightenment, disbelief and faith, the god of earth and the gods of the sky, lies and truth, drought and rain, people and ants, and between neighbors and friends.

The major schema of this play can be interpreted as the gods wanting to relate to people on earth for the sustenance of human life by aiding them but not completely



**Figure 8: The Members of Lo'il Maxil during the Performance of a Creation Myth**

providing support for them. Humans, before the time when corn was born, were lazy and did not like to work, till fields, or do anything but sit around, sleep, and consume soft rocks. In order for humans to reap the benefits of the gods' gifts, they must work for them. The gift of corn is bestowed upon a man named Pedro, who is seen by the gods as "innocent" and more capable than his cohorts at completing the task of planting corn (*Cuando nació el maíz* 2002: 3). Pedro is the central protagonist of the play, and relates to all the different characters in complimentary, and sometimes antagonistic, ways. Pedro, firstly, relates to the gods through his realization of the importance of the gift of corn to humans. When he begins his toils of growing corn, he enters into negative relationships with his neighbors who, through their opposition to the legitimacy of his work and disbelief of his story, serve to reinforce Pedro in his labor. Two women also function as antagonists, who discouraged Pedro by planting rocks in his freshly plowed field and ruining his first crop of corn. Pedro also enters into disagreement with the god of the earth or "earth-owner," who hordes amply supplies of corn but does not want to

share his wealth with human beings. On the positive end of the relationship spectrum, Pedro relates well to the two gods, who provide encouragement and supply him with the corn. He also communicates well with the animals in the play, which include a scorpion, several ants, and a toad, who aid him in his quest for more corn after the two women ruin his first yield.

The major transformation in the play arrives when Pedro successfully plants and harvests the gift of ‘civilized’ life, his corn. Pedro undergoes a personal transformation from ignorance to enlightenment when he harvests his yield, and aids in the major transformation of members of his community when he presents his crop to them. All the members of his community, even the antagonistic neighbors and conspicuous women, praise him for his success and transform into cognizant human beings who now have faith in the possibility that they can produce food for themselves and not have to gain their sustenance from rocks.

### **Conclusion**

Both mythological narratives found in the *Popol Vuh* and the play *Cuando Nació el Maíz* emphasize a process of transformation and creation through the act of sowing. The works accentuate the dualistic, complimentary nature of the earth and the divine cosmos. Sowing, as a consistent theme in both works, implies the planting of something by using physical labor to achieve the goal of growing something new, be it humans or corn. The repetition of this theme in the dramatized folkloric works of Lo’il Maxil does not occur by happenstance. The incorporation of myths serves as a way for the group to expand their scope of Maya ‘history,’ but they are doing more than increasing their means for preserving Maya cultural knowledge. The use of mythic works that emphasize the ‘sowing’ of corn or the personal ‘transformation’ of characters may become metaphors for the sowing of new ideas and the call for personal transformations of audience members using ideas or social solutions that the group introduces, which will be discussed in Chapter Six.

The members of Lo’il Maxil choose themes that reflect Maya oral traditions because they feel it is important to translate a message “which stresses unity and peaceful coexistence as the keys to cultural survival” (Frischmann 1994: 233). Indeed, there are several parallels between the stories in the *Popol Vuh* and their works which illustrate

what Diana Taylor (2006: 83) categorized as a break from the colonialist, chronological version of history: “The bearers of performance, those who engage in it, are also the bearers of history who link the layers past-present-future through practice. Thus, the performance event, like the historical event, both affirms and breaks with the cyclical, Hegelian pattern of again-ness. Therein lies its transformative power.” My interviews with the current members of Sna Jtz’ibajom and Lo’il Maxil corroborate this view. Some members of Sna Jtz’ibajom have published their scripts in print form in order to spread public and international awareness about the heritage and social issues of their communities. Members Juan Benito de la Torre López and María de la Cruz Vásquez, for example, published a collection of folklore and descriptions of the cultural traditions in their home community of Zinacantán. The stories included in their volume *Florilegio de Zinacantán* discuss aspects of traditional family life, the meaning and use of the sombrero in Zinacantán, and a description of the art of floristry, of which the Zinacantecos accomplished practitioners. The introduction to this volume, written by Francisco Álvarez Quiñones, embodies the reasoning behind the creation of the book and its potential importance in the Mayan traditionalist movement of which Sna Jtz’ibajom is a part: “*Florilegio de Zinacantán* gives a complete reflection on the effects of processes of modernity while showing that ancestral culture does not have to be lost; this volume is indispensable for understanding a vision of the future for Zinacantecos in the state of Chiapas” (Álvarez Quiñones 2005: xi). Myths and folktales play an important part in the mission of cultural preservation as outlined by Lo’il Maxil. The Maya players use theater to structure their conjuncture with global society in a way that empowers them to bring out those aspects of their history and contemporary social situations that have previously been silenced. After conducting structural analyses of an excerpt from the *Popol Vuh* and *Cuando Nació el Maíz*, it is clear that myths and folktales add a dimension to the plays of Lo’il Maxil which becomes a transferring a message of cultural preservation, transformation, and invention that provides the foundation for the creation of new cultural traditions.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **CONCLUSION: THEATER AND THE PRODUCTION OF CULTURAL TRADITIONS**

In the previous chapters, I have examined how Maya theater is used by FOMMA as a platform for social activism and by Lo'il Maxil as a way to (re)create mythic and recorded history. These given characteristics of their theatrical works are what I consider part of a larger discourse involving the creation of new cultural traditions. These 'new' traditions are produced when theater is used as a tool for cultural preservation and as social activism because both aspects of Maya theater call for a certain kind of awareness that also promotes social change. Examples of this are found in both the works of FOMMA and Lo'il Maxil. The new cultural traditions advocated by the two groups both differ and coincide in interesting ways that also interest with the outlined goals of each troupe. Lo'il Maxil, for example, uses plays and the publication of their scripts as ways to promote collective action and social awareness within indigenous communities regarding the importance of cultural preservation by advocating Tzotzil and Tzeltal literacy. In so doing they also create a new cultural tradition that emphasizes how literacy can positively be used as a tool for maintaining highland Maya culture by offering educational opportunities, such as literacy programs, for the public that shows how it is possible to 'be Maya' in a continuously globalizing world.

FOMMA also provides opportunities for the creation of new cultural traditions in two ways. The first is similar to Lo'il Maxil in that the group uses theater as an advertisement for their literacy education programs. The second way FOMMA creates new cultural traditions is through the works themselves, which promote the possibility of better opportunities for women who are caught in situations of domestic abuse. FOMMA not only provides hope for women with their theater, but actively promotes it by creating spaces where women can come and receive literacy education and occupational training. By offering these kinds of programs for women, they create a new cultural tradition because they challenge the negative status quo that some indigenous women live under by offering viable alternatives for a better life. The (re)creation of history and the call for

social activism are, as I have demonstrated, two essential elements in highland Maya theater. Used in their respective theatrical contexts, these elements become foundations for the creation of new cultural traditions. The following sections illustrate specifically how each group achieves this goal.

FOMMA creates new cultural traditions in one way by promoting literacy education programs. During my interview with Isabel Espinosa, she commented that the continued use of the Maya languages in indigenous families is highly important for the maintenance of cultural identity and supported the writing and reading literacy education projects run by FOMMA as ways to achieve this goal. Additionally globalization has, in some ways, brought positive changes to the highlands that benefit their programs, including the introduction of computers which she remarked aided children in their homework. These computers are also used by FOMMA for its literacy education workshops, thus giving Isabel a generally positive perception of the effects of globalization and how it affects the retention of indigenous language usage. Furthermore, she proclaimed that one could “definitely” continue to have an indigenous identity and still participate in the globalizing world (Interview 2006).

Theater, for Isabel, is an “ultimate goal” because it aids in the communication with the women they attempt to reach (Interview 2006). However, FOMMA provides other services that not only speak out to the women of highland Maya communities but allow them to participate proactively in order to make changes in their lives. FOMMA provides several kinds of production workshops where women work by making costumes, clothes, and bakery goods. Isabel noted that FOMMA has its own *pandería* where women make traditional breads of Chiapas for sale. The workshops provided by FOMMA provide opportunities for success by increasing the job marketability of the women who graduate. It is not only women who receive the benefits of FOMMA’s programs however because children, young adults, and both male and female adults participate in the classes offered. FOMMA also offers an education program where people can become literate and learn to write in their native language, be it Tzeltal or Tzotzil. For Isabel, these programs provide an avenue for her greater purpose of working with people from the highland indigenous communities of Chiapas.



**Figure 9: A Theatrical Portrayal of Maternal Death in *Viva la Vida***

The members of FOMMA create new cultural traditions in another way that directly relates to their parodies of men and the theatrical critique the offer of the prevalence of alcoholism and domestic abuse that affects the lives of women in highland Chiapas. As discussed in Chapter Three, men become dominant symbols in the works of FOMMA because the “meaning-content” of a representation of men “possesses a high degree of constancy and consistency throughout the total symbolic system” and denotes a “relatively fixed point in both the social and cultural structures, and indeed constitutes points of junction between these two kinds of structure” (Turner 1967: 32). The abusive male, as a dominant symbol, recurs throughout all of FOMMA’s theatrical works and also represents a stage-level replication of the reality of Maya patriarchal social and cultural norms. For the members of FOMMA, the patriarchal norms (as symbolized by the men in the plays) are perceived as a negative force in the lives of women because they often serve as apologists for abusive domestic behaviors and diminished social opportunities.

For many Maya women in the highlands, the abusive or jealous male figure is an important dominant symbol of their negative day-to-day social experiences. In an

interview with Cynthia Steele (1994: 254), Petrona de la Cruz Cruz, who is a co-founder of FOMMA, noted that “distrust is also common, and many husbands are jealous; they don’t like women to talk to other men, unless it is absolutely necessary. This is how male children are brought up, so not even single women have the freedom to speak or express their ideas or feelings.” By critiquing the negative aspects of patriarchal social organization in their plays, theater becomes “a factor in social action” and “becomes associated with human interests, purposes, ends and means, aspirations and ideals” (Turner 1982: 22). Therefore, the possibility of a new social life is reproduced when the actresses of FOMMA where, by using parody as mimesis, the dominant symbol of male is controlled and manipulated thereby enabling the women to transform from passive to proactive participants in Mayan culture.

FOMMA’s plays *La Mujer Desesperada* (A Desperate Woman) and *Viva La Vida* (Long Live Life!) are good examples of how theater is used to overcome, control, and critique negative and abusive treatment of highland Maya women by the men in their communities thereby creating the opportunities for the creation of new cultural traditions. *La Mujer Desesperada*, for example, offers a critique of “the seemingly endless violence visited on Mayan women and the matter-of-fact impossibility of recourse” (Marrero 2003: 292). This play and *Viva La Vida*, which was discussed in Chapter Three and was also the subject of the opening anecdote in Chapter One, offer the actresses and their female audiences a kind of cathartic release from the pain of their experiences because many of them suffered similar kinds of domestic abuse as those represented in the theatrical works.

Because there are no men in the FOMMA troupe, all the male parts go to women, who dress in men’s clothing, hide their long hair under ball caps or sombreros, and emulate the voice patterns of males in order to make the ruse more convincing to the audience. This action is also inherent of the creation of a new cultural tradition where women ascribe themselves to theatrical roles that would typically (as in the case of Lo’il Maxil) be performed by men. The script of *La Mujer Desesperada* provides many instances of the actresses’ imitations of the worst aspects of male behavior. There is one instance in the play where a main male character, Juan, comes home drunk from the cantina and threatens his wife for not having dinner already prepared: “What? Weren’t

you at home? I want to eat! Why isn't there a fire? Who were you with, you disgrace of a wife? Tell me or I'll kill you! (*He grabs a log from the fireplace and throws it at her while she dodges it, huddling on the bed. He lunges toward her and yanks her by the hair until she falls to the floor.*) Hurry up and get me something to eat or I'll beat you to death" (Marrero 2003: 294). Their reenactments of domestic abuse are performed in front of combined male and female Mayan audiences, and their parodies of the negative actions of men receive mixed responses.

When the plays are performed in the communities the works are based on, "some men respond negatively and some men respond positively. Often times, the men became angry because they see themselves being personified negatively on stage by women" (De Balso 2006). Perhaps it is a matter of honor, or perhaps the men who respond negatively are aware of the threat of the women's work, meaning that through the wonder of mimesis, which involves a "splitting of the self, of being self and Other, as achieved by sentience taking one out of oneself – to become something else as well" their patriarchal power base is potentially compromised (Taussig 1993: 41). The power over the original is manifested, I argue, in terms of the social change that the women fight for through the production of their theatrical works.

FOMMA's theater has an explicit goal: to alter the social positions of indigenous women from passive to proactive members of Mayan society who 'stand up' to the oppression and abuse of men. This goal is enacted over and over again on the stage during each performance and is also explicitly noted as an important part of their general cultural mission: "FOMMA seeks to arrest their crippling fear and sense of worthlessness in a tumultuous world of poverty, ignorance, and hostility by offering workshops in bilingual literacy, job skills, health education, and theater" (FOMMA promotional materials, 2006). In addition to aiding the women who come to FOMMA's headquarters for training and those who participate as audience members during their plays, the theatrical acts enable the actresses to confront issues they have personally dealt with in the past. Both of these results lead to the production of 'new' cultural traditions which is part social activism because of its call for action regarding domestic abuse against women and part cultural preservation because of the establishment of literacy and general

education programs for all members of local highland Maya communities. For FOMMA, Maya theater is about both stability and change.

The group Lo'il Maxil promotes the creation of new cultural traditions in various ways. The women who currently participate in Lo'il Maxil, as I indicated in Chapter Three, cross traditional social boundaries simply by participating in theater. The women of Sna Jtz'ibajom are playwrights, actresses, and serve as assertive purveyors of Maya culture and therefore create a new cultural tradition where indigenous women are accepted in the public and typically male dominated realm of theatrical work and social activism. As evidenced by the goals of FOMMA's work, their career choices are in direct conflict with traditionally prescribed gender roles because they refuse the constrictions of a patriarchal culture which deems women "subordinate to men sexually, socially, and politically by virtue of their biological femaleness" (Marrero 2003: 315). However, the women of Lo'il Maxil work in collaboration with the men of the group in order to do more than promote the importance of Maya cultural maintenance and preservation. They do this by creating new cultural traditions by attempting to heighten the social value of learning Tzotzil and Tzeltal languages (and by that token, folklore) despite pressures for the Maya population to learn Spanish.

There are several specific aspects of Lo'il Maxil's work that the male members found most important for the preservation of Maya cultural traditions. All members unanimously agreed that the preservation of Maya languages was of utmost importance because "the language is the strength of the culture" (Interview 2006). Although the members were divided as to what language they considered their *lengua materna* (Juan and José speak Tzotzil while Cristóbal and Diego speak Tzeltal), all asserted that "the identity of indigenous people lies in the language and in the customs" (Interview 2006). Some members remarked that children are not educated in their native language by their parents and are almost exclusively taught Spanish in the schools. In response to this problem, Sna Jtz'ibajom has begun several literacy education projects and promoted literacy education during their performances. This began with the distribution of bilingual pamphlets during performances when Lo'il Maxil was solely a traveling puppet theater that performed dramatized versions of folktales in either Tzeltal or Tzotzil with

the intention of “inspiring audiences to learn to read their brightly colored, bilingual booklets” (Frischmann 1994: 219).

In addition to promoting actual language, the theater serves as a kind of language itself, a way to communicate the political platform of cultural preservation to members of indigenous communities who actively participate in cross-cultural practices by their migration to San Cristóbal and other mestizo cities for work. The stage is used by Lo’il Maxil to (re)create theatrical versions of Maya history, to connect with their audiences by spreading the message of cultural preservation, and to produce new cultural traditions. These new traditions elevate the importance of maintaining a sense of being ‘Maya’ by raising the status of gaining literacy in highland Maya languages through the use of theater.

Theatrical performances are defined as texts that “have a physical existence in sound and movement, but which dissipates as it passes through time, continuing to exist only in the memory of the participants” (Gerstle 2005: 189). However, the groups Lo’il Maxil and FOMMA partially contradict this statement because the goal of their performance is to propose messages that do not dissipate over time by existing in the memory of the participants which include both the audience and the actors involved. Maya theater is not the only example of how performance is used in a proactive way. In the village of Dahakanda, India, a theater group known as Jana Sanskriti that emerged during the 1980s performed the play *Gayer Panchali*, which “raised questions about the one-sided relationship between the Panchayat (the committee of local government) and the ordinary people, about the corruption around the poverty alleviation programme, about the absence of healthcare, about the unavailability of year-round employment” (Ganguly 2004: 228). Both FOMMA’s and Lo’il Maxil’s plays approach similar social themes as those discussed by the Jana Sanskriti group with an addition of discourses about Mayan cultural identity maintenance.

From my experiences with both theater groups, I have gathered that Maya theater functions not only as a platform for social activism or as a way to (re)create tradition, but as foundation for the creation of new cultural traditions. This thesis was an exercise in understanding how theater was used to this end. By focusing on the creation of cultural traditions as a primary mission of Maya theater, I have also uncovered important

characteristics of each group's performances that are used to further their independent theatrical goals. The roles of women in this process are an important consideration because they are an indicator of how members of the theater groups produce a new cultural tradition by taking on careers in theater which call the patriarchal construct of society into question. As women, the members of FOMMA help produce this tradition and, through the use of parody and mimesis, openly critique the problem of domestic violence as a way to create another tradition in which indigenous women can educate themselves in order to escape the cycle of abuse and alcoholism. History, in its mythic and record forms, is also an important characteristic of Maya theater because of the unique ways in which it is used and (re)created as both an educational tool and as an advocate for Lo'il Maxil's mission of cultural preservation. I hope that, with time, the missions and goals of both these theater groups will continue to positively manifest on an ever-increasing scale in their communities, thereby crafting a new tradition of what it means to be 'Maya' in twenty-first century Chiapas.

## APPENDIX A

### Questionnaire\*

\*used with all groups/ persons interviewed with the exception of Doris Difarnecio

#### Demographic Information:

1. ¿Como se llama? (What is your name?)
2. ¿Cuantos años tienes? (How old are you?)
3. ¿Donde se nació? (Where were you born?)
4. ¿Donde se creció? (Where did you grow up?)
5. ¿Donde vive ahora? (Where do you live now?)
6. ¿Qué lenguas/idiomas habla? (What languages do you speak?)

#### General Questions:

7. ¿Cuál nivel de educación tenía cuando terminó sus estudios? (What level of education did you attain when you quit your studies?)
8. ¿Como entró en esto trabajo? (How did you enter into this work?)
9. ¿Cual es la intención de su trabajo para la cultura y comunidad Tzotzil, y para Ud. también? (What is the meaning for your work for the Tzotzil culture and community and for yourself as well?)
10. ¿Tiene un/a esposo/a, niños? ¿Qué idioma usa en la casa? (Do you have a spouse or children? What language do you use in the house?)
11. ¿Qué piensa su esposo/a sobre su trabajo? (What does your spouse think about your work?)
12. ¿Como piensa que la identidad Tzotzil, Tzeltal puede ser mantenida? (How should Tzotzil and Tzeltal identity be maintained?)
13. ¿Como piensa como Tzotziles, Tzeltales sobre sus interacciones en el mundo amplio? (How do you feel as Tzotziles and Tzeltales about your interactions with the wider world?)
14. ¿Puede continuar tener una identidad indigena y todavía tiene una parte en el mundo amplio? (Can you continue to maintain an indigenous identity and still be a part of the globalized world?)
15. ¿Cual son los factores mas importantes para mantener la identidad Tzotzil, Tzeltal? (What are the most important factors for maintaining Tzotzil and Tzeltal identity?)

16. ¿Siente Ud. una conexión con otras groupas indígenas en Mexico, Norte America o Sur America? (Do you feel a connection with other indigenous groups from Mexico, North America, and South America?)
17. ¿Conoce sobre Rigoberta Menchú? (Do you know of Rigoberta Menchú?)
18. ¿Como piensa sobre la obra de Rigoberta Menchú? (What do you think about the work of Rigoberta Menchú?)
19. ¿Como piensa sobre Zapatismo? (What do you think about the Zapatista movement?)
20. ¿Como piensa sobre la obra Comodante Marcos? (What do you think about Comodante Marcos?)
21. ¿Piensa que Zapatismo ha ayudado la comunidad indigena? (Do you think the Zapatista movement has helped indigenous communities?)

#### Theater History Questions

22. Diga me la historia de Sna Jtz'ibajom/FOMMA. (Please tell me about the history of your group.)
23. ¿Qué tipos de servicios y actividades hay? (What kinds of services and activities are offered by your group?)
24. ¿Cual son los resultados de sus obras? (What are the social results of your theatrical works?)
25. ¿Qué es las futura de su obra y Sna Jtz'ibajom/FOMMA en general? (What is the future of your work and your group in general?)

#### Questions Exclusively for the Men of Sna Jtz'ibajom

1. ¿Sirvió Ud. en la sistema cargo? (Have you served in the cargo system?)
2. ¿Qué posiciones ha tenido en el cargo? (What positions did you serve in the cargo?)
3. ¿Qué es la importancia d la sistema cargo por la comunidad y por Ud. también? (What is the significance of the cargo system for the community and yourself as well?)
4. ¿El cargo tiene la misma importancia ahora por la comunidad como en décadas pasadas? (Does the cargo have the same importance for the community now as it did in decades past?)

## APPENDIX B

### CUANDO NACIÓ EL MAIZ OBRA COLECTIVA DE SNA JTZ'IBAJOM.

*Versión Marzo 6, 2002*

*(En el patio exterior de una casa maya campesina de Chiapas juegan pelota cuatro niñas y niños. Uno de ellos se queda con ella y los otros se enojan, se corretean, se agarran, se tiran en el suelo en una hormiguera: las hormigas pican a los niños; se las sacuden y se lanzan a pisotearlas, danzando sobre ellas, luego planeando como aviones, imitando con los pies que les arrojan bombas.)*

**NIÑO 1-** ¡Ehh, vengan!, ¡vamos a jugar pelota!

**NIÑO 2-** ¡Sí!... ¡vamos a jugar básquet! *(empiezan a jugar pasándose unos a otros la pelota)* ¡Ehh, pásamela por acá!

**NIÑO 1-** ¡Ya pues, me toca a mí..!

**NIÑO 3-** ¡Ya pues, títamela, yo también quiero jugar! *(Uno se queda con la pelota y los demás lo persiguen, el NIÑO que traía la pelota se cae sobre un hormiguero, se enciman unos sobre los otros, y enseguida se levantan gritando)*

**NIÑO 2-** ¡Ehh!..., ¡algo me está picando!

**NIÑO 1-** ¡A mí también!

**NIÑO 3-** ¡Deben ser pulgas! *(Se sacuden las manos y los pies donde sienten las picaduras).*

**NIÑO 1-** ¡No, no! ¡Miren, son hormigas!

**NIÑO 2-** ¡Vamos a matarlas brincando de avioncito sobre ellas! *(Vuelan como aviones bombarderos y de pronto sale la ABUELA de la casa y llama a los Niños)*

**ABUELA:-** ¡Niños! ¿qué hacen aquí? ¿Porqué tanto ruido?, ¡Ahh,... están matando a las hormigas!, ¡no las maten, por favor!.

**NIÑO 2-** ¡Pero es que nos picaron, abuela!

**ABUELA:-** ¡Fue porque destruyeron su casa, por eso los picaron! Pero...¡Vénganse por acá, les voy a contar un cuento que me platicó mi abuelo! *(Se sientan en corro, rodeando a la abuela)*

**NIÑOS:** ¡Ahh, qué bueno!

**NIÑO 2-** ¿No será mejor el cuento del hombre lobo?...

**NIÑO 1-** ¡No! ¡Mejor que cuente algo sobre el Chapulín colorado!

**ABUELA:** -¡No, hijos...les voy a contar algo mucho más bonito que eso; les contaré un cuento que nos recuerda cómo nació el maíz para la humanidad!: ¡pongan mucha atención!:

“...Mucho antes, la humanidad no trabajaba para conseguir sus alimentos.  
Comían piedras suaves, sin hacer nada más que levantarlas del suelo.

**NIÑOS:-** ¡Piedras!.

**ABUELA:-** ¡Sí, piedras, pero tenían buen sabor! Los hombres sólo se multiplicaban; y los Dioses vieron que se acababan las piedras. (*Aparecen los DIOSES. La ABUELA se los muestra a los NIÑOS, que los miran extasiados*). Entonces enviaron una clase de semilla para que los hombres puedan vivir trabajando.

**NIÑOS:-** Ahhh... ¿así fue? ¿Entonces? (*Salen la ABUELA con los NIÑOS silenciosamente*).

**DIOS 1:** Bueno, hermano: ¡llegó el momento de cambiar el mundo! ¡Vamos a planear qué les vamos a dar de comer a nuestros hijos!, ¡ya vimos que sólo están vagando!: se lo pasan sin hacer nada; no se acuerdan de su Señor, no saben agradecer los alimentos que les damos; ¡tienen que trabajar un poquito, no les podemos dar todo gratis!

**DIOS 2:** ¡Pues sí, es mejor elegir a uno de ellos para que él se encargue de todo, y nosotros vamos a enviarle sus semillas de verdura y frijol, para que ellos las distribuyan y vayan incrementando sus productos!

**DIOS 1:** -¡Tienes razón, hay que darles comida! Ahhh..., ¡pero si solamente les vamos a dar verduras y frijoles, no van a poder realizar ningún trabajo duro! ¡mejor les demos maíz, que es el que tiene suficiente energía!

**DIOS 2:** -¡Bueno, pues...! ¡Nuestros hijos ya no van a ser los mismos, ya no van a comer esas piedrecitas suaves! ...¡tendrán que sufrir un poco trabajando, para conseguir sus alimentos!

**DIOS 1:** -¡Así le hagamos entonces!, ¡miremos en la tierra, a ver si hay alguien de ellos que no haya pecado mucho; ¡pero parece que todos son malos!, ¡no quieren hacer nada!...

*(Aparecen caminando todos los demás actores, que han actuado como niños, se pasean con cargas como si estuvieran en el mercado, y después actúan lo que dicen los dioses)*

-Mira: ¡ese hombre ya tiene dos mujeres, y tiene una docena de hijos con cada mujer!

**MUJER 1:** ¡Cristóbal que haces con esa mujer!, ¡Ven Aquí!

**MUJER 2:** ¡Vas a ver, Cristóbal! ¡ya no te quiero!

**MUJER 1:** ¡Ni yo tampoco!, ¡Vámonos, comadre! ¡Hombres, nos sobran! *(Salen las mujeres; Cristóbal queda tirado en el suelo. Aparece otra mujer, mirando una revista)*

**DIOS 2:** -¡Mira, allá está una mujer que parece inteligente!, ¡a ella le demos su regalo de maíz!

**MUJER:** Guuauu, este hombre está muy guapo!, ¡uno de estos me hace falta!, *(sale)*

**DIOS 1:** -No creo; ¡Veo que ha pecado mucho!; *(se adelanta al escenario un hombre contando dinero)* ¡mira ese señor, que está contando su dinero: sólo se preocupa de su riqueza y no le ayuda a sus compañeros! *(un hombre se levanta del suelo y se rasca su cabeza y perezosamente se deja caer al suelo de nuevo)* ¡Mira ese otro haragán, no hace nada; solamente se la pasa rasque y rasque su piojo! *(entra una mujer corriendo)* ¡Mira, esa otra que va corriendo como loca! ¡siempre se le hace tarde para llegar a su casa!

**DIOS 2:** -*(se levanta un hombre borracho y tropieza con el que está durmiendo)* ¡Ese otro sólo anda tomando trago! ...¡mejor que se ponga a trabajar para que mantenga a sus hijos! *(Salen los dos ebrios y aparece por el otro extremo PEDRO, vestido de Chamula, quien lleno de ilusión se pasea, mirando a las estrellas)*

**DIOS 1:** -Pero ese hombre, parece inocente... ¡sólo está mirando las estrellas!, ¡él sí que sabe soñar, y es diferente a los demás!

**DIOS 2:**- ¡Sale, pues!, lo visitaremos esta noche... le platicaremos en su sueño, y le llevaremos un regalo, que apreciarán por todo el mundo.

**DIOS 1:**- ¡Sí; mejor lo llamaremos ahora mismo, para decirle nuestros planes!

**DIOS 2:** - ¡Ehh... Pedro, acércate!

**PEDRO:** -¿Qué quieren de mí, señor?

**DIOS 1:** -Te traemos un mensaje, hijo; ...pronto no tendrán que comer, ya que cada día estará más escaso el alimento. ¡Hemos decidido que seas tú quien les des a ellos un sustento nuevo!

**DIOS 2:** -Para realizar esto, te visitaremos en tus sueños y te diremos qué es lo que vas a hacer; ...mientras tanto, ¡sigue disfrutando la belleza de la creación!

**PEDRO:** -¡Está bien, señor! (*Los DIOSES desaparecen de la escena*)

**PEDRO:-** -¿Que será lo que me están diciendo, será que estoy soñando despierto? No creo que los dioses me hablen...¡Mejor me olvido de esto, y voy a cenar piedrecitas, para que así me duerma tranquilo esta noche! ¡Voy a comérmelas, es lo que voy a hacer ahora! Mmh, ah, qué sabrosas están las piedrecitas, deveras! ¡Ahhh! Ahora voy a dormirme, y al rato me levanto! (*Terminando de cenar, PEDRO se duerme profundamente, y ronca; en ese instante, vuelven a escena los DIOSES y le hablan a PEDRO*)

**DIOS 1:** -¡Pedro, ya venimos! (*aparecen los dioses y entran a escena dos personas que llevan las herramientas con las que Pedro podrá trabajar*)... ¡Lo que vas a hacer primero, es buscar un lugar montañoso donde puedas realizar tu trabajo!; toma tu hacha, tu machete; cortas los árboles y los quemas, aquí está tu azadón para cavar la tierra. Siembras con una barreta tres o cuatro granos de maíz para cada mata.

**DIOS 2:** -¡Y aquí están tus semillas, el sagrado maíz que cosecharás una o dos veces al año!

(*Mientras PEDRO platica con los DIOSES en su sueño, va moviendo los brazos y haciendo algunos gemidos. Entra una niña con el maíz y lo deja al lado de Pedro; al salir da una palmada a Pedro para que se despierte. Los dioses se apresuran*).

**DIOS 1:** ¡Vámonos, hermano!

**DIOS 2:** ¡Vámonos! (*Salen de escena*)

**PEDRO:** - (*Adormilado*) -¡Soñé que los dioses me estaban hablando! ¿Qué me querrá decir este extraño sueño?, (*de repente descubre el maíz y las herramientas y toma el maíz con la mano*) ¡Aah, pero... ¿Qué es esto? ¡Es el maíz! ¡entonces es verdad mi sueño! ¡Parece que me dejaron algo aquí! ¡lo voy a recordar, a

ver si puedo! ¡parece que me dijo que llevara mi hacha para cortar los árboles, mi machete para cortar las ramas, mi azadón para cavar la tierra, y mi barreta para sembrar este maíz! ¡Eso fue todo mi sueño, lo que me dijeron los Dioses; ¡enseguida lo voy a probar! (*Comienza a trabajar en el campo. Toma el hacha, y le reza en Tzotzil a un árbol que va a cortar*):

-¡Perdóname, sagrado hermano árbol! ¡Tendré que cortarte, porque así lo han permitido los dioses, para que podamos tener nuestra milpa, el sagrado lugar donde crecerá nuestro maíz!

*Después de un rato se siente cansado, y suda).*

**PEDRO:** -¡Pero qué duro está este trabajo, ya me salieron ampollas! (*sigue trabajando, suda más.*) ¿Ahora qué está pasando? ...¡ya me salió agua de mi cuerpo, ya estoy mojado! ¿Será que ya me oriné? (*Se asoma hacia abajo, pero le cae sudor de la frente, que se toca con la mano*). ¿Será que tengo calentura? ¡Aunque la tenga, pero voy a seguir trabajando! (*Continúa trabajando con el machete, desramando el árbol. En ese instante aparecen dos mujeres enrebozadas tomadas del brazo, que lo miran con curiosidad y se burlan de él*).

**MUJER 1:** -¿Qué está haciendo este hombre?

**MUJER 2:** -¡Quién sabe, anda destruyendo la tierra y los árboles!

**MUJER 1:** -¡Pues sí, quién sabe dónde aprendió hacer eso, nunca hemos visto alguien así!

**MUJER 2:** ¡Está más loco que una chupacabra! (*Salen riéndose a carcajadas; PEDRO continúa trabajando.*

*En eso aparece su vecino, que lo mira con desprecio).*

**VECINO DE PEDRO:** ¿Pero... qué te pasa, hombre? ¡Estás más sucio que un marrano!, ¡ya hueles como a perro muerto!

**PEDRO:** -Sé que no entiendes esto... ¡es muy duro, pero me siento contento!

**VECINO:** -A ver, pues, cuéntame para qué te sirve esto.

**PEDRO:** -¡Estoy haciendo un experimento, para el bien de todos!

**VECINO:** -¡Pero qué estúpido eres!...¡estás maltratando a la tierra!

**PEDRO:** ¡No, hombre! aunque no me lo creas, ...estoy sembrando...

(*dudoso*)...sembrando ¡¡piedras!!

**VECINO:** ¿Para qué sirve estar sembrando piedras? ¡Si hay muchas por dondequiera!  
...¡Bueno, pues, sigue haciendo tus locuras, yo ya me voy! (*Sale el vecino enojado y PEDRO sigue trabajando*)

**PEDRO:** (*Cantando*) -“*Bolomchon, ta vinajel, bolomchon ta balumil. Natic avisim, bolomchon, K'ox K'ox avakan, bolomchon*” (*canta y silba mientras sigue cavando hoyos con la coa y sacando maíz de la bolsa que le dieron los dioses, para sembrar las semillas y tapar los hoyos con el pie*).

**PEDRO:** -Bueno; ¡creo que ya sembré bastante! ...regresaré dentro de quince días para ver qué clase de planta es ésta, ¡a ver si se convierte en realidad mi sueño!  
(*PEDRO sale de escena y dos mujeres hacen aparecer filas de rocas en los surcos donde había sembrado el maíz..Apenas salen las mujeres, entra nuevamente PEDRO, que mira las piedras, consternado*).

**PEDRO:** -¡Ay, cabrón! ¿Dónde está mi siembra, y de dónde salieron éstas rocas? ¡Todo el trabajo que hice fue en vano, por Dios! ¿Dónde está el maíz que me dijeron los Dioses? ¡En cada terrón donde sembré el maíz, en vez de una mata salió una piedra! (*Empieza a llorar; entran los vecinos, escandalizados*).

**VECINO 1:** -¿Pero qué hiciste, por Dios? ¡Mira nuestros alimentos! ¡Las piedrecitas ya no se pueden comer!, ¡se volvieron duras!

**VECINO 2:** -¿Ahora qué vamos a hacer?

**VECINO 3:** -¡Los niños ya están muriendo de hambre!, ¡pronto moriremos todos!

**VECINO 1:** -¡Por tu culpa! ¡Agárrenlo, línchenlo! ¡orguenlo! (*Aparecen los DIOSES*).

**DIOS 1:** -¡Qué buena cosecha tienes, hijo! ¡Parece que no sabes estimar nuestros consejos! Fué bueno tu trabajo, pero cometiste un error. ¿Te acuerdas lo que hiciste?

**PEDRO:** (*Arrepentido, tratando de disculparse*)-¡Traté de hacer todo lo que me dijeron!

**DIOS 2:** -Hiciste bien tu trabajo,...¡pero le dijiste una mentira a tu amigo!

**PEDRO:** (*Recordando de pronto su mentira*)-¡Ay, perdónenme, señores!

**DIOS 1:** -Bueno, hijo, te perdonamos tus pecados. A pesar de todo, tu trabajo no fue en vano; el maíz  
Está guardado!

**DIOS 2:** *(A los vecinos, que conservan las cabezas bajas)* -¡Ya no se preocupen, hijos!...ustedes no saben lo que está pasando. Este hombre fue elegido para darles el nuevo alimento a ustedes.

**DIOS 1:** -Pueden ustedes regresar contentos a sus casas; mientras, nosotros nos ocuparemos de sacar el maíz *(Los vecinos salen de la escena, y desaparecen las rocas)*.

**DIOS 2:** -¿Y ahora? ¡Ya no tenemos más semillas!

**DIOS 1:** -Lo sabemos que no, ¡pero sabemos dónde están!. ¡Las tiene guardadas el dueño de la tierra! ...Lo que vamos hacer ahora, es hablarle para pedirle el maíz. *(PEDRO sale y aparece la cueva; los DIOSES salen de la escena. PEDRO vuelve a entrar, llega frente a la cueva y llama al dueño de la tierra)*.

**PEDRO:** ¡Creo que por fin he llegado! ¡Señor, señor, vengo a visitarle! *(Sale un sapo)*.

**SAPO:** -¿Qué quiere, señor?

**PEDRO:** -¡Quiero hablarle al señor! ¿Me permite pasar?

**SAPO:** -¡Aah! no sé si quiere salir. ¿Quién es usted para que yo le diga?

**PEDRO:** -Me llamo Pedro, soy enviado por los Dioses. *(Aparecen los DIOSES)*

**SAPO:** -¡Señor, te quieren hablar! ¡Es un loco que dice que lo mandan...los Dioses!

**DUEÑO:** -¡Que me espere un ratito, estoy muy ocupado!

**SAPO:** -¡El señor dice que esta muy ocupado, que esperes un ratito!

**PEDRO:** Está bien, muchas gracias, lo voy a esperar... *(El sapo se queda a un lado de la cueva)*

**PEDRO:** *(Obsequioso, dirigiéndose a Pedro:)* ¿Quieres un poco de agua?

**SAPO:** *(Distraído, Impaciente)* -No.

**PEDRO:** *(Enojado)* -¡Entonces, muérete! *(en ese momento aparece el dueño de la tierra)*.

**DUEÑO:** *(Molesto)* -¿Qué quieres de mí?

**PEDRO:** Venimos a pedirle un poco de tu maíz.

**DUEÑO:** ¿Para qué?

**PEDRO:** -¡Es que quiero sembrarlo y cosecharlo para alimento de la humanidad!

**DUEÑO:** ¿Qué?... ¿ya tienen hambre otra vez? ¡Pero si nadamás se la pasan de haraganes! Además... ¡no hay, no tengo mucho!

**DIOS 2:** -¡Señor, pero se lo podemos comprar!.

**DUEÑO:** -Aunque lo compren, ¡no me sale! ¡No hay! ¡Luego nomás van a andar destruyendo mis jardines! ¡No, no, no!. Definitivamente, el maíz solamente es para mí. ¡Y se acabó la discusión! (*Se vuelve a meter a su cueva, decidido y enfurruñado*).

**DIOS 1:** -¿Qué podemos hacer entonces?

**DIOS 2:** -¡Es necio!,...pero... ¡si no nos lo entrega por las buenas, le robaremos a la fuerza!

**PEDRO:** -Pero qué, ...¿no es pecado hacer eso?

**DIOS 1:** -¡No tenemos otra opción! Además... ¿te atreves a cuestionar los actos de los Dioses?

**PEDRO:** -Está bien, mi señor,...¡déjame intentarlo!

**DIOS 1:** ¡Está bien, pero pronto! (*Pedro lo intenta, pero no puede porque la entrada es muy pequeña*).

**PEDRO:** -¡No puedo, no entra mi mano!, ...la entrada es muy chica, ¡sólo un insecto pasaría por allí!

**DIOS 1:** -¡Ay, hijo! ¿Pero cómo lo vamos a hacer, pues?

**PEDRO:** -¡Ya sé lo que podemos hacer! ¡Buscaremos algunas hormiguitas! ¡ellas sí podrán pasar, porque son muy pequeñas.

**DIOS 2:** -¡Buena idea tienes, hijo! ¡No eres tonto!...

**PEDRO:** ¡No, señor!

**DIOS 2:** -Está bien, está bien...pero... ¿dónde hallaremos a esas hormiguitas? (*Aparece por el extremo una hormiga.*)

**HORMIGA 1:** -¿Qué quieren?

**PEDRO:** -¡Señor! ¡Aquí hay una!

**DIOS 1:** -Está bien. ¡Convéncela, antes de que se te escape!

**PEDRO:** -(*Hacia los Dioses*) -¡Ay, Dios, a ver qué puedo hacer! (*Dirigiéndose a la hormiga*) Mira, preciosa hormiga, debes entrar a la cueva del dueño de la tierra y traernos todo el maíz que hay adentro.

**HORMIGA 1:** Pero...¿Porqué debía de hacerlo?

**PEDRO:** -¡Porque es necesario, para... para... ¡que todos podamos alimentarnos!

**HORMIGA 1:** -Bueno, será para que se alimenten ustedes los humanos, porque nosotras ya encontramos nuestros alimentos.

**PEDRO:** -¡No sabes lo que estás diciendo, hormiguita! El maíz es alimento de los Dioses: ¡es el mejor de todos los alimentos! Si comemos de él, podremos reír, cantar y alabar a los Dioses: ¡El maíz es sagrado! Nosotros comeremos las semillas, y ustedes pueden comer el tallo, las hojas y todo lo demás.

**HORMIGA 1:** -De acuerdo, señor, lo intentaré.

**PEDRO:** - De acuerdo, hormiguita.

**HORMIGA 1:**-¡Ay, ay! No, no puedo. ¡No pasa mi panza!

**PEDRO:** ¡Inténtalo con más ganas! ¡Tienes que lograrlo! ¡Bueno pues, te voy a ayudar!

**HORMIGA 1:**-Está bien. (*Vuelve a intentarlo, con ayuda de Pedro*) -¡Ya entré! ¿Ahora qué hago?

**PEDRO:** ¿Qué ves ahí?

**HORMIGA 1:** ¡Nada!

**DIOSES:** (*Asombrados, incrédulos, en coro:*) -¿Nada?

**HORMIGA 1:** (*Mintiéndole a PEDRO*) ¡Todo está vacío! ¡No hay nada de maíz!

**PEDRO:** -¡Creo que me estás mintiendo, amiguita! ¡Lo que pasa es que quieres que todo el maíz se quede para las hormigas! ¡Mejor salte de ahí! (*La hormiga sale con dificultad*)

**HORMIGA 1:** ¡Ahh, Ahh, Ay, no puedo salir! ¡Se atoró mi panza! ¡Ayúdame a levantar esta roca, por favor!

**PEDRO:** -¡Cómo crees que vas a salir, si ya engordaste por comer tanto maíz! ¡Bueno, te voy a ayudar!, nadamás que te tengo que jalar, ¿eh? (*La jala, con alarde de esfuerzo*)

**HORMIGA 1:** -¡Ay, ay, ay! ¡Uuuuj!

(*PEDRO ayuda a levantar la roca y se sorprende al descubrir el cuerpo de la hormiga*)

**PEDRO:** -¡Mira nadamás qué apretón te llevaste, ya no te vas a componer esa cinturita! ¡Ya te vas a quedar así para siempre!

**HORMIGA 1:** ¡Ay, ay, ay! ¡Carajo, por poco me muero! ¡Ya me voy! (*Sale de escena*)

**PEDRO:** ¡Vete pues! ¡No me serviste para nada! ¿Ahora qué hago, a quién enviaré? ¡Ah, ya sé...! ¡Buscaré la hormiga Ses! ¡Claro! ¿Dónde estará esa hormiguita?

**HORMIGA 2:** ¡Aquí estoy! ¿Qué quieres? (*PEDRO la toma en las manos*)

**PEDRO:** -¡Entra en la cueva!, ¡ve a sacar todo el maíz!

**HORMIGA 2:** -Está bien, voy a entrar. (*Entra en la cueva sin dificultad*) -¡Ya estoy adentro! ¿Ahora qué hago?

**DIOS 2:** - ¿Qué hay dentro?

**HORMIGA 2:** ¡Hay cuatro montones de maíz!

**DIOSES:** ¡Aah!

**PEDRO:** ¡Aah, entonces la otra estaba mintiendo! ¿Cómo es posible? ¡Cómo son esas hormigas! ¿Cómo es ese maíz?

**HORMIGA 2:** ¡Hay del rojo, el negro, el amarillo y el blanco. Hay también del verde, que crece silvestre y no hay que cultivar, pero ése es nadamás para el dueño de la tierra. ¡Pero no puedo sacarlo cargando, porque los orificios de la cueva son muy pequeños!

**DIOS 1:** -Si no se puede, pues ni modos: ¡Buscaremos otros animalitos más pequeños que tú!

**HORMIGA 2:** -¡Discúlpame, Señor!

**DIOS 2:** No hay problema, pero... ¿a quién enviaremos, entonces?

**PEDRO:**-No sé...¿qué tal si enviamos a las hormigas más pequeñas?, esas que se llaman... que se llaman...

**HORMIGA 2:** -¡Se llaman me´ baxanich!; ...¡ellas sí pueden sacarlo, porque son más pequeñas que yo..., y son más fuertes!

**PEDRO:**- ¡Claro! ¡Me´baxanich!

**HORMIGA 3:** -¿Nos llamaron?

**PEDRO:** -Sí, queremos que entren aquí en la cueva y traigan el maíz. Podrán entrar, porque son más pequeñitas.

**HORMIGA 3:** -Esperemos que sí, aunque no sé si podemos sacarlo cargando, pues no somos tan fuertes como ustedes creen.

**PEDRO:** -Pero sí confío en ustedes...(Aparece el alacrán).

**ALACRAN:** (*Fanfarrón*) -¡Yo soy el alacrán, soy más fuerte que ustedes! ¿qué intentan hacer? ....¿les puedo ayudar en algo?

**PEDRO:** ¡Ah, señor alacrán! ¡Estamos tratando de sacar las semillas que guardan estas

rocas!

**ALACRAN:** -¡Yo, yo lo puedo hacer! ¡Yo soy bastante resistente para entrar en cualquier cueva!, ¡no más me digan ustedes donde está la entrada!

**PEDRO:** -¡Pero tú estás muy grandote!, ¡no pasas en los orificios! ¡Mira cómo está!

**ALACRAN:** -¡Oh, guau!, ¡es cierto, está muy pequeña! ¡No voy a pasar ahí...! ¡...Ya sé!  
(*Haciendo un gesto de explosión*) ¡Le vamos a echar dinamita!

**PEDRO:** -¡No!, ...si lo hacemos, ¡se va a quemar todo el maíz!, además...podemos despertar al dueño de la tierra.

**ALACRAN:** -¿Dueño de la tierra?,¿es ésta su cueva?

**PEDRO:** -Sí, ¡es que no nos quiere dar el maíz que tiene guardado!

**ALACRAN:** -Ya entendí entonces, ...pero ¿para qué nos va servir?

**PEDRO:** -¡Para sembrar y comer, cabrón! ¡Tú no piensas nada!

**ALACRAN:** -¡Sí,sí,sí, señor!, ...¡ya entendí!, ...pero necesitamos que nos ayuden las hormigas.

**HORMIGA 3:** -¡Ay, qué tonto eres! ¿porqué crees que estamos aquí?

**ALACRAN:** (*Haciendo una reverencia*) -¡Oh, perdónenme, señoras hormigas! ¡No las había visto!

**HORMIGA 3:** -¡No hay problema, pero déjanos hacer el trabajo!

**ALACRAN:** -¡Sale, pues...! (Se acucilla a un lado de la cueva)

**DIOS 2:** -¡Ustedes, hormiguitas, sí lo pueden traer, poco a poquito!

**HORMIGA 3:** -Si así lo desea, ¡lo intentaremos, señor! (*Las hormigas entran en la cueva*).

**DIOS 1:** -¿Cómo van, hormiguitas?

**HORMIGA 3:** -¡Estamos bien, aquí hay bastante maíz!

**PEDRO:** -¡Júntenlo todo y tráiganlo cargando hacia fuera! (*Lo hacen y salen con los granos. Pedro exclama contento:*)- ¡Ya están aquí los primeros granos

**HORMIGA 3:** -¡Sí, señor! (*Aparece de pronto el dueño de la tierra enojado y le habla a PEDRO*).

**DUEÑO:** ¿Qué hacen aquí otra vez?

**PEDRO:** (*Asustado*) ¡Nada, nada, señor!; ...¡es que es muy bonito este lugar!

**DUEÑO:** -¡Pero ésta es propiedad privada! ¡Lárgate de aquí!

**ALACRAN:** -Ay, ¡que cabrón!, ¿porqué no nos quieres? ¡Eres muy malo! (El alacrán se lanza y le pica el pie al dueño de la tierra).

**DUEÑO:** -¡Ay, ay, ay! ¿Qué me picó? ¿Ay, porqué lo hiciste? ¡Vas a ver, bicho maldito!  
¡Me lo vas a pagar muy caro!

*(En esos momentos las hormigas acarrearán el maíz).*

**DUEÑO:** -¡Ah, ya veo porqué lo hiciste! ¡Se están robando mi maíz! ¡Cabrones!, *(toma su escopeta y apunta sin saber a quién primero)* ¡los voy a matar a todos! *(Le apunta al alacrán)* ¡Aah, y tú vas a ser el primero, para que sientas lo mismo que me hiciste! ¡Te atreviste a hacerme daño, sólo porque tú tienes muchas patas!

**ALACRAN:** -¡No, señor, no me mates!, *(riendo nerviosamente)* ...¡fué una broma, je, je, je! ...Además, si me dejas vivir...yo puedo ser tu guardián. ¡Te defenderé y podré picar a los malos que se acerquen a ti con malas intenciones!

**DUEÑO:** -¡Callate, animal del demonio! ¡Áhi te va un rayo, carbón! ¡Pum! *(Apunta su escopeta y le dispara. Cae el alacrán, moviendo las patas).*

**ALACRAN:** ¡Ay, ay, ay, me mataste, cabrón! ¡Este es mi fin! Ni modos, pero gracias a Dios, anoche tuve la oportunidad de hacer un millón de hijos para que piquen a los malvados. -¡Adiós! *(Sale de escena, arrastrándose)*

**HORMIGA 3:** ¡Aquí están los granos de maíz!, ¡nosotras ya cumplimos nuestra tarea: te los entregamos en tus manos, Pedro!; ¡nosotras juntas nos iremos a nuestras casas! *(Salen de escena todas las hormigas)*

**PEDRO:** Está bien, muchas gracias, hormiguitas. Ahora vamos a estar tranquilos, ya no moriremos de hambre, ya es hora de sembrar y cosechar el sagrado maíz. ¡Así les voy a enseñar a mis paisanos, para que vayan aprendiendo. ¡Vénganse todos, compañeros, a llevar sus semillas, trabájenlo, cultívenlo juntos con sus hijos!

**AMIGO 1:** ¡Está bueno, señor! ¡Gracias a Dios que ya tenemos el nuevo alimento!  
¡Vamos pues a sembrarlo! *(Salen de escena).*

**DIOS 2:** -De esta manera serán felices nuestros hijos, por este nuevo regalo de maíz que les dimos; ahora no nos resta más que agradecer al dueño de la tierra y disculparnos con él por los pecados que cometió el alacrán.

**DIOS 1:** -¡Lo llamemos ahora para ponernos de acuerdo sobre cómo va a quedar la tierra!

**DIOS 2:** -¡Señor, dueño de la Tierra! ¡Te queremos hablar!

**DUEÑO:** -Sí, díganme. ¿Otra vez me van a robar? ¡Pero si ya se lo llevaron todo!

**DIOS 1:** -No es eso, señor; ¿No ves ahora cómo ha cambiado el mundo? ¿No aprecias ese color verde que llegó a la tierra y que complementa la vida humana?

**DUEÑO:** - Sí, señor, tienes mucha razón; veo que la gente está feliz, pero todavía me duele el piquete de ese maldito alacrán; ¡Lo voy a perseguir con mis rayos, dondequiera que esté!

**DIOS 2:** Eso tienes que controlarlo; tus rayos serán la señal de que viene la lluvia.

**DIOS 1:** - A tu sirviente sapo, pídele que cante para que venga la lluvia.

**DIOS 2:** -A las hormigas, diles que se junten todas y que caminen hacia el oriente para llamar el agua.

**DUEÑO:** -Estoy de acuerdo, señor.

**DIOS 1:** -Está bien; trabajemos juntos para el bien de nuestros hijos. *(Sale de escena el DUEÑO de la Tierra y los DIOSES. Aparece en otro extremo el sapo cantando y las hormigas caminando y al mismo tiempo se escuchan sonidos de rayos y comienza a llover. Aparece la milpa y entra en escena toda la gente a comer felices).*

**TODOS:** *(Mirando hacia todas partes, buscando sapos, y exclamando por lo bajo:)* -  
¡Kerek, kerek, kerek!

**PEDRO:** - *(Maravillado):* -¡Escuchen, compañeros:...!Ya se oyen cantar los sapos! ¡hoy va a llover!

**TODOS:** ¡Sii!

**AMIGA 1:** - ¡Miren las hormigas, ya se juntaron todas! ¡Vamos a tener mucha agua!

**PEDRO:** - ¡Sí, es cierto; ya se escuchan los truenos! ¡Ya está lloviendo! *(Se escuchan truenos y sonidos de lluvia. Todos levantan la mirada y las manos hacia las nubes, sonriendo y entrecerrando los ojos)*

**AMIGA 2:** -¡Vamos a tener buena milpa!

**AMIGO:** Si, ¡con estas lluvias vamos a tener buenas cosechas!

**AMIGA 2:** *(Aparece la milpa, un abanico de plantas de maíz, llevada por quienes actuaron como DIOSES)* -¡Ya tenemos buena milpa!

**AMIGA 3:** -¡Sí! Es cierto, ¡ya tenemos buena milpa!, ¡miren, compañeros!

**PEDRO:** -( *Pedro, corta maíz y lo reparte a todos* ) ¡Vamos a comer! ¡Miren qué rico alimento tenemos, este es el fruto de nuestros trabajos!

**AMIGA 1:** ¡Pero qué sabrosa está esta tortilla!

**PEDRO:** -¡Sí, esto es bueno! ¡Pero también, no hay que olvidar que tenemos que respetar a las plantas y los animales de estos lugares!

**AMIGA 2:** -¡Tienes toda la razón, sin ellos no podemos vivir! ¡Pero dame otra tortillita, pues!

**TODOS:** -¡Sí! ¡Tener este alimento, es vida!

**PEDRO:** -¡Sí, gracias a que sabemos trabajar y que tenemos Tierra! ¡Démosle gracias a los Dioses y al dueño de la Tierra!

**TODOS:** -¡Sí!

**AMIGA 2:** ¡Ah, ahora ya sabemos porqué no se deben maltratar a las hormiguitas!

**ABUELA :** -¡Bueno niños! ¡Nuestra historia ha terminado!

**TODOS:** -¡Muchas Gracias!

**FIN**

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## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

### Education

2007

- Spring 2007, completed University M.A. degree requirements and was accepted to the Ph.D. program in Anthropology at FSU beginning in the Fall of 2007

2006

- As of Fall 2006, enrolled in 12 credit hour courses in order to complete 2<sup>nd</sup> year Master's Program departmental requirements
- During the Summer of 2006, participated in a five week thesis research project in Chiapas, Mexico with Mayan theater groups

2005

- Fall 2005, entered Master's Program in Anthropology at FSU

2004

- Attended Georgia State University in Atlanta, Georgia from 2001-2004; Major of Anthropology, Minor of Psychology. Graduated Bachelor of Arts *Cum Laude* in Anthropology in December 2004. Attained a 4.0 major GPA with an overall undergraduate GPA of 3.55.

2002

- Participated in Study Abroad program affiliated with Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia. Spent five weeks in Paris, France studying European culture and art while completing core requirements in art history and environmental science.

2001

- Participated in joint-enrollment program during senior year at Cairo High School, Cairo, Georgia. Completed 12 credit hours of core undergraduate work before enrolling at Georgia State University.

### Academic Achievements

2006

- Awarded the Departmental Assistantship and full tuition waiver in Anthropology at FSU for the 2006-2007 Academic Year

2005

- Awarded the Departmental Assistantship and full tuition waiver in Anthropology for the 2005-2006 Academic Year
- Fall 2005, awarded the PIE Teaching Certificate for Graduate Departmental Assistants

2001-2004

- Awarded the HOPE Scholarship Fund for Undergraduates at Georgia State University consecutively for the Academic Years of 2001 through 2004

2001

- Recipient of the GSU Department of English Undergraduate Internship for the 2001-2002 Academic Year

### **Academic Employment**

2006

- Departmental Teaching Assistant in Anthropology for the 2006-2007 Academic Year

2005

- Departmental Teaching Assistant in Anthropology for the 2005-2006 Academic Year

### **Languages**

- field and academic experience with Spanish