IMAGINING CROSS-BORDER BELONGING: MAYA-MAM COLLECTIVE

IDENTIFICATION ACROSS THE GUATEMALA-MEXICO BORDER

by

JEFFREY A. GARDNER

(Under the Direction of Patricia Richards)

ABSTRACT

Many indigenous peoples span state borders, yet little research has analyzed how indigenous cross-border nations are actually constructed and how contemporary state borders are implicated in that process. This dissertation begins to address that puzzle by focusing on how the Maya-Mam, an indigenous people divided by the Guatemala-Mexico border, are actively imagining and constructing nationhood across state borders. Although state borders socially, culturally, and politically divide the pueblo Mam, the Mam are engaged in denaturalizing such borders in their efforts to seek collective rights as a cross-border nation. This dissertation highlights how leaders of Mam councils, Mam organizations, and also individuals in their everyday lives who self-identify as Mam are denaturalizing state borders through three processes. First, I address how the Mam define their symbolic boundaries of collective identification in relation to spatial boundaries of different scales. Second, I analyze how cross-border experiences (i.e., social interactions among Mam councils and individuals from opposite sides of the border) are shaping Mam collective identification as a cross-border nation. And third, I address how the Mam are counter-mapping their ancestral territory by producing geographic and political

representations that challenge state maps and the nation state framework. I suggest that these three processes have an interwoven character (i.e., they feed into each other), which I refer to as *imagining cross-border belonging*. I conceptualize imagining cross-border belonging as an active reconstruction of space (both physical and symbolic) across state borders. I argue that imagining cross-border belonging constitutes a symbolic struggle with material, and even spatial, consequences linked to the collective rights of cross-border nations.

INDEX WORDS: Indigenous Peoples; Collective Identification; Border Politics; Maya-Mam; Nation-building; Boundary Work

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my incredible wife, Lindsey, and our three inspiring daughters (Maya Dante, Lily Ali, and Zion Marley). You have supported me in every stage of this research, even when I was conducting fieldwork far from you. I will always cherish the memories of our adventures together in Guatemala and Mexico. You are my family and I adore you!

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[1] All photographs by author, except Image 6 taken by Carlos Manuel Citalán.

CHAPTER 1

THE BORDER POLITICS OF MAM COLLECTIVE IDENTIFICATION

The second time Diego shared the story, his emotions were just as convincing as the first. A highly educated man in his forties, Diego is a Maya-Mam activist who works for Guatemala's Ministry of Education. Sitting at his office desk that warm afternoon, he displayed frustration, confusion, and sadness as he repeated to me the questions of another Mam man he met "from across the border" in Mexico: "How is it that they split our territory? How? How were they so unfair to leave some of us on one side and others on the other side, when we are the same? We are [all] Mam and Mayan." For Diego, these questions are critical for Mam collective identification because he imagines the Mam as one *pueblo* (people or nation) divided by a state border.

Social scientists frequently tie societies, cultures, and nations to specific states, failing to articulate conflicting boundaries between some nations and states (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Lamont and Molnár 2002; Rosaldo 1989; Wilson and Donnan 1998). In fact, many indigenous nations are fragmented—geographically, socially, culturally, and politically—by state borders. Indeed, conceptualizing peoples as nations bounded within state borders is especially problematic for indigenous nations that span state borders (such as the Mapuche across the Chile-Argentina border, the Tohono O'odham across the Mexico-U.S. border, and the Maya-Mam across the Guatemala-Mexico border). These peoples can be characterized as "cross-border nations" (Warren 2013).

Research on indigenous cross-border nations has the potential to elucidate relationships between spatial and symbolic boundaries, yet little research has concerned itself with how cross-border nations are actually constructed and how contemporary state borders are implicated in such constructions. This issue is raised by Naples and Bickham Mendez (2015: 357-38) in their concluding chapter on border politics, wherein they ask, "How are borders and boundaries interpreted by movement participants as sources of articulated demands and grievances or targets of action?" More specifically, here I will address how the Maya-Mam, an indigenous people divided by the Guatemala-Mexico border, denaturalize state borders in their efforts to seek collective rights. How are the Mam actively imagining and constructing nationhood across the Guatemala-Mexico border and other political-administrative borders within each country? In essence, this dissertation is a sociological examination of how nation-building is constructed not only within states but also across state borders. Additionally, it is an examination of how nation-building is a contested symbolic struggle. Therefore, this dissertation addresses how nationhood not only permeates from the state in a top-down fashion (see Anderson 1991), but how nationhood is also shaped by subaltern agents from the ground-up. These questions are also sociologically important because they draw attention to how the symbolic boundaries of collective identification are shaped by spatial boundaries and, in a reciprocal fashion, how such symbolic boundaries may be used to contest those spatial constructions.

Struggles to gain recognition as cross-border nations do not typically involve a demand for statehood. Rather, they entail seeking collective rights, such as territory and self-determination, consultation and informed consent (on the part of governments from

both countries) about projects that will impact their territory and the natural resources therein, and the ability to develop and maintain relationships across the border for cultural, political, economic, or social purposes (Deloria and Lytle 1984; Fraser 1997; Postero and Zamosc 2004; Richards 2004; Richards and Gardner 2013; United Nations 2008).

Of course, in an important sense, the Mam cross-border nation already exists. The mere imposition of state borders crossing Mam territory does not erase the longer history of Mam living out their lives in that territory. As Maddison (2015:155) notes, "Contemporary Indigenous nations are no less sovereign because they have been subsumed within a colonial nation-state, with new borders and boundaries inscribed over the top of existing borders." Nonetheless, I refer to the "construction" of the Mam cross-border nation throughout this dissertation. I do so in order to capture the fact that efforts to achieve recognition of the cross-border Mam nation are ongoing, vis-à-vis the Guatemalan and Mexican states as well as the Mam people.

The narratives and actions of the Mam across the Guatemala-Mexico border provide an excellent case for understanding how individuals and collectivities denaturalize state borders while seeking to construct a cross-border nation. Reflecting on her research about Mam identities along the southern Mexican side of the border, Hernández Castillo (2001) remarked, "The border became for me no longer a boundary line between two countries but rather a space of identity, a way of being." The overall theoretical contribution, therefore, lies in demonstrating how borders shape ways of being and belonging, but also how belonging, or what I will later conceptualize as an *imagining of cross-border belonging*, may potentially shape borders.

COLLECTIVE IDENTIFICATION AND BORDER POLITICS

I situate my research at the intersection of indigenous collective identification and border politics. Border politics can be understood as "struggles that challenge, transcend, or reinforce territorial borders and their effects, or that contest borders *within* nationally, defined territories, including social and symbolic boundaries of inclusion and exclusion" (Naples and Bickham Mendez 2015:4, italics in original). Indigenous collective identification intersects with border politics as indigenous peoples seek collective rights impeded by the spatial and symbolic borders of states. In this section I draw upon sociological literature on collective identification, the interdisciplinary literature on indigenous peoples, and the interdisciplinary literature on border studies to contextualize how my research fits at this intersection. I suggest that bridging these literatures helps us understand that while state political-administrative borders may constrict indigenous peoples' collective imaginings, some forms of collective identification can challenge those divisions.

Borders

An emphasis on borders is relevant for this particular research for at least three reasons. First, collective identification, which is central to this analysis, involves the negotiation of symbolic borders. The construction of a collectivity (whatever that collectivity may be) assumes a limit, or symbolic border, to that collectivity. Second, state borders sustain a nation state framework, which conflates *the* nation (singular) with the state, by conflating the limits of the state with the limits of the nation (Horsman and Marshall 1995). The nation state framework impedes the collective rights of indigenous peoples,

which I will discuss further in the next subsection. But as a precursor to that discussion, it is through the denaturalization of state borders that indigenous nations may consequently challenge the reification of the nation state in their efforts to seek collective rights (including their recognition as nations). And third, borders are relevant for this research since I will analyze the relationship between state political-administrative borders and the symbolic borders of collective identification.

As noted here, the usage of the term borders takes on different meanings. Most humans daily cross many borders, either formal ones distinguishing between governmental boundaries or symbolic and cultural ones distinguishing between local places, groups, identities, or ideas (Diener and Hagen 2012). Since borders mark so many forms of distinction, *border* is often an ambiguous analytic concept (Donnan and Wilson 1999). Thus, a theoretical conceptualization of borders here is necessary. How can we characterize the socio-political and geographic concepts of place, space, and scale, and borders in particular?

Debates within geography over understandings of *place* and *space* remain unsettled.[2] In their most simple forms of characterization, place refers to a specific location somewhere, while space refers the fact that places are located somewhere (Agnew 2011). Thus, broadly defined, places are specific while spaces are general locales (Agnew 2011; Segesvary 2003). Space may also be regarded as "a general idea people have of where things should be in physical and cultural relation to each other," while place, on the other hand, "encompasses both the idea and the actuality of where things are" (Donnan and Wilson 1999:9). Although these understandings are part of an ongoing debate, what seems to be clearer within this debate is that to a certain degree both space

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[2] See Agnew 2011 for a more comprehensive review of this debate.

and place are scalar dimensions, where place is narrower in scale (or scope) than space (Segesvary 2003).

How place and space are conceptualized in relation to borders, borderlands, and territory (in addition to the terms *boundary* and *frontier*) only further complicates the debate (Donnan and Wilson 1999; Prescott 1987). In some languages the terms space, place, and territory, just as border and frontier may even be synonymous in certain contexts (Diener and Hagen 2012). In the Mam language, territory is translated as *tx'otx'*. But tx'otx' signifies more than a demarcation in land that designates the limits of power, sovereignty, or jurisdiction. Although translated as territory, in the Mam language tx'otx' is a spatial term signifying an all-encompassing interdependence—fitting with the Maya Cosmovision—that includes the trees, plants, rivers, and even air. Humans and animals are also a part of tx'otx'. It encompasses all aspects of the environment as a living being.

Although I recognize certain merits in these terminological debates, especially as they pertain to analytic clarification, I have little invested in positing a particular position within these debates and little confidence in being able to resolve them here. What I will do, however, is articulate a conceptualization of borders that is useful for this particular analysis. Regarding place and space in this study, I broadly define borders as places that mark distinction. These are not always necessarily rigid places, however. Borderlands or border regions do not have clearly defined boundaries, but they are places (symbolic and/or physical) where the borders that mark distinction are socially, culturally, historically, and/or politically relevant. Just as borders may take on different forms, borderlands (as symbolic and/or physical places) and their scales shift in different social, political, and historical contexts as well.

Thus, in a general sense, borders are human constructions designed to mark difference (Diener and Hagen 2012). These include political, economic, cultural, racial, ethnic, and geographic differences, among others (Diener and Hagen 2012; Madsen 2014; Nájera 2015; Wilson and Donnan 1998). Donnan and Wilson (1999) classify borders into three categories: social, cultural, and territorial. They note that these are not mutually exclusive categories and each of these aspects could be present in a single boundary.

Social borders are symbolic constructions that mark difference along the lines of race, ethnicity, and nation (not to be confused here with *state*), among other social categorizations of collective belonging. To understand the interplay between the spatial and the symbolic in this research, it is important to analytically distinguish between collective identification boundaries of nations that are symbolic constructions and state boundaries that, while also symbolic, are spatial constructions. Collective identification boundaries are socially negotiated symbolic borders that distinguish between notions of "us" and "them." These metaphorical boundaries are relationally constructed, and ever-changing to a certain degree since they are always in formation (Hall 1996; Mallon 1996; Melucci 1995; Nagel 1994; Nelson 1999; Wade 1997). More of discussion on symbolic borders will follow below.

Cultural borders take the notion of boundaries as a metaphor and extend that metaphor to any situation characterized by contradiction. Like social borders, cultural borders may not always have a spatial dimension (Donnan and Wilson 1999). Cultural borders and borderlands include informal intersections that may be crossed, such as gender, class, age, and distinctive life experiences (Rosaldo 1989). These are transitional

zones that are also sites for innovative cultural construction (Donnan and Wilson 1999; Rosaldo 1989). Anzaldúa's research (1987) rooted in the Mexico-US border shows that these cultural borderlands are "physical, psychological, sexual, [and] class and racial" (Donnan and Wilson 1999:38). In this context, she explains that borderlands are contested places where "the lifeblood of two worlds [merge] to form a third—a border culture" (Anzaldúa 1987:3; Donnan and Wilson 1999; Naples and Bickham Mendez 2015). Living in these borderlands involves negotiating varying contradictions and forms of difference (Naples and Bickham Mendez 2015).

State borders, like the social and cultural borders previously mentioned, are also socially and symbolically constructed. Put differently, each of these boundaries that mark difference—even the geographical boundaries that may seem to follow a natural landscape—are not "natural" (Ganster and Lorey 2005). The borders that divide peoples are constructed by humans and so they should be understood as situated within human perceptions of the social and political world rather than as immutable and natural place-markers (Ganster and Lorey 2005). Nevertheless, even though borders are social constructions they may have material consequences. Indeed, because state political-administrative borders *are* socio-political and historical constructions they may have material effects on how individuals carry out their everyday lives and identify collectively (Donnan and Wilson 1999; Ganster and Lorey 2005).

State borders are sometimes referred to as geopolitical borders since they entail mapping out in geographic space the limits of state sovereignty over its citizens (Diener and Hagen 2012; Donnan an Wilson 1999). Thus, state borders can be viewed as "the meeting place between state and people" (Naples and Bickham Mendez 2015: 4).

However, rather than referring to these state borders as *geopolitical*, I will refer to them as *political-administrative* borders since the geographic aspect of their construction could at times be misleading. Political-administrative borders is an especially fitting label for these state demarcations of division since this label may be used to describe internal state divisions (such as the borders between municipalities in Chiapas, Mexico and between municipalities in western Guatemala, as well as the departmental divisions within Guatemala) and this label captures the limits to each country's political-administrative reach (the Guatemala-Mexico border). In contrast, *geopolitical* may be a misleading adjective because although these political-administrative borders within and between Mexico and Guatemala do indeed create divisions across a geographic space; like all state borders elsewhere, in many instances they do not meaningfully coincide with geographic contours within landscapes.

For example, where the contemporary borderline between western Guatemala and southern Mexico originates from the Pacific Ocean it follows the Suchiate River as the division between each state, seemingly following a geographic contour in the landscape. But moving north of the Suchiate River the borderline is then delineated as a straight line, following no landscape, as it cuts across the Sierra highlands at different angles (see Image 1). At the ground level (i.e., not from an aerial cartographic representation) since the division does not follow any geographic contours, the borderline is marked by concrete boundary monuments at regular intervals.[3]

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[3] More details on the Guatemala-Mexico border will follow in chapter two. For an example of these concrete boundary monuments, see Image 5 in chapter four.

Image 1. Guatemala-Mexico Border. 15°03'05.69" N and 92°02'02.31" W. Source: Google, SIO, NOAA, U.S. Navy, NGA, GEBCO. December 13, 2015.

On the ground, and especially when state political-administrative borders do not follow geographic contours, the border is made visible and invisible in different ways. In some places, state political-administrative borders are made visible by boundary markers, walls and fences, surveillance and policing, official entry and exit points, customs offices, and even by border patrols, to manage cross-border flows of people and materials (Diener and Hagen 2012).

Yet in other regions these borders are not clearly demarcated or visible at the ground. The first time I crossed the Guatemala-Mexico border in 2011 was with a research participant from a border town in Guatemala who wanted to familiarize me with a nearby Mexican town. Before we started down the bumpy dirt road that would wind through the mountains north of the Tacaná volcano, I politely reminded him to stop when we neared the border so I could snap a photograph of the borderline. As I bounced around the back of his pickup bed, trying to keep my balance, I was extremely impressed by the

beauty and height of the mountains that wrapped around us and that extended to the horizon. After about 20 minutes of being awestruck by the gorgeous highland landscape I finally remembered my plan to take a photograph of the borderline. I tapped on the driver side of the window and tried to ask through the glass, "*Cuánto falta?*" (How much longer). I only received a confused look from him over his shoulder in return. I then wondered if maybe he had forgotten about my request. "How much farther to the border?" I repeated. He then laughed, unrolled the driver door window, and pointed behind us. Apparent to him and less apparent to me was that we had already crossed the border and I didn't even know it.

Even when these borders are less visible or even invisible in landscapes, state borders may be reinforced by hegemonic cartographies. Maps of Mexico and Guatemala, like other states, typically define with clarity the fixedness of political-administrative borders between states. These maps are reproduced by citizens and even mass-produced in a variety of ways (e.g., on school murals and on passports), which reinforces citizens' internalization of these seemingly immutable state borders.[4]

Although states present borders as immutable places, individuals and collectivities may construct ways of being and identifying that denaturalize such markers of difference. In the following section I bridge sociological literature on collective identification with interdisciplinary literature on indigenous peoples. I draw from these literatures for two reasons. First, these literatures can help us consider how spatialized political realities shape the symbolic boundaries of collective identification, which may impede certain

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[4] Passports are an interesting case in this regard since Guatemala recently faced international criticism for the manner in which the state represented a less-defined border between Guatemala and Belize on the covers of their passports all while, on the other hand, it represented solid borders around the other Central American states and Mexico.

collective rights (e.g., territory and recognition). And second, these literatures can help us ponder how collectivities might use the symbolic to contest the political realities that deny them these rights.

Collective Identification and Contesting the Nation State Framework

Although a significant trend within the sociological literature on collective identification focuses on its role in social movements (Laraña, Johnston, and Gusfield 1994; Melucci 1989; Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin 2010; Polletta and Jasper 2001; Turner 1969), relatively few sociologists address indigenous movements or indigenous identification more generally (for exceptions, see Golash-Boza 2010; Richards 2013, 2004; Warren 2013). In this section I will highlight the ways that the sociological literature on collective identification and the interdisciplinary literature on indigenous peoples will complement each other throughout this analysis.

One line of research on collective identification focuses on what Nippert-Eng (2002) has called "boundary work." Boundary work consists of the "strategies, principles, and practices we use to create, maintain, and modify cultural categories" (ibid: 79). Boundaries define who is and is not a member of a given collective (Owens, Robinson, and Smith-Lovin 2010). Boundary work involves drawing lines between realms (and identities), and maintaining them in such a way that we can transition between them (Nippert-Eng 2002).

However, sociologists' usage of boundary work to demonstrate how collectivities create, modify, and maintain symbolic boundaries is predominantly aspatial. The symbolic boundaries of identification are not defined in relation to geographic, political-

administrative, or geopolitical boundaries (or at least, the extent to which they are is not highlighted in the sociological literature). This is the case even as sociologists like Polletta and Jasper (2001) have called us to consider the importance of place in the construction of collective identities.

As a corrective, I will examine how boundary work is simultaneously constructed through social relationships *and* spatialized political realities, such as being rooted in ancestral territories (Basso 1996; Silko 1981). Leslie Marmon Silko (1981:69) notes that stories shape identity and "cannot be separated from geographical locations, from actual physical places within the land." Therefore, I will pay particular attention to the reciprocal relationship between the spatial and the symbolic.

In a broad sense, collective identification is typically understood according to one, or various combinations, of primordialist, instrumentalist, and constructivist views (Arthur 2011). The primordialist view uses stable essentialism to define identity as unchanging, such as seeing the contemporary Maya stuck in a timeless past; it treats "ethnicity as a given" (Corntassel 2003:83). In response to the primordialist view, instrumentalists see ethnicity as something that can be purposefully created (Corntassel 2003). The instrumentalist view suggests that individuals can freely choose their identities, which are neither timeless nor unchanging (Arthur 2011). Stemming from the influence of Fredrik Barth's seminal work (1969), instrumentalists see identity as a tool for resistance to be used against dominant sectors of society (Hernández Castillo 2001). Lastly, a constructivist view understands identities as not simply chosen by individuals, nor as timeless and unchanging, but rather, as made through social relationships and institutions in which people are embedded (Arthur 2011). The approach I use here is

constructivist. I see Mam collective identification as constrained by social relationships, histories, organizations, and the state, but I also recognize the agency of the Mam, individually and as a collectivity, in shaping their ongoing processes of collective identification.

Indeed, collective identity is not something simply inside people's heads. Rather, it is an interactive and shared definition constructed among people within a field of opportunities and constraints (Melucci 1995). Casaús Arzú (1998:119) writes: "Identity is a process of constant change and reconstitution, and the boundaries of identities are found in permanent modification based on historical conjunctures." Collective identities are not fixed, but the product of a process always in construction (Hall 1996; Mallon 1996; Nagel 1994; Nelson 1999; Wade 1997). Just as collective identification is processural and socially constructed, the boundaries that mark difference along lines of race, ethnicity, and nation are created through "marked juxtapositions in daily interaction" (Barth 1969:10; Taube 2012). In other words, individuals and collectivities negotiate the boundaries of their collective identities through everyday social interactions. Within Guatemala and Mexico these interactions involve negotiating the boundaries of the persistent indigenous/ladino and indigenous/mestizo dichotomies. Indigenous identification is relationally constructed in opposition to *ladino* (non-indigenous) or *mestizo* identification; each is defined in terms of the other (Nelson 1999; Smith 1990).[5]

Identification boundaries are also negotiated through everyday social interactions *among* the indigenous Maya population, which is complex and heterogeneous. In

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[5] *Mestizaje* is a symbolic cultural and biological hybrid of Spanish and indigenous peoples that arose along with Mexico's Law of Government national integrationist project "to civilize Chiapas Indians," beginning in the 1920s and '30s (Hernández Castillo 2001). I will expand on this history in chapter two.

addition to the pueblo Mam, there are several other Mayan peoples in Chiapas, Mexico, including the Tzotzil, Tzeltal, and Cho'ol, and in Guatemala the Maya population is made up of at least 21 distinct peoples with varying languages, histories, cultures, dress, ancestral territories, etc. (Del Valle Escalante 2008; Mac Giolla Chríost 2003). While today language seems to be one of the more dominant distinguishing features among Maya peoples, in some cases this diversity is also rooted in ancient territorial rivalries (Carmack 1995; Watanabe 1995). However, not only are the Maya not homogeneous, but different Maya peoples themselves are also not internally homogeneous. Indeed, referring specifically to the Mam, Hernández Castillo (2001:11) writes that their lives "challenge any definition of 'the culture' as an integral, unified, and homogenous whole."

To be identified as indigenous, an individual must both self-identify and be recognized by others as a member of that group (Martínez Cobo 1982; Nelson 1999). At a collective level, external recognition is also important. The self-identification of the Mam as an autonomous nation spanning the Guatemala-Mexico border constitutes a fundamental criterion for achieving formal recognition of the Mam as a people with territorial rights, or even more moderate rights to self-governance. Indeed, self-ascription and ascription by others are critical for defining not only ethnic boundaries, but national ones as well (Smith 2002). The Mam nation is constructed in part through self-identification as a distinct nation with its own territory, culture, language, and political authorities (Hernández Castillo 2012), and in part through recognition by others. Both of these processes are unsettled, contested, and in formation.

Unsurprisingly, tension often exists between indigenous movements promoting collective rights and states that seek homogenization through a nation state framework

(Eriksen 2002; Iyall Smith 2006; Maddison 2015; Naples and Bickham Mendez 2015).
This tension is particularly noticeable as indigenous peoples use collective identification
to seek recognition as nations (either within states and/or across state boundaries), which
poses a direct challenge to the framework that conflates nation with state. In other words,
as collective identification boundaries diverge from state boundaries, indigenous peoples
"make nations and states two very different entities" (Wilson and Donnan 1998:2).

In Guatemala and Mexico state discourses about the meaning of the nation have
been less radical than those of some other Latin American states, such as Bolivia and
Ecuador, which have recognized their plurinational character. For example, Article 2 of
the Mexican constitution now importantly notes that awareness, or self-identification, is a
fundamental criterion for indigenous identity, but the same article defines Mexico as a
singular (*única*) "multicultural" nation (Constitute Project 2015). While multicultural
acknowledgement may highlight a state's diversity, state-driven multiculturalism projects
frequently sideline more substantive indigenous rights (Hale 2006, 2002). Likewise, after
Guatemala's civil war, which lasted from 1960-1996 and left hundreds of thousands
missing or killed, the state and guerrilla groups signed peace accords, including the 1995
Agreement on Identity and Rights for the Indigenous Population (also called the
Indigenous Rights Accord). The Accord defines the Guatemalan nation as multiethnic,
multilingual, and culturally plural (Sieder 2001). It reads:

> That, because of its history, conquest, colonization, movements and migrations,
> the Guatemalan nation is multi-ethnic, multicultural and multilingual in nature;
> that the parties recognize and respect the identity and political, economic, social
> and cultural rights of the Maya, Garífuna and Xinca peoples, within the unity of

the Guatemalan nation, and subject to the indivisibility of the territory of the

Guatemalan State, as components of that unity.

Although the agreement depicts Guatemala as a multiethnic, multicultural, and

multilingual nation, it still sustains a singular nation state framework or "a project of a

multicultural nation" (Casaús Arzú 1998:121).[6] As Casaús Arzú (1998) has written, the

political and ethnic boundaries established in the accord do not correspond to the

plurinational social reality of Guatemala. Nor do they account for the ongoing reality of

cross-border migration. During the Guatemalan civil war, thousands of Mam individuals

and families, along with other Mayan peoples, resettled in Chiapas, Mexico as refugees.

More recent decades have seen a wave of economic migration, as Mam individuals seek

work in Chiapas (Hernández Castillo 2012).

The discussion of state borders in the previous section is especially relevant here

in relation to the nation state framework. As the nation state framework facilitates the

denial of collective rights for indigenous peoples seeking recognition as nations, state

borders harden these constructed "realities." Horsman and Marshall (1995) explain:

There has always been a tension between the fixed, durable and inflexible

requirements of national boundaries and the unstable, transient and flexible

requirements of people. If the principle fiction of the nation-state is ethnic, racial,

linguistic and cultural homogeneity, then borders always give the lie to this

construct.

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[6] The multicultural depiction of Guatemala also has been criticized to the extent that state-driven multiculturalism merely highlights some of the country's diversity while sidelining more substantive indigenous rights (Hale 2002).

In essence, state borders establish together the supposed fixedness of the nation and state; they are the lines of articulation for the fusing together of a singular nation with a singular state.

In spite of the divisive character of the nation state framework and state borders, indigenous nations continue to mobilize to seek collective rights. Constructing collective identification boundaries within and between states, especially as it involves the symbolic boundaries of indigenous nations, is an inherently political act since it challenges the state's homology "between culture, identity, territory, and nation" (Donnan and Wilson 1999:10). Some indigenous peoples have even developed "counter-mapping projects" to contest and rework hegemonic geographies informed by the nation state framework (Wainwright 2008). As Naples and Bickham Mendez (2015) point out, borders and other boundaries can be both the reason behind social movements' demands and grievances and the specific targets for their actions. While the state promotes a framework for national belonging that elides indigenous rights, some indigenous individuals and organizations promote ways of identifying that denaturalize state borders in order to realize cross-border collective rights. Mam collective identification and activism contesting the Guatemala-Mexico border is a compelling case in point.

METHODS

To address how the Mam actively denaturalize the Guatemala-Mexico border, I conducted ethnographic fieldwork and semi-structured qualitative interviews in both countries. Individuals in Guatemala and Mexico were selected through snowball sampling based on their willingness to participate, beginning in 2011 with contacts made

in the Guatemalan department of San Marcos, in the municipality of Comitancillo. After

three months of fieldwork in 2011 in Comitancillo and Tacaná (another department of

San Marcos), my interviews and fieldwork continued on and off in other regions of

Guatemala and Mexico in 2013, 2014, and 2015, totaling more than 13 months research.[7]

Interviews were conducted with Mam individuals in their everyday lives and

leaders of Mam councils and organizations. I only conducted interviews with Mam

participants because I was interested in how the Mam, at both an individual and

collective level, define their own collective identification boundaries. Collective

identification is by definition a process engaged by collectivities. However, while I

address how Mam organizations construct collective identification, I also focus on

individuals. I do so to explain how Guatemalan political-administrative borders are

manifest in the narratives of Mam in their everyday lives and how they might challenge

those borders. Thus, my research includes two levels of focus: how collective

identification is constructed within Mam councils and organizations and how collective

identification is constructed through social interactions among individuals.

The participants included twenty-four women and forty-five men.[8] Forty-four of

these participants were from Guatemala and twenty-five from Mexico.[9] They ranged in

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[7] The interviews and fieldwork I conducted in 2011 were for my master's thesis research on Mam collective identification in Guatemala, which inspired this current project. Data from that phase of the research will be used here as well.

[8] Some of this variation can be attributed to sampling method. Through my snowball sampling, men and women tended to refer me to other potential male participants more frequently than potential female participants. Additionally, since the leadership of several organizations in each country was gendered in quite a patriarchal fashion, there were usually more male leaders of organizations available to be interviewed by me than women.

[9] There are more participants from Guatemala in this study than Mexico for two reasons. First, my sample includes more Mam participants from the Guatemalan side of the border in this dissertation research because I maintained contact and conducted some follow-up interviews with Mam participants from Guatemala that I interviewed for Master's thesis. Second, this study not only addresses how Mam individuals in their everyday lives are identifying as part of the pueblo Mam, but also how Mam councils and organizations are engaged in constructing Mam nationhood. More participants in this study are from

age from 18 to 61, and their education levels ranged from no formal schooling to university graduates. Some participated in community or political organizations while others did not. They included farmers, university students, state officials, teachers, NGO leaders and workers, unemployed individuals, Mam Council leaders, and others. Although these participants come from a variety of different backgrounds it is important to remember that their perspectives cannot possibly represent the perspectives of all the Mam in Guatemala and Mexico and elsewhere. That said, their variety of backgrounds do may help us understand nuanced ways that collective identification is constructed from individuals with different experiences and perspectives.

The interviews ranged from brief conversations to lengthy dialogues lasting hours regarding what it means to be Mam in the contemporary world. Some participants were revisited on numerous occasions for follow-up discussions as well. In some instances participants chose to be interviewed with a family member or friend. I respected these requests and they occasionally turned into productive discussions about experiences with identity, activism, and ongoing challenges faced by the Mam. The interviews were carried out in Spanish, with a sprinkling of Mam interspersed. They took place in a variety of settings, including state offices, pathways to NGO meetings, living rooms, kitchens, cornfields, and barns.

In western Guatemala I conducted interviews and fieldwork primarily in two departments, San Marcos and Huehuetenango. Both of these departments' western borders are delineated as the Guatemala-Mexico border (i.e., the western border of these departments is also the western border of the country). These departments were ideal for

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Guatemala partly because there are four Mam councils in Guatemala (of which I conducted interviews with leaders from three of them) and only one Mam council in Chiapas, Mexico that together form the Council of the Mam Nation.

this research because of their bordering with Mexico. In western Guatemala, Mam territory also includes part of Guatemala's departments of Retalhuleu and Quetzaltenango. Although my research in Guatemala was primarily focused on the bordering departments I did conduct some interviews and participate in some meetings among Mam leaders in Quetzaltenango as well. In Chiapas, Mexico I conducted interviews and fieldwork primarily in Pavencúl, an ejido of the municipality Tapachula.[10] Pavencúl was ideal for its close proximity to the Guatemala-Mexico border; in fact, from Pavencúl the borderline is visible as it divides the volcano Tacaná in two.

Both interviews and participant observation were crucial methods for this project since both provided opportunities for Mam participants to describe and actively construct meanings around different ways of identifying. Meetings with Mam councils, for example, allowed me to hear discussions among Mam leaders about goals and planning strategies that related to Mam collective identification and activism. Interviews about the desired outcomes and perceived success and/or failures of these meetings helped me further disentangle meanings around the intended and unintended consequences that may unfold from these situations. Taken together, these methods allowed me to access different ways that the Mam are actively engaged in constructing forms of being and belonging that denaturalize state borders.

CHAPTER ROADMAP

Once more, the main question I will address throughout the dissertation is the following: how are the Mam actively imagining and constructing nationhood across state borders?

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[10] As noted by Hernández Castillo (2012:53), the official name of this community is Pavencúl; however, as part of the cultural-political movement in this community the Mam spelling as Pab'en Qul is used in some political documents.

Throughout this dissertation I will demonstrate that although state borders socially, culturally, and politically divide the pueblo Mam, the Mam are engaged in denaturalizing such borders in their efforts to seek collective rights as a cross-border nation. An analysis of how the Mam are imagining and constructing nationhood across state borders can provide interesting sociological insights about how nation-building is a contested symbolic struggle with potential spatial consequences. Thus, the theoretical aim of this project is to demonstrate the interplay between the spatial and the symbolic: how borders shape ways of being and belonging, but also how a sense of belonging may potentially shape borders.

I will argue that the Mam are constructing nationhood across the Guatemala-Mexico border by denaturalizing state borders through a process that I refer to as *imagining cross-border belonging*. By *imagining* I do not mean merely a mental exercise. While certainly imagining includes ways of thinking and knowing, in this context here I conceptualize imagining cross-border belonging as an active reconstruction of space (both physical and symbolic) across state political-administrative borders. Imagining cross-border belonging is about reconstructing space for indigenous peoples to organize around social, political, cultural, spiritual, economic, and/or environmental claims. The *belonging* aspect of this process refers to a social, historical, and political relationship with this reconstructed space.

It is perhaps important to note that Mam participants in this study did not actually use the phrase "imagining cross-border belonging." Imagining cross-border belonging is an analytic concept comprised of various dimensions that will be outlined in the following chapters. Nevertheless, the interviews and fieldwork observations highlight

how this analytical concept captures an important process within Mam activism. The imagination of cross-border belonging can be viewed as a cultural "tool," borrowing Ann Swidler's (1986) metaphor, that indigenous peoples may use to right historical wrongs and address contemporary dispossession and environmental degradation across state borders.

Throughout the dissertation I will describe three primary facets of imagining cross-border belonging that Mam activists use: collective identification, cross-border experiences, and counter-mapping. I will then explore how these facets should be understood as interdependent processes. As previously noted, my theoretical contribution lies in articulating how these three interwoven processes are shaped by borders and also how they demonstrate ways that collectivities may reconstruct space to attain collective rights.

In chapter two I develop a historical contextualization for imagining cross-border belonging by paying particular attention to the socio-historical construction of the Guatemala-Mexico border. I discuss the actions of both the Guatemalan and Mexican governments toward the Mam on both sides of this constructed division. Additionally, I discuss the role of Mam councils on both sides of the border. Although I will rely heavily on dominant historical narratives of this borderland region, I will also approach this history from below (i.e., from the perspective of Mam individuals in their everyday lives). I do so because I am interested in how Mam individuals imagine the past in relation to the present while looking toward different futures.

In chapter three I outline the first of three interwoven processes that comprise imagining cross-border belonging: collective identification. I argue that Mam collective

identification highlights how symbolic and spatial boundaries are actually co-constituting. Through several examples I demonstrate how the boundaries of Mam collective identification are shaped by state political-administrative boundaries. Often Mam individuals and organizations will conflate their collective identification boundaries with state-defined political-administrative boundaries (e.g., municipal boundaries and with the Guatemala-Mexico border). However, there are also examples of ways that the Mam define their collective identification boundaries in ways that transcend state political-administrative boundaries. Just as spatial boundaries shape the symbolic boundaries of collective identification, in this chapter I pose the theoretical argument that the symbolic may also potentially shape the spatial.

In chapter four I further detail how the interpretation of cross-border experiences among the Mam may shape collective identification. In particular, I address how Mam individuals and organizations mobilize these cross-border experiences to shape the collective identification of other Mam individuals. While these are often ephemeral experiences of cross-border interaction, in many instances they have long-lasting consequences for how Mam individuals imagine themselves as part of a cross-border body politic. Through the mobilization of cross-border experiences the Mam actively denaturalize the Guatemala-Mexico border.

Then in chapter five I discuss the process of counter-mapping. Mam counter-maps (i.e., maps of Mam territory that do not align with the state borders) contest hegemonic geographies by presenting alternative ontological and epistemological perspectives (Wainwright 2008). Mam counter-maps are informed by cross-border experiences and collective identification boundary narratives discussed in chapters three and four. These

counter-maps complicate the state-activist binary by showing a similar example of counter-mapping undertaken by Mam individuals while working *within* a Guatemalan state organization. I also discuss examples undertaken by other indigenous cross-border nations to construct these counter-maps, including Warren's research (2013) about Mapuche "territorial dreaming" across the Chile-Argentina border. I then push the discussion further by introducing other ways that the Mam are engaged in counter-mapping that go beyond "*the map*." By going beyond *the map*, I mean ways of mapping Mam territory that do not fit within the prevalent (and practically universal) aerial perspective of cartographic representation. My analysis of counter-mapping beyond *the map* demonstrates how Mam leaders and individuals in their everyday lives see and talk about their territory, including perspectives of landscape, volcanoes, and sacred sites. I suggest that these counter-mappings challenge state borders and the nation state framework that divide the pueblo Mam.

I conclude the dissertation by discussing how the three processes outlined in chapters three, four, and five feed into each other (conceptualized as imagining cross-border belonging) to denaturalize the Guatemala-Mexico border. Thus, my theoretical argument is that these three interwoven processes constitute a symbolic struggle with material, and even spatial, consequences linked to collective rights.

CHAPTER 2

A CONTESTED HISTORY OF THE GUATEMALA-MEXICO BORDER

AND THE PUEBLO MAM

"...No telling of history is ever complete or ever disinterested."

-Patricia Richards (2013:35)

"The history of any country, presented as the history of a family, conceals fierce conflicts
of interest (sometimes exploding, most often repressed) between conquerors and
conquered…"   -Howard Zinn (2005:10)

In this chapter I develop a historical contextualization of ongoing frictions

between indigenous peoples and the states that divide them. In particular, this

contextualization might help us better understand how the Mam interpret state borders as

sites of contestation as they seek to construct nationhood. This chapter will draw attention

to the ways that state political-administrative divisions (including the Guatemala-Mexico

border) are socio-historical constructions that have shifted over time. This historical

contextualization will also address the following: how the Mam and their territory have

been divided by state borders; how the Guatemalan and Mexican governments have

discriminated against indigenous peoples in the region; and how the indigenous have

resisted and challenged this discrimination while seeking collective rights.

Throughout this chapter I intentionally avoid drawing neat divisions between Mexican and Guatemalan histories, leaving out distinct "Mexican" and "Guatemalan" headings. While it is important to acknowledge that each state has discriminated—and continues to discriminate—against indigenous peoples within the bounded limits of each country, I suggest that it is also important to contextualize this discrimination from the perspective of indigenous peoples. Histories are contentious social constructions (Mallon 2012; Richards 2013). Therefore, a historical contextualization about how states have mapped their sovereignty over the sovereignty of indigenous peoples should not only consider the dominant historical narratives articulated by academics. Such a contextualization should also consider the historical narratives constructed by indigenous peoples, which is an approach to history from below, from the perspective of Mam individuals in their everyday lives. This approach calls attention to how the Mam remember the past in relation to the present while looking toward different futures. Many indigenous individuals view state borders as problematic, to say the least, especially as they are inscribed over their ancestral territories. Therefore, my approach will be to address histories of discrimination against indigenous peoples in each country without legitimizing the states' historical perspectives.

I will do this by describing important historical differences between each state's relationship with indigenous peoples (and the Mam in particular), while also acknowledging that the borderland is a space that occasionally blends these histories. Indeed, the borderland is a space that encapsulates both rigidity and flexibility through a boundary line that is quite porous in certain places. Personal histories among the Mam are especially blended through visits with extended family members on both sides of the

border and seasonal labor migrations. As such, borders may "bleed" so that "places, *en este lado y el otro lado*, must be read within a larger context of bleeding borders" (Thompson 2001:179). Therefore, my description of these histories focuses on distinctions between the two countries while also blending these histories as they are lived and blended in the borderland.

In the first section I describe the historical negotiation of the Guatemala-Mexico border, which ignored altogether the indigenous peoples and their territories. I also demonstrate that this border has continually shifted over time. In this manner, the border has cut across the pueblo Mam. Likewise, I address the different political-administrative divisions *within* each country, which have also socially, culturally, and politically divided the pueblo Mam. While most historical narratives about the negotiation of these state borders ignore the indigenous altogether, these divisions are highlighted and contested by the Mam in their own telling of history.

I will then describe some of the ways that the Guatemalan and Mexican governments have discriminated against indigenous peoples in the region over time. Emphasizing this discrimination is significant for this dissertation's overall analysis because discrimination continues to shape how the Mam identify as a collectivity and it has even influenced the cross-border migration of indigenous peoples. Most notably, this is the case as indigenous peoples from Guatemala crossed the border into Chiapas as refugees during Guatemala's thirty-six year armed conflict, which involved the genocide of indigenous peoples by Guatemala's military. In that section I will also address how indigenous peoples, including the Mam, have historically resisted this discrimination.

Today the Mam continue this resistance by defending their territory and seeking

recognition as a cross-border nation.

THE GUATEMALA-MEXICO BORDER AND ANCESTRAL TERRITORIES

In this section I describe the shifting character of state political-administrative borders

and how such borders have divided the pueblo Mam throughout history. I begin by

addressing different historical iterations of the boundary between Guatemala and Mexico.

I then address how political-administrative divisions *within* each country have also

divided the Mam. Most historical narratives about the negotiation of state borders ignore

altogether the indigenous peoples and their territories that these divisions cross. Cautious

to not privilege the states' perspectives on these histories, I will also include narratives

about these divisions from Mam individuals. As Richards (2013:33-4) notes, "Different

versions of memory and history yield different versions of truth, which may be wielded

in defense of competing interests."

Mam Territory and State Borders

Mam territory today encompasses parts of western Guatemala (in the regional

departments of Quetzaltenango, Retalhuleu, San Marcos, and Huehuetenango) and part of

the border state of Chiapas, Mexico. This ancestral territory continues to be mapped by

Mam councils, activists, and individuals. They draw connections between their pueblo

and a more holistic and interdependent conceptualization of territory, which includes

sacred sites, the mountains, volcanoes, rivers, trees, plants, animals, and other living and

non-living beings in the Mayan Cosmovision.[11] Nevertheless, these perspectives of territory are cut sharply by histories of state border negotiations that have never considered the Mam or their ancestral territory.

The division of the pueblo Mam by state borders looks differently today than it did at the time of Spanish conquest. This is because colonial and state borders have shifted over time through various conflicts and negotiations. Chiapas was part of what was known as the "Kingdom of Guatemala" from the middle of the sixteenth century until 1821, the year both countries achieved independence from Spain (De Vos 1994; Dym 2006).[12] Then for a brief period in the late 1830s several western Guatemalan departments and Chiapas seceded and declared themselves to be Los Altos, the sixth country in the Federal Republic of Central America. This secessionist movement initiated on February 2nd, 1838 when the *municipio* (municipality) of Quetzaltenango demanded separation from Guatemala as it waited to be added to the newly formed republic (Dym 2006). Thus, Los Altos was a country formed from a municipal origin (Dym 2006). As elites sought to form this independent country and establish a representative government there were several complications among municipal authorities jockeying for power. At the same time, efforts to establish Los Altos were quickly toppled through a series of uprisings against elites by rural (and largely indigenous) populations in this newly founded country (Dym 2006). On a broader scale, the Federal Republic of Central America was also fraught with conflicts between elites and their cities, as well as state and federal authorities (Dym 2006; Woodward 1993). With the collapse of this short-

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[11] Some of these counter-mapping efforts will be analyzed in chapter five.
[12] For maps of the "Kingdom of Guatemala" see Dunn (1981 [1829]) and Dym (2006).

lived federation at the beginning of 1840, Guatemalan leaders continued to demand Chiapas' return from Mexico (De Vos 1994).

What is intriguing about this historical narrative, particularly during this period of redrawing federal boundaries, is that indigenous peoples are almost entirely absent from this telling of history. Elites and political authorities negotiated these borders without taking into account the ways that indigenous peoples and their territories would be divided by such borders. The absence of indigenous peoples is normalized in historical accounts about the shifting Guatemala-Mexico border throughout the 19th century. During this century the border would continue to be rearticulated and redrawn by the Guatemalan and Mexican governments. Both sought to extend the reach of their state's limits and obtain valuable land, all the while shifting over the territory of the pueblo Mam.

Decades of territorial disputes between Guatemala and Mexico ensued following the collapse of the Federal Republic of Central America. These disputes were finally negotiated by Guatemalan and Mexican officials with the signing of the Tratado sobre Límites (Boundary Treaties) in 1882. But, to reiterate the point above, I am aware of no evidence that indigenous peoples were ever discussed during these border negotiations. In the first article of this agreement, Guatemala "forever renounced the rights it believed it had to the territory of the State of Chiapas and its District of Soconusco" and the third article plots the contemporary borderline ("Tratado sobre Límites" 1882). Yet contention over the border region and Chiapas in particular persists to this day (Zorilla 1984). While several authors have addressed the contested history of the Guatemala-Mexico border

region, few give significant consideration to how this historically shifting border has affected the indigenous peoples who live there.

In addition to the border between Guatemala and Mexico, there are numerous state political-administrative divisions within each country that divide indigenous peoples. Guatemala is divided into 22 departments (Mam ancestral territory extends through four of them) and 340 municipios. Chiapas, Mexico is also divided into 122 municipios.

Just like the Guatemala-Mexico border, today these political-administrative divisions *within* each country also divide indigenous peoples and their territories. Cojtí Cuxil (2005:18) explains:

> While the [political-] administrative division has been reorganized according to
> the political conveniences of the [government] rulers, the fact is that all of [these
> rulers] have agreed to deny the indigenous peoples their territorial
> (administrative) and cultural recognition.

The misalignment of indigenous peoples and the state's political-administrative divisions is especially apparent in map comparisons. Both Warren (1998) and Nelson (1999) present two maps of Guatemala in their books, which contrast the location of Mayan peoples with the country's departmental divisions.[13] Warren (1998:14) describes this comparison by declaring, "The maps on these two pages are at war with each other." Since indigenous peoples are divided by political-administrative borders within each country (e.g., by municipios), it is extremely difficult for the indigenous to make collective rights demands as a pueblo.

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[13] More on such mapping exercises will be analyzed in chapter five.

An ongoing debate has centered on addressing the degree to which municipios in Guatemala and Chiapas align with pre-conquest Mayan towns (see Lovell and Lutz 2013). Some historical narratives, including those from contemporary academics, suggest that the institution of the municipio in Guatemala and Chiapas was simply a "continuation of the basic societal unit" of the Mayans (Wagley 1969:5; see also Collier 1975 and Wasserstrom 1983). Using archival data, Lovell and Lutz (2013) argue that many of Guatemala's municipios can be traced back to "Indian towns." Not to be confused with pre-conquest Mayan centers, these "Indian towns" were founded as settlements in the mid-sixteenth century by evangelizing clergy. So while it is true that many municipios today can be tied to "Indian towns" from the past, these towns were colonial constructions.[14]

Their research also indicates that most of the "Indian towns" were equated with "*encomiendas*" (Lovell and Lutz 2013). The encomienda was a taxation system where indigenous communities were required to pay tribute (via goods or services) to Spaniards or the royal treasury (Lovell and Lutz 2013). Lovell and Lutz (2013:101) described the geographic significance of these encomiendas as follows:

> While, in principle, the encomienda had nothing to do with land or landholding— it was conceived as an institution of economic exploitation, not a territorial construct—in actual practice encomiendas took on geographical characteristics. Indians were identified as living within encomienda boundaries and so, over time, encomiendas came to be thought of as spatial units…

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[14] As an exception to this, Lovell and Lutz (2013) note that several places received the title of municipio in the late nineteenth century—when Guatemalan law liberally allowed any place with 200 inhabitants or more to qualify for the municipio status. This was also an intense period of land seizures and labor exploitation against indigenous peoples (Lovell and Lutz 2013; McCreery 1994).

Almost all of these encomiendas, which exploited indigenous peoples centuries ago, are identifiable as present-day municipios (Lovell and Lutz 2013).

Unlike earlier scholars who described the municipio as continuation of indigenous communities, I interpret the municipio as a spatialized unit of the state that has historically exploited and divided indigenous peoples. My interpretation of the municipio matches Smith's (1984:198-99), who explains: "The municipio was not an indigenous institution, nor did it closely resemble any indigenous institution. It was a colonial administrative unit—the lowest-level political unit and the unit subject to tribute and labor levies." Lovell and Lutz (2013) point out that Smith (1984) may be mistaken in attributing the term municipio to colonial times (i.e., it's more likely that the term "pueblo de indio" or simply "pueblo" was used in the colonial era than the term municipio). But her argument, nonetheless, stands: towns were founded in the colonial era as places for exploiting and dividing indigenous peoples. Furthermore, most of these colonial towns are present-day municipios.

Mam narratives about the history of the region often differ somewhat from the historical narratives presented by academics. These historical narratives from below assert that when the present-day municipios were founded during the colonial era, they were designed to "take over" Mam places that were important locations within their ancestral territory. One of these Mam narratives was expressed to me by Luis, who was one of the founding leaders of the Mam council in Quetzaltenango in the late 1990s and early 2000s. Luis explained that during the pre-conquest there were "strategic centers" for the pueblo Mam—including economic and religious centers—but the Spanish

invaders divided these locations into municipios, effectively creating divisions among the pueblo Mam.

> The Mam placed strategic centers [within their territory]. Of course, the central city was Saq Tx'otx', right? Zaculeu. And from there it was the capital, we say, where they made the biggest decisions. But they also had strategic towns. So here [Oxe Tun K'al, which today is part of San Juan Ostuncalco in Quetzaltenango] was a very important economic place in the territory.

Narratives such as this suggest that Mam towns were strategically located (in terms of political and military advantage and religious importance for the pueblo Mam). Consequently, these towns became ideal locations for the Spanish invaders to establish municipios, which would divide the pueblo Mam and their territory.

In Chiapas, *within*-state divisions also include ejidal units. The ejidal system—a communally owned land system legally protected by the Mexican Constitution—redistributed titles on uncultivated land to many indigenous communities in the border region following land reform of the 1920s and 1930s (Yashar 1998). But the ejidal system of Chiapas contains a haunting history for the pueblo Mam. Hernández Castillo (2001) explains that while historical narratives of Chiapas tend to distinguish between "plantation times" and "ejido times," there is much overlap. As part of Mexico's integrationist policies during this era, the Mam could become *ejiditarios* (ejido holders) but only by formally accepting a Mexican identity and ridding themselves of their indigenous culture (Hernández Castillo 2001). This was done, in part, by complying with laws that prohibited speaking Mam or wearing *corte*, *huipil*, or other indigenous clothing. The ejidos created opportunities for farming and passing down uncultivated lands to

future generations but these lands came at a steep price from the state: the Mam would

have to become "Mexican peasants." Hernández Castillo (2001:42) describes:

> In official documents dating from the 1940s, there are no more references to their
>
> cultural identity as Mam. In fact, by 1950 the official census in municipalities
>
> historically inhabited by the Mam reports only Spanish speakers. Possibly many
>
> of the Mam speakers did not declare themselves as such to government
>
> representatives, because of the fear provoked by "Mexicanization" campaigns.
>
> Sierra inhabitants began to identify themselves publicly as "peasants"…

Thus, acquiring such land holdings required submission to the state. All of this was part

of a decades-long project to consolidate a Mexican national identity along its southern

border with Guatemala (Hernández Castillo 2001).

As I've argued in this section, there are several ways that the pueblo Mam

continues to be divided by state borders. Such borders are shifting socio-historical

constructions. Most historical narratives suggest that neither government has taken into

account indigenous peoples and their territories when negotiating borders. Mam accounts

suggest that the borders were designed to socially, culturally, and politically divide the

pueblo Mam.

Contesting State Borders

While state borders have historically divided the pueblo Mam, how are the Mam

contesting such divisions? The aim of this dissertation is to address how nationhood is

constructed across state borders. As the Mam are engaged in the construction of this

cross-border national project, they are also problematizing the nation state framework and

denaturalizing state borders. In the following chapters I will address several layers to these questions. In this section I provide a sample of such efforts, by describing a few ways that the Mam are contesting state political-administrative borders. The thread that binds these examples together is that they all convey Mam collective rights to an ancestral territory transcending these political-administrative borders.

One of the ways that indigenous peoples have challenged these political-administrative borders within each country is by reconstructing regions and municipios as autonomous. Following the uprising of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) in Chiapas, some indigenous communities have declared that certain municipios within and beyond Chiapas belong to "autonomous indigenous regions" (see Hernández Castillo 2001; Mattiace 2003). For example, indigenous activists have declared that several municipios in Chiapas' borderland form an autonomous region that they call "Tierra y Libertad." Likewise, indigenous activists have declared certain municipios (e.g., Tapachula) in the Soconusco region of Mam ancestral territory to be autonomous. The Mexican government, however, refuses to recognize these municipios as autonomous indigenous regions (Hernández Castillo 2012; Mattiace 2003). Likewise, even though some indigenous activists are reconstructing municipios as autonomous regions, the indigenous peoples who live there do not necessarily think of their municipios in such terms. Hernández Castillo (2012) notes that in 2001 Mam individuals from Pavencúl (an ejido of Tapachula) announced that they would transform Pavencúl into an autonomous Mam municipio. Yet Pavencúl is still considered, even by many Mam residents in this study, to be an ejido belonging to the municipio of Tapachula.

These struggles are complicated because "autonomy" is interpreted in a variety of ways. What "autonomy" means is debated among the indigenous and non-indigenous, federal government officials and indigenous activists, and even within indigenous communities themselves. Mattiace (2003:87) explains:

Indian autonomy projects in Chiapas include, for example, the uniting of various municipalities to form regional governments that replace officially sanctioned municipal governments. (This practice has occurred mainly in EZLN-controlled areas of Chiapas.) Autonomy projects often include greater control over natural resources within indigenous regions. Autonomy is also defined as the exercise of Indian law in communities, that is, "usos y costumbres" ("traditions and customs"), in effect demanding that the state acknowledge a dual system of law.

While many of the debated definitions of indigenous autonomy are very political, some Mam I interviewed from Pavencúl explained that they think discussions about Pavencúl's autonomy are simply about being able to access more federal tax money that tends to remain in the city of Tapachula. Again, autonomy is interpreted in a variety of ways, even among the Mam themselves. Nevertheless, as indigenous peoples make varying demands in the name of collective rights for autonomy, they challenge state borders by reconstructing geopolitical space. Mattiace (2003:99) contends, "The notion of autonomy…highlights the profoundly political nature of space" where indigenous leaders may draw new political boundaries. Thus, autonomy may be viewed as a reconstruction of political space; not as a means for doing away with citizenship, "but rather to transform it" so that they may create "a more inclusive form of belonging" (Richards 2013:171).

Indigenous peoples have also challenged these political-administrative divisions by drawing attention to meaningful Mam landscapes that extend beyond state borders. For example, when Luis welcomed me at the beginning of our first interview he said, "Welcome to Oxe Tun K'al, that's what this community is called in Mam, Hill with the Three Drums." By using the Mam name for the region (Oxe Tun K'al, or Hill with Three Drums), which has been Hispanicized as Ostuncalco, Luis drew attention to how Mam territory includes the surrounding mountains. Some other towns in Guatemala and Chiapas have done the same. For instance, political documents created by Mam leaders in Pavencúl, Mexico have used the Mam alphabet established by the Guatemalan Academy of Mayan Languages (ALMG) to refer to the ejido as Pab'en Qul (Hernández Castillo 2012). One example of this is the "Pab'en Qul Accords" declared by the Council of the Mam Nation, which will be discussed in the next section. By using the Mam alphabet and Mam names for regions that each state has Hispanicized and redrawn for their own political-administrative conveniences, the Mam are challenging these state borders.

The Mam also challenge these divisions by remembering the historical significance of Mam places that extend across municipal and departmental borders. This is a telling of history from below that addresses places within Mam territory that are meaningful for the pueblo Mam, regardless of the political-administrative borders established by Mexico and Guatemala. For example, Luis described to me that Oxe Tun K'al is a historically significant place for the pueblo Mam, whose ancestral territory transcends the borders of present-day San Juan Ostuncalco:

Before colonialism Oxe Tun K'al was historically a very important Mam city because of its location. And now it demonstrates, we could say, that it continues

to be the capital of the pueblo Mam of Quetzaltenango, which is what they've

called it, because here is where everyone [who is Mam in Quetzaltenango] lives.

It's a commercial center [and] it was a religious center. In fact, when the

Spaniards came, it was a "*curato*" [a focal point for surrounding towns]. Here it's

considered a *curato*. There are documents that prove it. From here, but also

including San Marcos and all of the coast… Because when the Spanish came they

saw that this was a strategic location and an important place to live for the Mam.

Today San Juan Ostuncalco is an important place not only for these points, but

also in terms of the struggles of the pueblos. From here was born, was

germinated, the Consejo Mam.

Luis not only mentioned the geographic significance of Oxe Tun K'al, but also the

political significance of this region prior to Spanish colonialism. Furthermore, he

highlighted its political significance today as a place where a council for the Mam Nation

was organized. Luis challenged the internal state borders that divide the pueblo Mam by

describing Oxe Tun K'al as a key place for the Mam extending from Quetzaltenango to

San Marcos and even throughout the coastal region (i.e., across the state's departmental

borders). He elaborated, "Mam territory is very broad. Historically, Mam territory was

very vast. It's extensive." Luis mentioned that Mam territory included all of the

Soconusco (in Chiapas) and several other regions that today are divided into state

municipios on both sides of the border (e.g., Tapachula, Comitán, and Motozintla). In

essence, the Mam may challenge political-administrative divisions by remembering the

pre-conquest significance of these places and also by articulating the ongoing political

significance of these places for the pueblo Mam today.

In this section I have demonstrated the shifting character of state borders. Indeed, these borders are socio-historical constructions that Guatemala and Mexico have negotiated without considering indigenous peoples and their territories. These borders divide the pueblo Mam. Although the historical narratives discuss the negotiation of these state borders while ignoring indigenous peoples altogether, today the Mam contest such divisions by geographically and politically reconstructing spaces as indigenous and autonomous. What "autonomy" means in this context varies widely. The Mam also contest these borders through their own historical narratives, which highlight the long-standing significance of Mam territory across state borders. This historical contextualization is important for my overall analysis about how the Mam are identifying as a collectivity in relation to state borders because it demonstrates that these borders are shifting socio-historic constructions.

Given Latin America's discriminatory history in addressing the "Indian Problem," perhaps it is unsurprising that dividing the Mam via state borders is *not* the only way that the Guatemalan and Mexican governments have discriminated against the pueblo Mam. Both states have committed human rights violations against indigenous peoples and have denied the Mam access to collective rights through a variety of discriminatory policies and practices. In the next section I address some of the historically significant ways that Guatemala and Mexico have discriminated against indigenous peoples. This history of discrimination against indigenous peoples will further contextualize my analysis of how the Mam are constructing nationhood across state borders today.

DISCRIMINATION AND RESISTANCE

In addition to being divided by state borders, both the Guatemalan and Mexican governments have historically discriminated—and continue to discriminate—against indigenous peoples. Here I am conceptualizing discrimination in a broad sense to capture the unequal treatment of indigenous peoples through the denial of access to valued resources. The state discriminates against indigenous peoples for being racial, ethnic, and political "others" (Goldberg 2002). Goldberg (2002:10) argues that the racial state places heterogeneity "outside the state, excludable in virtue of being the antithesis of homogeneity, of state belonging." This is especially the case as indigenous peoples make political demands to the state, such as demands to be recognized as nations with ancestral territories.

There are numerous ways that Guatemala and Mexico have discriminated against indigenous peoples (see López Martínez 2001) and covering each example would be beyond the scope of this analysis. In this section I highlight two historically significant ways that Guatemala and Mexico have discriminated against indigenous peoples. I will also describe some of the ways that indigenous peoples have resisted discrimination. This is not meant to be an exhaustive history of each state's relationship with indigenous peoples. Rather, the purpose of these examples is to highlight that each state has engaged in discriminatory actions against indigenous peoples, which may significantly contour indigenous identification. In the first example I address how Chiapas' Law of Government effectively suppressed Mam identification. In the second example I address how Guatemala's thirty-six year armed conflict was an act of genocide that lingers as a tension between indigenous peoples and the government. By acknowledging that both

states have discriminated against indigenous peoples, I suggest that these ongoing histories of discrimination may continue to shape how the Mam imagine themselves as a nation in relation to each state.

Discrimination against Indigenous Peoples

One example of state discrimination against indigenous peoples was the Law of the Government. Hernández Castillo (2001:21) notes that the Law of the Government was not a single law but several actions taken toward the indigenous to "civilize Chiapas Indians." This was part of a post-revolutionary project in the 1920s and 1930s—headed by the administration of Victor Grajales—that sought to "Mexicanize" the southern border (Hernández Castillo 2001). In other words, the Law of the Government aimed to create a homogenous Mexican national identity, hardening the newly negotiated boundary line between Guatemala and Mexico. As part of this nationalist campaign, it was against the law to speak indigenous languages (including Mam) in public[15] and in 1934 the Central Committee for Clothing the Indigenous Student had Mam individuals in the highlands swap out their indigenous clothing for "civilized clothing" (Hernández Castillo 2001:25). These efforts to "civilize through clothing" were not always peaceful (Hernández Castillo 2001). In some instances the Mam were forced to add their *traje típico* [indigenous clothing] to a fire in the center of the town. This was known as the burning of the trajes. Hernández Castillo (2001) was able to record the testimony of someone who witnessed the burning of the trajes as a child. In this account a policeman poured oil over an elderly man who was reluctant to remove his indigenous pants and the

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[15] After independence from Spain, Guatemala also passed laws (such as Decree 14) which mandated that municipios "extinguish" indigenous languages as part of a "national integration" project of Ladinoization (see Wilson 1995).

officer threatened that he would be thrown into the fire with his clothing if he refused.

Crying, the old man removed his indigenous clothing (Hernández Castillo 2001:26).

During this period, the myth of *mestizaje* also worked to erase Mam

identification. Mestizaje is a symbolic cultural and biological hybrid of Spanish and

indigenous peoples, which arose along with Mexico's Law of Government national

integrationist project (Hernández Castillo 2001). As a myth, mestizaje is part of a

nationalist project that seeks to unify all as mestizos, which ignores the continued

existence of indigenous peoples and the injustices they face. Richards (2004:14) contends

that although nation-building projects like mestizaje aim "to unify people in the name of

the nation, they have historically resulted in the suppression of other forms of identity,

and thus have had negative effects on indigenous peoples." Since mestizaje still shaped

the national discourse of "the Mexican" during this era, Mam women's bodies became

marked in particular through the myth of mestizaje. Hernández Castillo (2001:27) argues

that this is because "indigenous women's bodies were literally conceived as the epicenter

of the nation, from which would emerge the Mestizo."

The Law of the Government is an important example of discrimination for this

analysis, but not because the Mam in Chiapas are well-aware of this history. In fact, most

of the Mam participants I spoke with in Chiapas had never heard of this harrowing aspect

of their people's past. Contextually, though, this account is important because it

demonstrates how Mam culture has been systematically suppressed by the Mexican

government. Some of the Mam participants in this study would speak about their culture

"being lost" and so now it needs to be rescued. The "losing of culture," however, was

frequently attributed to individual failures and not to the government's systematic

discrimination. For instance, some adults in Pavencúl who could not proficiently speak

Mam would occasionally tell me that they didn't know the language because they were

probably just "too lazy" to learn it as a child. Internalized in this manner, the state has

effectively limited Mam identification (even in the contemporary world) while also

managing to let itself off the hook, so to speak, for its systematic suppression of Mam

identification. In sum, state discrimination against indigenous peoples (vis-à-vis the Law

of Government) effectively limited expressions of Mam culture, fostered a sense of

Mexican nationalism, and simultaneously hardened distinctions between those from

Guatemala and those from Mexico.

The armed conflict of Guatemala is another example of state discrimination (in

the *most* extreme sense because it involved genocide), which continues to shape how

indigenous peoples perceive the state today (Nelson 2009). Casaús Arzú (2008:17) refers

to this genocide as the "maximum expression of racism" in Guatemala. Guatemala's

armed conflict between the state's military and leftist insurgents, with the military

initially supported by the United States' CIA, lasted from 1960-1996. The state

committed 93% of the violence during this armed conflict (Nelson 2015). In total more

than 200,000 people were killed or declared officially "disappeared." 83% of the victims

were indigenous Mayans (Nelson 2015).[16]

Martínez Salazar (2012:101-02) points out that according to the militarized

Guatemalan state, local elites, and the United States, "…communism, coupled with Maya

peoples' survival and resistance, had as one of its main objectives the corruption and

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[16] Numerous books have been written about Guatemala's armed conflict and the genocide committed against the indigenous by the hands of the Guatemalan military as well as the aftermath of the civil war (see for example, Burrell 2013; Casaús Arzú 2008; González 2000; Little and Smith 2009; Manz 1988; Nelson 2015, 2009; Ruiz Lagier 2013; Sieder 1998).

destruction of the 'national family.'" The Maya peoples were seen as "culturally unfit for a modern nation's advancement to modernity" (Martínez Salazar 2012:101). During the armed conflict, several military dictators of Guatemala viewed indigenous peoples as outside of the "modern nation" and enacted terrible violence against them.

General Efraín Rios Montt, who took power in 1982 through a coup d'état, is a notorious example of how the state executed violence against indigenous peoples. Through a campaign called *Frijoles y Fusiles* (beans and guns), which offered food to those willing to submit to total army control and fiercer attacks against rebels, Rios Montt's 17 months in power were one of the most violent periods of the war (Nelson 2009:23). Recent testimonies by Maya-Ixil women and men emphasize accounts of rape, murder, and torture at the hands of the Guatemalan military. For instance, the court's account of Cecilia Baca Gallego's (Sentencia Por Genocidio 2013:448) testimony described:

> The soldiers took away her husband. She was left with her little son of 6 months, they grabbed [Cecilia] and stabber her. She still has the scars...She indicated that she suffered because she was raped, three nights she was [raped] among the soldiers. They raped her at night. She couldn't even move or walk because they threw her around like she was a ball. This is what truly bothers her: that they made her suffer. They covered the mouth of her son and threw him on his back; then her son began to bleed from the mouth, nose, and eyes. He died. First they raped [Cecilia] then they stabbed her...There were so many that raped her [over three nights], and that is why she couldn't even move.

Emphasized throughout Baca Gallego's testimony, and many others like it, is a recollection of the military's ongoing horrific violence and terrorist tactics committed against the Mayans.

Some ex-military officers also testified of the military's violent acts against non-militarized indigenous citizens. Hugo Ramiro Leonardo Reyes (Sentencia por Genocidio 2013:452), an ex-army mechanic, testified:

> An older lady about sixty-eight years old with longer hair and who was short enough that she would only come up to your waist was executed...and they cut off her head. They took her head to the kitchen where the food is prepared. That night the officials played a joke called '*cortándole la cabeza a la anciana*' ('cut off the head of the old woman'). The head was carried to the kitchen workers to torture them. It was so that the women who worked on preparing the food would have some type of a reaction, to scare them or make them the butt of a joke.

Through this armed conflict, gruesome physical and emotional violence was committed by the state against indigenous peoples. The easiness by which this murder was committed also reminded everyone of the soldiers' slogan in this region, which was designed to terrorize: "*Indio visto, indio muerto*" ("Indian seen, Indian dead").

Including the armed conflict as an example of discrimination against indigenous peoples is very relevant for this dissertation's analysis. While the previous section highlighted how the shifting Guatemala-Mexico border has crossed the pueblo Mam at different points in time, the Mam have also crossed the border themselves at different historical junctures. Many Mam individuals and families, along with those from other indigenous pueblos, fled Guatemala in the 1980s and settled across the border in Chiapas

as refugees (Hernández Castillo 2012, 2001; Ruiz Lagier 2013). For this reason, a few

Mam participants expressed to me that the pueblo Mam includes parts of Chiapas

because many Mam individuals from Guatemala entered Chiapas as refugees.[17]

According to those participants, this was the reason why there are some Mam individuals

in Mexico today; they were seemingly uncertain about whether the Mam were ever in

Chiapas before the armed conflict.

 The Law of the Government in Chiapas and the armed conflict in Guatemala are

simply but two examples of state-driven discriminatory actions against indigenous

peoples. State discrimination against indigenous peoples shapes how the Mam identify as

a collectivity. But it is also crucial to acknowledge actions of resistance. Therefore, in the

next section I address how the Mam are resisting against state discrimination by forming

their own indigenous councils, which are part of an emerging national Mam project

across the Guatemala-Mexico border.

Indigenous Resistance

In this section I draw attention to the ways that the Mam are organizing as councils to

resist state discrimination and seek collective rights as a pueblo. I suggest that the

emergence of these councils, along with the social, cultural, and political demands that

they are making, are a manifestation of indigenous resistance. This is particularly the case

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[17] Hernández Castillo (2012) notes, however, that this was not the only historical migration across of Mam individuals from Guatemala to settle in Chiapas. For instance, a much earlier historical migration from Guatemala to Chiapas took place shortly after the signing of the boundary treaties when Mexico "imported" labor into the Soconusco for the coffee harvest seasons (Hernández Castillo 2001). Under General Porfirio Díaz's government, Mexico created the Colonization Law in 1883 that attracted Mam laborers from the Sierra of Chiapas as well as from Guatemala across the newly created border. This was accomplished by promising laborers land they could cultivate when their services were not required on the coffee plantations (Hernández Castillo 2001). There has also been a more recent economic migration across the border as young Mam laborers have crossed the border to seek work in Chiapas, where many have then settled down (Hernández Castillo 2012).

as the Mam deconstruct and denaturalize the borders of Mexico and Guatemala by highlighting the ways that Mam territory transcends them.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, in the context of increased indigenous mobilization throughout Latin America, the Pan-Maya movement and idea of the "Pueblo Maya" emerged. This followed several events about indigenous rights that were drawing worldwide attention (e.g., in 1989 there was the International Labor Organization's adoption of Convention 169 that recognized important indigenous right and in 1992 there were the Quincentenary counter-celebrations of Columbus' "discovery" of America). Notably, in 1992, the Peace Accords had not yet been signed in Guatemala. Within this context, the Pan-Maya movement was an effort to unite all Maya linguistic groups in Guatemala as a single people in order to increase its political power (Urkidi 2011; Warren 1996). Guided by Mayan intellectuals, the Pan-Maya movement is a political struggle that aims to define the demands of the pueblo Maya (Esquit 2012; Fischer 2001; Warren 1998). However, today Mayan activists are also making political demands as distinct Mayan nations (e.g., as a Maya-Mam nation), rather than just as a singular Mayan nation (as suggested by the Pan-Maya movement). For instance, the Council of the Maya-Mam Nation asserts itself as the political authority to be consulted within its ancestral territory (Council of the Mam Nation 2014). Although indigenous individuals may politically support different aspects of the Pan-Maya movement, "[they] tend to identify themselves as Quiché, Mam or Cachiquel [some of the 21 Mayan peoples in Guatemala] rather than as Maya" more generally (Urkidi 2011:562).

The formation of indigenous councils is a manifestation of indigenous resistance against both Guatemala and Mexico. Luis, who was a leader of the Consejo Mam in

Quetzaltenango when it was organized, recounted the historical formation of the Mam

council in this way:

> This was back in the year 1998, '99, when the Consejo [Mam] started. But as a
>
> parameter we used the signing of the Peace Accords. The Accords allowed for an
>
> opening of a new perspective of pueblos. Because before there was so much
>
> discrimination, racism, but more than anything *repression* against the pueblo
>
> Mam. So anyone who tried to think differently was considered subversive, a
>
> guerilla, or a terrorist. They were an enemy, an enemy of the state. After the
>
> signing of the Peace [Accords] the panorama changes. But it wasn't immediate.
>
> We had to go through a few years before the pueblos would begin to *reivindicar*
>
> (protest to make demands). And in the case of the pueblo Mam in '98, '99, more
>
> or less, we begin to articulate some of the struggles that had already [initiated].
>
> For example, the community organizations, leaderships, individuals, cultural
>
> groups, for example, that started to unite. But it's in 2001 when now it was
>
> formalized like this: as a Maya-Mam Council.

In Luis' retelling of this history, the Consejo Mam emerged out of an opening that was

forged through the signing of Guatemala's Peace Accords. It is within this context that

the Mam organized to challenge the prevailing discrimination against their pueblo.

It was in 2001 in Oxe Tun K'al of Quetzaltenango that the first Mam council was

organized. At this time there were less than 10 delegates from different municipios that

formed the leadership for the Mam council. Within a few years Mam councils were also

formed in the departments of Huehuetenango, San Marcos, and Retalhuleu through a

close network of Mam activists. There were two primary areas of focus in the early years

of these councils: first, an articulation of indigenous rights claims (including their right to be consulted about projects in their territory); and second, Mam education (including the promotion of bilingual education). As part of these early focuses, from 2004 onward the Mam council began to focus on what one Mam council leader referred to as "stronger axels." These "stronger axels" included community workshops about the Indigenous and Tribal Leaders Convention (ILO-169) regarding indigenous rights, defending Mam territory, and organizing *Consultas Comunitarias de Buena Fe* (community consultations where indigenous peoples make collective decisions, such as voting against the imposition of transnational mining and hydroelectric dam projects in their territory).

During this period of the early 2000s there were many other indigenous organizations and activists also resisting the transnational mining projects in Guatemala. In 2005, in the municipio of Comitancillo (*Txolja*, in Mam) the Mam held the first Consulta to vote against mining in their territory. This Consulta then set in motion various others. While these consultations have effectively informed and united the Mam across their ancestral territory, some Mam council leaders have regretted that because they have been organized at the municipal level they may also perpetuate the division of Mam territory. In other words, since the Consultas and their annual celebrations take place as municipal activities, they may subtly legitimate the state's political-administrative borders that continue to divide the pueblo Mam. One Mam council leader described it this way:

> In Txolja they had the first Consulta [in 2005]. Then Sipacapa was contacted and had [its Consulta]. Then [the Consultas] take off. From there they begin in [the department] of Huehuetenango. In Huehue, they were then held [in the municipio

of] La Democracia, and other municipios of all that part of Huehuetenango. And this movement is giving a lot of strength to the community organizations against the mining. But in every case it's happening in municipios. Consultas in municipios. Work as municipios. Not from a perspective of the [Mam] pueblo and its territory. And they really divide us… The issue is that it's more practical, we could say, to work as municipios when it's time to do the Consultas, for example. And not think about it the other way, from the dimension of the pueblo Mam.

One of the Mam councils' challenges today is to find ways of engaging in socio-political actions in their territory without reifying the state borders that divide it. Contesting the state through its own political-administrative units may inadvertently further legitimize the state, even as it encroaches on Mam territory (Jiménez Sánchez 2008). Yet some Mam council leaders are reluctant to attempt alternative approaches. Some expressed to me a sense of doubt: since the government already fails to respect the Consultas Comunitarias that have already been realized in various municipios (by failing to revoke mining licenses within Mam territory), then the government would be even *less likely* to entertain the Consultas Comunitarias if they did not work through the state's municipios. For this reason the Mam councils continue to resist such projects, while occasionally reifying such state divisions in the process.

In addition to the Mam councils of Guatemala, the Consejo Mayor Mam was later organized in Pavencúl, Mexico in April 2011 (Hernández Castillo 2012). Today it is known as the Council of the Mam Nation and it includes Mam councils from Huehuetenango, San Marcos, Retalhuleu, and Quetzaltenango (Guatemala) and from Chiapas (Mexico). In chapter four I will analyze how these Mam councils from

Guatemala and Mexico are constructing socio-political ties across the Guatemala-Mexico border.

> The Consejo Mayor Mam, consisting of Chiapas, Mexico; Huehuetenango, Quetzaltenango, Retalhuleu, and San Marcos of Guatemala. Meeting in Pab'en Qul, Chiapas, Mexico to declare the "PAB'EN QUL ACCORD" and to make known to the governments, nations of the earth, the media, and the population in general, the following:
>
> 1. From this date we declare ourselves in construction of our autonomy as a nation of the pueblo Maya-Mam of Guatemala and Mexico. In this context we support [and] we politically back the autonomy of Pab'en Qul of the State of Chiapas, Mexico… We call for and we demand that the governments of Guatemala and Mexico respect our rights as a pueblo.
> 2. That from now on the pueblo Mam of Chiapas, Mexico and Guatemala will constitute its council and at the same time will form part of the Consejo Mayor Mam.
> 3. We call for and we demand that the governments of Guatemala and Mexico respect our rights over our ancestral territories, avoiding the granting of mining licenses, hydroelectric dams, and every type of exploitation to our natural resources without consulting us…
>
> FOR THE AUTONOMY AND SELF-DETERMINATION OF THE PUEBLO
> AND MAYA-MAM NATION

Image 2. Pab'en Qul Accord by the Council of the Mam Nation, April 11-12, 2011.

From this meeting in Pavencúl, the Mam councils of Guatemala began to develop cross-border connections with the pueblo Mam of Chiapas. The beginnings of this cross-border national council indicate that its formation is a political form of resistance against both the Guatemalan and Mexican governments. This is especially manifest in the Pab'en

Qul Accord (see Image 2) that was written by the Council of the Mam Nation (2011) following its formation.[18]

In the Pab'en Qul Accord, the Council of the Mam Nation did not define autonomy as something merely specific to Pavencúl. "Politically [backing] the autonomy of Pab'en Qul," as it mentions in the accord, is but just one instance of the usage of this term. More broadly (as in the closing of the Pab'en Qul Accord), autonomy is used to call for the political recognition of the Mam cross-border nation. As a form of resistance against both governments, the Council of the Mam Nation pursues the recognition of their territory on both sides of the border in order to better defend it from national and transnational companies involved in mining and hydroelectric activities. And the Council seeks institutional recognition as *the* political body to be consulted and to resolve issues related to the imposition of programs, projects, and policies in Mam territory on both sides of the border (Council of the Mam Nation 2014).

The examples of state discrimination against indigenous peoples that I've provided point to ways that history may continue to shape Mam collective identification. The Mam are actively engaged in seeking collective rights as a cross-border nation. They have resisted discrimination by exercising Consultas Comunitarias in defense of their ancestral territory, by organizing councils for their pueblo within each country, and by asserting their political authority as a Mam Nation. It is within this historical context of

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[18] This meeting in Pavencúl laid a foundation for organizing a cross-border national council. Participants told me that at this 2011 meeting the Mam councils did not meet with a council in Chiapas. For this reason, early political documents of the Council of the Mam Nation include official stamps of Mam councils from Guatemala but only signatures of some invited Mam *individuals* (not a Mam council) from Chiapas. In 2014, the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' of Huehuetenango, Guatemala began to establish socio-political ties across the border with the Consejo Regional Indígena Maya-Mam del Soconusco of Chiapas, Mexico.

discrimination and resistance that the Mam are constructing nationhood across state borders.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to provide a historical context for addressing this dissertation's central puzzle: how is indigenous nationhood constructed across state borders? I demonstrated that the Guatemala-Mexico border and other political-administrative borders within each state are socio-historical constructions that have shifted across the pueblo Mam at different moments in history. As these borders have shifted they have served to exploit and divide the pueblo Mam. The Mam have challenged these divisions through discourses of autonomy and also by highlighting how Mam territory transcends those state borders.

I have also suggested that to understand how the Mam are engaged in reconstructing space in relation to these borders, we must acknowledge that both states have historically discriminated against indigenous peoples. Thus, this reconstruction of space is shaped within a historical context of state discrimination against indigenous peoples. Importantly, indigenous peoples have also resisted this discrimination. Here I have suggested that one of the ways this resistance is manifest is through the construction of indigenous councils which have made claims on their ancestral territories across state borders. The Council of the Mam Nation is a manifestation of this resistance as it has begun to organize itself as *the* political body to be consulted by both governments about projects that may impact their territory.

With this historical contextualization in mind, in what ways do state borders shape how the Mam identify as a pueblo? In addition to how Mayan intellectuals and Mam leaders are constructing nationhood, how do Mam individuals in their everyday lives identify as part of the collectivity? I turn to these questions in chapter three.

CHAPTER 3

THE SYMBOLIC AND THE SPATIAL: DEFINING THE BOUNDARIES OF

MAM COLLECTIVE IDENTIFICATION

"…The only thing that divides us is the line."

-Miguel (Mam participant from Guatemala)

"…Why divide us by a border? In other words, the pueblo Mam is not divided."

-Lox (Mam participant from Mexico)

In this chapter I analyze how Mam individuals define the symbolic boundaries of Mam collective identification. As a form of "boundary work," the Mam construct collective identification boundaries as they describe who is and is not a member of the collective. As I described in chapter one, much of the sociological literature on collective identification boundary work is primarily aspatial. As a corrective, in this chapter I analyze the symbolic boundaries of collective identification while taking into account spatial considerations.

In particular, I address how different ways of identifying as a collectivity are shaped by the Guatemalan and Mexican states through their various political-administrative borders. I argue that Mam collective identification boundaries are flexible as they shift in different contexts. Although the state is effective in limiting cross-border

understandings of Mam nationhood, this chapter will demonstrate that shifting social contexts provide spaces for the active imagination of a Mam cross-border nation.

This chapter is sociologically important for at least two reasons. First, this analysis elaborates on the interplay between symbolic and spatial boundaries. In particular, I focus on relationship between the symbolic and spatial boundaries of nations and states. I address ways that collective identification narratives may contribute to the isomorphism of nations and states (reifying the nation state framework) while other narratives highlight the separation of the two. Second, this chapter may push discussions about how the state and individuals in their everyday lives construct different imaginings of nationhood. As Sahlins (1989) suggests, the conflation of state borders and national identification is not only imposed on individuals by the state, emanating from the center outward, but individuals also construct imaginings of nationhood that sustain the nation state framework. This chapter furthers this claim by focusing on how Mam individuals in their everyday lives construct imaginings of nationhood that may problematize state borders and challenge the nation state framework.

In the first section I provide examples of three primary narratives of Mam collective identification, which are each linked to different spatial scales. These examples show that the boundaries of Mam collective identification are often fused with state political-administrative borders, which harden divisions between the Mam. Notably, such political divisions reify the nation state framework, which elides the plurinational character of each state and the cross-border character of the Mam nation. However, there is more to this story because collective identification boundaries are not used in a mutually exclusive manner. These collective identification boundaries are shifting and

context-driven. Thus, in a second findings section I describe how Mam individuals weave in and out of these three narratives, demonstrating an ongoing symbolic struggle between the Mam and the Guatemalan and Mexican states regarding the boundaries of Mam collectivity. Therefore, in this chapter I highlight how a Mam cross-border nation is being actively imagined by Mam individuals in their everyday lives, even as they are divided by state political-administrative borders.

MAM BOUNDARY NARRATIVES

Participants used three primary narratives when defining the boundaries of Mam collective identification, each of which were linked to spatial scales:

1) Defining the boundaries of Mam collectivity as localized within certain municipal borders;

2) More broadly defining the boundaries of Mam collectivity as extending beyond municipal borders and throughout western Guatemala or southern Mexico to the Guatemala-Mexico border;

3) Even more broadly defining the boundaries of Mam collectivity as transcending the Guatemala-Mexico border.

In this section, I provide examples of these narratives, showing how state political-administrative boundaries (such as municipal divisions) and the state's construction of history shape how Mam individuals define their collective identification boundaries and effectively limit cross-border understandings of Mam nationhood.

Collective Identification Localized within Municipal Borders

The first narrative narrowly localizes Mam collectivity within the borders of certain municipios. This way of defining Mam collective identification associates municipal boundaries with the boundaries of Mam collectivity; Mam collectivity is simply mapped onto political-administrative boundaries. Some municipios are understood to be Mam while others are understood to be ladino. This rigid association assumes that those who reside within the borders of Mam municipios are Mam, and those who live within ladino municipios are ladino.

Historically, the state has defined indigenous and ladino boundaries as coterminous with municipal ones. For instance, on October 13, 1876, Guatemalan President Justo Rufino Barrios signed Decree 165, legally declaring that all the indigenous of San Pedro Sacatepéquez were now officially ladinos (Comisión de Oficialización de los Idiomas Indígenas de Guatemala 1998). Some current politicians continue to label entire towns "ladino" and "Indian" in their campaigns. And like many of the participants in this study, scholars in Mexico and Guatemala frequently define indigenous collective identification boundaries within territorialized municipal boundaries (Burguete Cal y Mayor 2016; French 2010; Hendrickson 1995; Little 2003; Tax 1941, 1937; Watanabe 2004, 1992, 1990; Wolf 1955) even though these boundaries divide the indigenous politically (Cojtí Cuxil 2007, 2005; Warren 1998). Here I affirm that in many contexts the municipio is the locus of identity for Mam individuals, a tendency that is reinforced by each governments' historical and contemporary use of the municipio as the primary unit for interacting with citizens (Jiménez Sánchez 2008).

Claudia, a grandmother and farmer in her forties from Comitancillo, Guatemala, is a member of a Mam NGO and several women's groups. She usually describes being Mam in terms of being from the municipio of Comitancillo. Sitting in her adobe kitchen one afternoon with several of her grandchildren playing nearby, she described how "we the indigenous" from Comitancillo are ridiculed by the ladinos of another municipio, San Pedro Sacatepéquez, when selling chickens there. As Claudia related this story and her anger for being mistreated, her voice got louder and a couple of her grandkids stopped playing to look up at her from across the room. She recounted, "Well, there are times that ladinos, even worse, the San Pedranos, say to avoid the indigenous… They say, 'Don't buy chickens from [those from] Comitancillo!' The people say… 'You are *Indios*!'(Indians, a pejorative term). 'Indios!' the ladinos yell at us." Laden in Claudia's story, as in many others, are conflations of racial, ethnic, and cultural boundaries with municipal ones. Her account reveals an implicit understanding of identity as bound within specific municipios: Comitancillo is viewed as indigenous and San Pedro Sacatepéquez as ladino.

Claudia's account also exemplifies how identifying collectively is a relational process between herself, as an individual, the Mam collectively, and ladinos. Her narrative transitioned from "I, a Mam woman" to "we, the indigenous." Claudia's lived experiences of confronting ladino racism hardened the boundaries between "us and them" and between San Pedro Sacatepéquez (ladino) and Comitancillo (Mam). Claudia may or may not be aware of the history of San Pedro's ladinoization by the state. I am not suggesting the Mam conflate their boundaries of collectivity with municipal boundaries

because they necessarily recall certain historical events. But such state declarations have contributed to and sustain this way of defining the boundaries of collectivity.

Some participants from Mexico and Guatemala also occasionally associated Mam collectivity with other, even narrower, political-administrative boundaries within each country. For example, the Mam in each country sometimes describe particular *aldeas* (villages) and *caserios* (hamlets) as Mam while describing others villages as non-indigenous. For instance, Sandra rents out several small apartments to school teachers in the Mexican border town of Pavencúl, near Tacaná in the highlands. Sandra spoke with me about the school teachers living in Pavencúl who are not Mam by pointing out different municipios and aldeas where they are from in Mexico. She then distinguished these teachers' nonindigenous identification from the Mam in Pavencúl and the nearby town of Toquian Grande:

> These towns [Pavencúl and Toquian Grande] are Mam, they're Mam. But they don't send us teachers from Toquian Grande. And that's why the children now don't speak Mam or learn about their culture in school. Why don't we have school teachers here from Niquivil or Bijahual? …maybe then our children would learn more about their culture because they respect their teachers.

In effect, just as collective identification may be localized within the boundaries of particular municipios, the boundaries of certain villages are also occasionally conflated with the boundaries of Mam collective identification.

How did the conflation of Mam identity with particular municipios come to be and why does it remain so significant? Jiménez Sánchez (2008) argues that in Guatemala, the municipio is a colonial construction that to this day divides indigenous peoples, like

the Mam, geographically and politically (see also Cojtí Cuxil 2007, 2005). He suggests

that a hegemonic logic persists whereby the Mam must belong to and identify with a

municipio because, as a political-administrative unit, the municipio is the point of contact

by which individuals and communities gain access to state programs and projects and are

effectively legitimized as citizens. Within Mexico, too, municipios are political-

administrative divisions that divide the Mam (Hernández Castillo 2001). However, in a

paradoxical fashion the municipio can also be a "space from which counter-hegemonic

struggles are developed" (Jiménez Sánchez 2008:4). For instance, Hernández Castillo

(2001:209) notes how Mam peasants in the Mexican municipios of Mazapa de Madero,

Motozintla, and El Porvenir mobilized to demand a change in corrupt municipal

authorities, which resulted in removing mayors. Today the Mam continue to mobilize in

state political-administrative units when making demands to the state. For instance, the

Mam of Tapachula, Mexico in the communities of Pavencúl and Toquián Grande (which

are ejidal units of the municipio) have protested against mining, the construction of

hydroelectric dams, and transportation problems in the region. And on the other side of

the border the Mam have also voted against transnational projects at the municipal level

(in what are referred to as the *Consultas Comunitarias de Buena Fe*). Therefore, even

though municipios are colonial constructions that divide the pueblo Mam, the Mam

continue to interact with the state *as* municipios. In this manner, the symbolic boundaries

of Mam collective identification are conflated with the spatial boundaries of municipios.

Today when the state interacts with citizens it primarily does so at the municipal

level (through mayors and other elected municipal officials). One Mam political

candidate for a municipio in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala explained that for the state to be

willing to interact with the pueblo Mam, Mam individuals must take office as municipal authorities and participate within the political-administrative limits of the municipio. This candidate noted that traditional Mam authority structures are not considered legitimate in the eyes of the state, in large part because the Mam are politically fragmented into distinct municipal units (a situation put into place by the state long ago). The narrative that defines the boundaries of Mam collective identification as tied to the municipio persists and is salient at least in part because it is only through such administrative divisions that indigenous citizens have been permitted to engage with the state and have some of their claims addressed.

Collective Identification to the Guatemala-Mexico Border

A broader way some Mam describe the boundaries of collectivity is by *transcending* the fixedness of municipal borders and defining the Mam as an indigenous people throughout western Guatemala or southern Mexico but not transcending the Guatemala-Mexico border. Rather than referring to municipios as "Mam" or "ladino," some Mam described municipios by saying, "there are indigenous people there," "there are ladinos there," or "there aren't many Mam there." This broader way of defining the collectivity still maintains some of the bounded character of the former, particularly to the extent that this way of defining the collectivity is still mapped within the nationalist project of each state by ending at the Guatemala-Mexico border. Imagining the boundaries of collectivity in this manner still envisions spaces as Mam or not-Mam, but rather than referring to municipios, involves the use of topographic markers to identify them.

For example, Danitsa is a Mam NGO leader in her thirties who helps women in Comitancillo, Guatemala create and commercialize textiles using a traditional Mayan backstrap loom. While her work is primarily focused on projects within Comitancillo, she does not limit her discussion of the Mam to those within its municipal borders. One morning I walked with Danitsa to a meeting with other Mam women where they were to discuss Mam artisanry. On this walk Danitsa talked about a variety of topics, from current politics to her responsibilities with the NGO. She seemed to enjoy talking about how her work allows her to frequently travel and speak with Mam women from different regions. In several instances during this walk, Danitsa spoke of "Mam regions" and spaces by pointing to certain mountains. These mountains served as markers of orientation to places during her narratives. She pointed to hills and mountains in their respective directions as she described visits beyond Comitancillo's borders to Tajumulco (the largest volcano in Central America) and areas near Tacaná and Ixchiguán, and recounted exchanging ideas with the Mam in those regions. In this manner, Danitsa imagined the Mam as an indigenous people throughout western Guatemala, and not necessarily localized within specific municipal borders.

Like Danitsa, Artemio is a farmer in his late forties (he also occasionally participates in a few community service organizations) who drew upon topographical markers as he defined the boundaries of Mam collectivity transcending Guatemalan municipal borders. His home is situated on a mountainside, not uncommon for homes near his in Comitancillo, where several mountains can be seen in different directions along with the volcano Tajumulco. Rather than dichotomously naming municipios as either "ladino" or "Mam," Artemio used hand gestures to indicate certain mountains that

could be crossed to encounter other Mam spaces. He observed, for example, "Behind those mountains the Mam are too."

One afternoon Artemio and I spoke while sitting alongside his cornfield. He grabbed a stick to draw a map of western Guatemala in the dirt as he described Mam territory. While Artemio's sketch did not represent a "traditional" map of Guatemala, it indicated that the Mam spread throughout the mountains of western Guatemala, ending at the border with Mexico. When asked about the Mam in Mexico, Artemio quickly shook his head as if to convey disbelief or confusion at the question. He explained that he has never been across the border, but knows there have never been any Mam in Mexico.

Likewise, on the Mexican side of the border some participants drew upon topographical markers to define the Mam as a people throughout southern Mexico but ending at the Guatemala-Mexico borderline. In southern Mexico some participants used this boundary narrative to distinguish the highlands in Mexico (as a Mam region) from the municipio of Tapachula near the coast. By doing so, these participants still adhere to the narrower boundary narrative discussed in the previous section as they describe certain municipios as non-indigenous. But they also move beyond this boundary narrative by imagining the Mam as a people throughout the highlands.

For example, Rolando was a newly-elected community official in Pavencúl, Mexico who expressed to me his dissatisfaction in the municipal government of Tapachula. He was frustrated that Tapachula government officials requested and received federal funds for the Mam in the highlands of Mexico (in Pavencúl, in particular), but then never sent those funds to the Mam in Pavencúl. He elaborated:

The municipal government [of Tapachula] does not want to recognize here the indigenous zone in the Sierra [highlands], the Mam zone, because I believe they also don't want to give help, give resources, for…this indigenous zone. But they see, they report about what's [happening with Mam culture]…to our federal government: that there's an indigenous zone and that they support the indigenous zone. But it's not true… And resources come down [from the federal government] for the indigenous zone but there it stays in the municipio [of Tapachula]. So we're not recognized, see. We're not legally recognized as an indigenous zone, as indigenous Mam… So the municipal government only gets [the money], like it's closed [to us]… And then the state government [officials] come, from the federal government, and they know, because [the municipal authorities] tell them, that…there's a Mam indigenous zone. But the municipal government is very crafty, because it keeps the resources. But for the indigenous zone there's nothing. There's no support. There are no resources to overcome, to get ahead of, even a little bit, the poverty… And we're left without the recourses in the Mam indigenous zone. So [the government] doesn't take us into account. We're not legally recognized as a Mam indigenous zone in Mexico.

While expressing his frustration with the Tapachula government, Rolando suggested that the Sierra highlands are "a Mam indigenous zone." He defined the Mam as a people in the highlands of Mexico, which makes sense given this conversation's context about a corrupt municipal government capitalizing on "a Mam indigenous zone."[19] This example

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[19] Rolando distinguished the Mam as a people throughout the highlands from those from the municipio of Tapachula. There are two reasons why this is interesting: first, Pavencúl is an ejido within Tapachula's municipal boundaries; and second, the region where Tapachula is located historically pertained to Mam ancestral territory.

suggests that on both sides of the border some Mam draw upon topographical markers such as volcanoes and mountain ranges to define the Mam as a people throughout southern Mexico or western Guatemala, but within the boundaries of each country.

Rolando's words also demonstrate that this boundary narrative is not only used by the Mam who live far from the border (as in the case of Artemio in Comitancillo, Guatemala). The Mam who live close to the border also define their boundaries of collectivity ending at the Guatemala-Mexico border. In other words, it's not the case that proximity to the border is the only factor that shapes how the Mam define their boundaries of collectivity differently.

For instance, one morning prior to a cultural event in the border town Pavencúl I spoke with and elderly man from there named Guillermo. The cultural event was being sponsored by the Consejo Regional Indígena Maya-Mam del Soconsuco (C.R.I.M.M.S.), which is the Mam council in Chiapas, so I figured it would be an opportune time to discuss ideas about Mam culture and territory. Guillermo gestured with his lips, as is common in the region, toward the valley below. He explained, "All of this is Mam, to the coast, we are Mam. This is the pueblo Mam." He elaborated as he pointed to the mountains and the communities that dot them: "We are all Mam in these mountains and even below [toward the coast]." When I attempted to probe further I could tell that he was somewhat distracted by the event preparations, especially the marimba musicians who were setting up their equipment.

Later that evening when I asked Guillermo to describe Mam territory for me again, he used his outstretched hand to gesture at the mountains descending to the coast again (see Image 3). He explained, "Everywhere, from the Sierra [mountains] to

Tapachula, we're the pueblo Mam. The territory, yes, from the mountains to the border."

I followed up by asking, "Well, what about on the other side of the border?" Guillermo

answered, "Yes, it's indigenous too. But it's different. We're Mam. And they're

different."
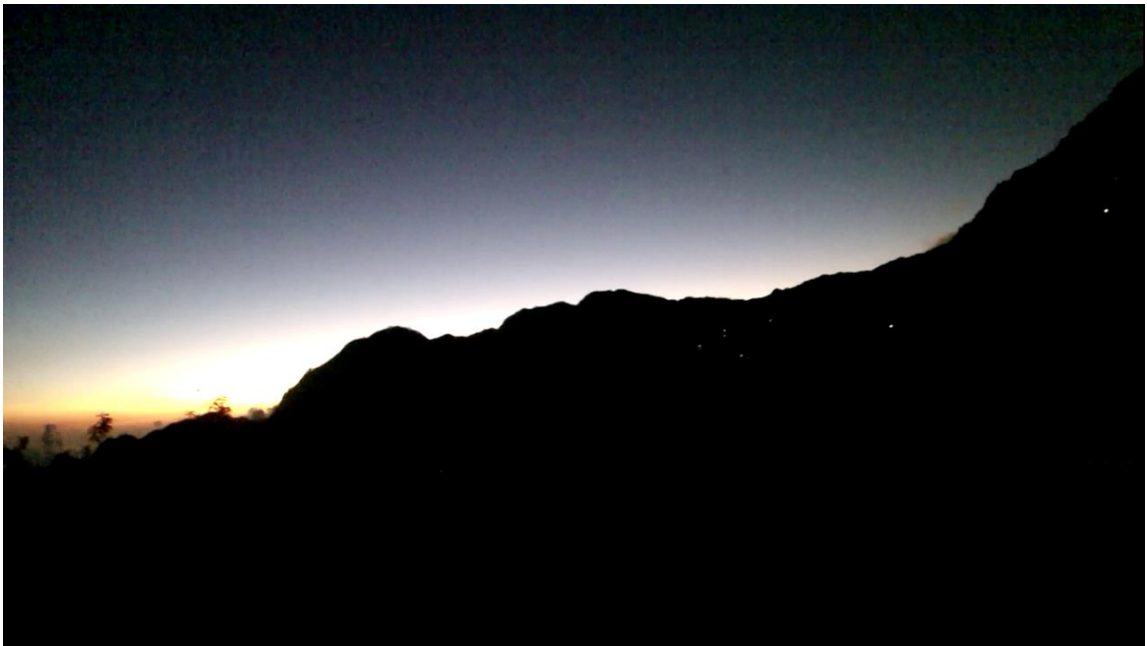
Image 3. Twilight view from Pavencúl, Mexico of Sierra mountains to the coast.

Guillermo's description is interesting for a few reasons. First, it was shaped to a

certain degree by the cultural event taking place on the day we spoke. The event

highlighted the importance of celebrating different aspects of Mam culture, including

music, food, and the Mam language. This event in Pavencúl was organized by

C.R.I.M.M.S. as a sort of interest-generating precursor for the development of Mam

language classes for children in the town. As in some other meetings organized by

C.R.I.M.M.S. that I attended, leaders at this particular event didn't address at all the Mam

in Guatemala. However, this event did bring together Mam individuals from different

Mexican communities near the border. This signals that Guillermo's description of the pueblo Mam is likely in part shaped by events such as these.

Second, there was no discussion of Mam territory during this particular cultural event. C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders do speak about issues related to Mam territory in their community events. However, among the speeches given by community members of Pavencúl and C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders at this particular event there was no discussion about Mam territory. Yet, interestingly, Guillermo fused together the *pueblo Mam* and *territory* as he switched back and forth between these two terms when describing the region from the mountains to the coast on the Mexican side of the border. He even did so by referring to the mountains as Mam as he said, "All of this [gesturing to the mountains] is Mam." Contrary to essentialist notions of identity that bind the Mam to the mountains though, Guillermo's description of the pueblo Mam also extends to the coast (even the town of Tapachula, specifically).

Third, like Artemio's description of the Mam in Guatemala, Guillermo defined the Mam as a people throughout the border region in Mexico but not extending across the Guatemala-Mexico border. Also similar to Artemio who had never crossed the border into Mexico, Guillermo explained that he hasn't travelled across the border into Guatemala for many years. When probing for how those in Guatemala are "different," Guillermo noted that there are indigenous pueblos in Guatemala, "but they don't speak Mam." This is especially unique since some individuals from nearby Guatemalan border towns who also identify as Mam come to Pavencúl's weekly market. Guillermo distinguished the pueblo Mam (in southern Chiapas) from the indigenous peoples of Guatemala because he has never conversed with individuals from Guatemala in the Mam

language. In some ways, Guillermo's description reinforces essentialist ideas about language serving as a defining characteristic of indigenous identification. This limited characterization suggests that individuals are Mam and members of the pueblo Mam if they speak the Mam language. Scholars have long dismissed this type of essentialism that reduces indigeneity to a set of particular characteristics (such as language and clothing), which signify "authenticity" (Jackson and Warren 2005; Nelson 1999). However, in the everyday lives of some Mam individuals, like Guillermo, language may serve as an expressive characteristic of commonality or dissimilarity. Additionally, Mayan activists argue that while speaking a Mayan language by itself does not define being Maya, language is still a symbolically important marker of identification because it encodes beliefs, values, and ways of seeing the world (Watanabe 2000:238; Cojtí Cuxil 1991). Thus, Guillermo draws upon his experiences with Mam individuals from Mexico with whom he has spoken in the Mam language to define the Mam as a pueblo throughout southern Mexico but not across the Guatemala-Mexico border.

Not only do Mam *individuals* express this boundary narrative, but some Mam organizations use this narrative as well. For example, one NGO in Comitancillo holds workshops that occasionally serve as spaces for collective identification construction. One such workshop focused on what *tx'otx'* (territory) means to the Mam. One participant defined tx'otx' as a concept within the Maya Cosmovision that included land, but also encompassed everything else—the sky and all living and non-living beings, all of which are understood as interconnected. The other participants then discussed the concept. Some described how their relationship with each other and territory is not confined to Comitancillo. Others explained that this broader way of thinking is important

because the Mam throughout Guatemala need solidarity in the struggle to defend their territory from mining companies. Like Danitsa, Artemio, Rolando, and Guillermo, the participants in this workshop collectively imagined the Mam as an indigenous people with boundaries extending beyond municipal borders, but still mostly defined within the borders of the state.

This narrative is broader than the first, but still limiting in the sense that it reifies the nation state framework, which may impede the Mam from gaining cross-border rights and recognition. Importantly, this boundary narrative is not only present in Guatemala but also in Mexico. On both sides of the border Mam individuals imagine themselves as a people that transcends local state political-administrative boundaries, but is also confined within each state. Thus, Mam individuals in their everyday lives may inadvertently reify the nation state framework by contouring the symbolic limits of their pueblo within it.

Collective Identification Transcending the Guatemala-Mexico Border

Some interviewees defined the boundaries of their collectivity even more broadly, by viewing the Mam as a people spanning the Guatemala-Mexico border. This way of defining their collectivity does not rely on boundaries defined by the state, and thereby challenges the nation state framework. Put differently, when the Mam define their symbolic boundaries of collective identification in this manner, they challenge the isomorphism between place and nation, "[making] nations and states two very different entities" (Wilson and Donnan 1998:2; see also Lamont and Molnár 2002; Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Rosaldo 1989). This narrative is embodied by Diego, a highly educated

man in his forties who works for Guatemala's Ministry of Education. On several

occasions Diego revisited a story about a meeting in Unión Juárez, Mexico:

> So I've seen in a meeting, we had a project that I worked on for bilingual
>
> education, and there was a meeting, an invitation for me, in Chiapas… I was
>
> invited to a meeting in Unión Juárez… I spoke. But I said, "I am Mam." And I
>
> said a few words. At the end, in the audience a tall person asked to talk with me.
>
> And he climbed on stage, I had the microphone. And we spoke…and he said,
>
> then, how he heard that I was Mam. Then he told me that he was Mam too. And
>
> then we started to speak in Mam. A few minutes later I saw his face with tears
>
> rolling down his cheeks. [Diego uses his index finger and runs it from his right
>
> eye down his cheek, signifying tears rolling down the face.] I also felt a bit
>
> sentimental, because then he said, "How is it that they split our territory? How?
>
> How were they so unfair to leave some of us on one side and others on the other
>
> side, when we are the same? We are Mam and Mayan."… [The border] line
>
> divides us, but it is important to try to communicate and come closer. Well, I was
>
> the same as him.

This interaction has greatly influenced how Diego views the boundaries of Mam

collectivity. Although describing themselves as a nation spanning the border does not

require such experiences, for Diego and others, a cross-border understanding was

facilitated by personal interactions with Mam from Mexico.

Through his work, Diego shares this broader definition with others. One

afternoon, while visiting in his office, Diego gave me a copy of his team's latest version

of a Mam language manual, soon to be published and distributed to teachers in the

department of San Marcos. He proudly pointed out a statement that he and his Mam colleagues included in this version, which was not in the previous curriculum:

> The Mam people are a sociolinguistic community divided by two states, Guatemala and Mexico, since the colonial political division did not take into account the territorial borders of the original peoples, therefore, a part of the people remained in Guatemala and the other in Mexico. Currently, about 50,000 speakers of Mam live in the State of Chiapas.

He adamantly observed, "The Guatemalan map was made, was constructed, by the colonizers, by the invasion, and it doesn't correspond with the Mayan territory." While some Mam may be unaware of state discourses and practices that have historically influenced how the boundaries of Mam collectivity are delimited, others are very conscious of this process as well as how people can challenge official histories by envisioning the Mam as a collectivity transcending the border. Diego's words demonstrate how political-administrative borders can be challenged by the symbolic boundaries of collectivity imagined by the Mam.

Mam participants from Mexico also defined the boundaries of Mam collectivity transcending the Guatemala-Mexico border when describing interpersonal social interactions with Mam individuals from Guatemala. Such cross-border experiences may foster an acknowledgement of shared history, culture, and politics transcending the Guatemala-Mexico border. This is especially apparent in the context of discussing local market days in border towns, which bring Mam individuals together from both sides of the border. In Pavencúl, Mexico the Wednesday market attracts local Mam merchants and buyers of commercial goods both from Pavencúl and also the nearby Guatemalan

border town of Chequín, among other towns. Mam participants explained to me that those who travel to and from Pavencúl for market days in each country do so without paperwork because there are no border officials to question documents in these border towns. When I asked about whether there are ever any problems among the Mam from each side of the border, one Pavencúl resident who buys goods each week on the market day explained:

> With our Guatemalan brothers there are no problems because we're the same. The same, see. We're close. And what divides us is the line, the dividing line that the government put there. But yes, we're close. And there haven't been any…problems with our Mam brothers. We're the same Mam brothers and sisters… Everything that's close here, that's Guatemala, everyone is [Mam], almost everyone speaks the Mam language… We're the same here.

In this explanation, "Guatemalan" is still mentioned as a defining characteristic that marks difference, but this difference is dismissed as the Mam are envisioned as "the same." Once again, the borderline is described as an imposed division from the government (in this case signaling Mexico's role in dividing the pueblo Mam). Although the market day is primarily described by participants as a space for buying and selling goods, Pavencúl's weekly market also provides a space for interpersonal cross-border experiences.

This emphasis on *sameness* was expressed to me by Mam participants who come from Guatemala to sell goods in Pavencúl's marketplace too. Miguel, who travels from Chequín, Guatemala to Pavencúl each market day to sell an array of off-brand and "traditional" medicines, similarly described how he views those in Pavencúl as part of the

same pueblo. He briefly described the history of the borderland region and noted that in this borderland everyone used to speak Mam:

> Before, here [in the borderland], on both sides, all of these people didn't speak Spanish… But they spoke purely…in Mam. As we say, purely Toj Qyol [the Mam language]… In this time, we spoke, they spoke in Mam.

He emphasized the *sameness* among the Mam across the border when describing his interactions with Mam residents from Pavencúl:

> So when I came here [to Pavencúl] the first time…well people saw me and some asked where I was from. So I told people I was from Guatemala, from a village called Chequín… Now I have many friends here [in Pavencúl] who speak to me in Mam. But I don't always understand [laughs]. So when I came here they spoke to me a lot, a lot in Mam. So now I know a little more words. But not everything [laughs]. Just a few words I understand… All of this area is indigenous. Here in Mexico the only thing that divides us is the line. Because everything here is the same language that we speak. And in Guatemala there [nearby across the border] is Mam. We are treated here, the Guatemalans, as if we lived here and were from here [in Pavencúl]. There is no division in any way. No, there's no division in any way. We get along well…as if we're brothers. As I said, there's no problems. We're all the same. And all the food that we eat is the same, it's the same food [laughs]. What we eat there [in Guatemala] and what they eat here [laughs], we're the same. There are no differences. It's not like, "you're Guatemalan and we don't like you, get out of here Guatemalans," no. No, never.

Miguel described Pavencúl's market as a place for articulating commonality among the Mam across the border. He, like others I spoke with in this borderland region (from both sides of the Guatemala-Mexico border), described the market as a location where individuals come together with a shared history and similar customs. In particular, Miguel and others emphasized a shared sense of community; a shared culture, including the Mam language (even though not everyone speaks Mam today as their parents or grandparents in the region before them); and a shared sense of ancestral belonging. This shared sense of belonging is conveyed as Mam individuals describe their *sameness* across the border with terms like "brothers," "sisters," "friends," and "*compañeros*."

It should be noted that Mam individuals do not attend Pavencúl's weekly market to intentionally foster a sense of cross-border nationhood. Most attend the market in Pavencúl for the same reasons weekly markets draw crowds elsewhere: for buying and selling commercial goods. So with these examples I do not mean to suggest that individuals show up to the market because they want to meet Mam individuals from the other side of the border. But I am suggesting that through such interpersonal cross-border experiences, the market is a location where the Mam on each side of the border interact with each other and may come to identify as a cross-border people who are divided by an artificial boundary line. As Miguel mentioned, it is through these interpersonal cross-border experiences that the Mam can denaturalize the Guatemala-Mexico border by suggesting that "there is no division in any way" among the Mam in these borderlands.

The above example of demonstrates the everydayness of Mam collective identification through local interactions. It is not like some cognitive stretch for Mam individuals to imagine themselves as part of a cross-border pueblo. The everydayness of

interactions in the marketplace make Mam collective identification as a cross-border pueblo quite accessible. This form of collective identification tends to focus primarily on how Mam culture is shared across the Guatemala-Mexico border. In other words, these marketplace interactions help the Mam to culturally see themselves as the same. However, such cultural similarities do not always translate into the recognition of shared history and shared politics (including a shared ancestral territory). Addressing the historical and political similarities across the Guatemala-Mexico border might continue to require consciousness raising by Mam councils, organizations, and activists.

Although this boundary narrative is used by the Mam on both sides of the border, more of my participants in Mexico were aware of the Mam in Guatemala than vice versa. Here I offer two explanations for why this may be the case. First, there is a much larger Mam population in Guatemala than Mexico. Although governments in both countries have historically embraced assimilationist projects to deal with the "Indian problem," the legacy of such projects have had a fierce effect in Chiapas' borderlands. Chiapas' Law of Government during the 1920s and 1930s—the integrationist policies that prohibited speaking Mam and wearing indigenous clothing—purposefully and successfully left a legacy that conditioned people in the borderland to perceive indigenous culture as Guatemalan and not Mexican. Second, those in Mexico may be more aware of the Mam in Guatemala because of recent Mam migrations from Guatemala into Chiapas. After the signing of the boundary treaties at the end of the nineteenth century (which divided the pueblo Mam), at different historical moments some of the Mam on the Guatemalan side of the border have crossed into Mexico. Two of these recent historical moments participants mentioned with more frequency: when thousands of Mayans came to Mexico

as refugees in the 1980s during Guatemala's armed conflict; and a more recent economic migration (in the end of the twentieth and beginning of the twenty-first centuries) as young people from Guatemala are seeking temporary work across the border and then settling down in Chiapas (Hernández 2012). Even though more of the Mam participants in this study seem aware of the Mam in Guatemala, importantly this boundary narrative that defines the Mam as a pueblo transcending the Guatemala-Mexico border was expressed by Mam participants on both sides of the border.

In many instances, all three of these boundary narratives seem to be shaped by whether Mam individuals have had personal face-to-face interactions, or heard stories about such interactions, with Mam individuals from other regions (e.g., from beyond the municipio and from the other sides of the Guatemala-Mexico border). Indeed, interpersonal cross-border experiences (where Mam individuals from one side of the border interact with Mam individuals from the others side of the border) shape how the Mam imagine themselves as a people transcending state political-administrative borders.

Of the three scalar narratives, this broader view of the Mam as a nation that spans the Guatemala-Mexico border was the least common in my interviews. The most common narrative narrowly localized Mam collectivity within the borders of particular municipios, followed by the narrative that the Mam are a pueblo in southern Mexico or western Guatemala that ends at the borderline. This suggests that both states have been quite effective in fomenting forms of identification that limit people's understanding of Mam nationhood. Political-administrative boundaries have long served to divide the Mam politically, and yet, by adhering to these narrower definitions some Mam

respondents may inadvertently legitimize those divisions and undermine political efforts to construct the cross-border nation.

WEAVING IN AND OUT OF SCALAR BOUNDARIES

Nevertheless, there is more to this story. Although the Guatemalan and Mexican states have been effective at restricting Mam definitions of collectivity (and thereby constraining demands for cross-border rights), my findings suggest that depending on the situation at hand, Mam individuals imagine the spatial boundaries of their collective identification differently. This signals that Mam collective identification boundaries are not hardened realities but, instead, are shifting and context-driven. For instance, in some contexts The Council of the Mam Nation and other organizations promote acknowledgement of the incongruity of the boundaries of Mam collective identification with political-administrative borders, revealing the Guatemala-Mexico border as a site of contestation. In this section I provide examples of how Mam participants weave in and out of the three scalar narratives when discussing what it means to be Mam in the contemporary world. These examples demonstrate an ongoing symbolic struggle between the Mam and the Guatemalan and Mexican states regarding the boundaries of Mam collectivity. While the previous section demonstrates how spatial boundaries may shape the symbolic boundaries of collective identification, in this section I demonstrate that these processes are co-constituting. As the Mam weave in and out of these different collective identification boundary narratives, they complicate the spatial constructions that divide their pueblo.

The three scalar narratives discussed in the previous section are not generally used in a mutually exclusive manner. The same individual may express the boundaries of collectivity quite narrowly in some circumstances and more broadly in others. Over the course of several conversations or even a single conversation, depending on the context at hand, an individual may express various combinations of these three narratives. The complexities of collective identification are manifest as Mam continuously weave in and out of these three boundary narratives.

For instance, César is in his late thirties and leads a small Mam group that works on community projects such as planting trees and building barns in Comitancillo, Guatemala. In one conversation, he illustrated how Mam define the boundaries of collectivity differently in varying contexts. César recounted how he and a Mam friend from another department, Huehuetenango, were conversing in the Mam language while waiting for a taxi in San Pedro Sacatepéquez. Overhearing these men speak in Mam, a ladina woman from San Pedro burst into a racist rant: "Get out of here! Get out of here [or] we're going to beat you! Go, go, go!… Leave!" César relates how he told the woman that he and his friend are Mam, and although they speak both Spanish and Mam, their "own language," as he describes it, is Mam. He asked, "Why should we leave? We have always gone [to San Pedro], we are going to speak the same [in Mam]."

As he spoke, César used "them," "ladina," and "Shecana" (meaning from San Pedro) interchangeably. He associated being ladino/a with being from San Pedro as he expressed ladino/a identity as localized within the boundaries of that municipio. But he also weaved into a broader narrative of boundaries by using "us," "our," and "Mam" as signifiers of collective identification transcending Comitancillo and even the boundaries

between the departments of San Marcos, where San Pedro Sacatepéquez is located, and

Huehuetenango. As I have shown, political-administrative divisions within these

countries have long served as instruments of domination by politically fragmenting the

indigenous and failing to recognize indigenous authority that spans such divisions. These

divisions are often internalized as essentialized spatial identities, and thereby contribute

to state goals related to assimilating Mam subjects as part of the Guatemalan or Mexican

nation. But in this context César recognizes that he and his friend are part of a collectivity

that transcends certain political-administrative boundaries. By weaving in and out of

these scalar understandings of identity César in effect de-essentializes these spaces.

Like César, Eliseo, a primary school teacher in his early twenties who plays

soccer for the Comitancillo selection team, also occasionally refers to Comitancillo as a

Mam municipio. But he too weaves into broader definitions of Mam boundaries. In his

accounts, especially those that center on his personal interactions with Mam individuals

in regions beyond Comitancillo, he sometimes refers to the Mam as a collectivity

extending throughout western Guatemala and ending at the border. He even does so while

recognizing differences among the Mam, such as variation in how they speak the Mam

language:

Eliseo: Because in different places there are indigenous people. But their language

                [he pauses] they pronounce different than the Mam language here. In other

                words, all the Mam languages are different. They are not all the same.

Jeff: So the Mam language is different in different places?

Eliseo: Yes. At the moment of pronouncing the words, the difference is there.

<u>Jeff:</u>	For example, the Mam [language] of those in Huehue[tenango] is different?
<u>Eliseo:</u>	[M hm] Yes.
<u>Jeff:</u>	So then are they the same indigenous pueblo…
<u>Eliseo:</u>	Yes! [he exclaims emphatically over my question]
<u>Jeff:</u>	…Or are they a different indigenous pueblo?
<u>Eliseo:</u>	No, it is the same indigenous pueblo.
<u>Jeff:</u>	So everyone feels they are the same then, the same pueblo Mam?
<u>Eliseo:</u>	M hm [nodding affirmatively].

Eliseo attributes this broader understanding of Mam boundaries, which diverges from the state's administrative divisions, to his personal interactions with Mam beyond Comitancillo's borders when playing soccer in those regions. But he says he is unsure if the Pueblo Mam extends through Mexico because he has never been there. This again suggests that collective identification is context-driven. The fluid and shifting character of collective identification may align with political-administrative borders in certain interactions and diverge from them in others.

Hearing about social interactions across political-administrative borders also helps produce broader understandings of the boundaries of Mam collectivity. Indeed, stories and discourses fashion identification boundaries (Dunn 2001; Andolina, Radcliffe, and Laurie 2005). For example, Raúl, an elementary teacher in his twenties from Comitancillo, would often say "Comitancillo is Mam" in his stories, narrowly localizing the boundaries of Mam collectivity within municipal boundaries in Guatemala. However, one evening after playing soccer, Raúl and I were reminiscing about their childhoods.

Raúl related stories his father shared with him about his travels to Chiapas, where he had worked on coffee plantations. Raúl related that his father was once surprised to meet a Mam man from Mexico:

> A man from there, who lived on the *finca* (plantation), came and spoke to my father in Mam. "You understand?" he asked [my father]. "Yes," my father said, and then they began to exchange words [in Mam] and become friends… In that time they understood, we're speaking here about…'90, '92, '93. But still today they speak it [Mam], I believe that still, because there are ancestors [from Mexico] that exist... Because the Mam from San Marcos [in Guatemala], *todo* (everything and everyone) is Mam, [just] like Tapachula [in Mexico], according to the history.

Even though Raúl did not personally interact with this man, his father's stories have shaped how, at least in some contexts, he defines Mam collectivity boundaries more broadly.

Diego also frequently weaved in and out of different spatial scales when talking about Mam identity. One afternoon, Diego and I discussed how he began working in bilingual education and some of the challenges his office deals with in promoting bilingual education. Diego transitioned from talking about the Mam as a people transcending the Guatemala-Mexico border to discussing Mam identity issues throughout western Guatemala (associating identity boundaries with nation state boundaries) and within municipios (associating them with municipal boundaries). He did this by situating himself differently based on his multiple ways of identifying (e.g., activist, father, community leader, state employee). As Diego's various group affiliations intersect

differently in distinct contexts, different ways of defining boundaries of collective identification are actively constructed.

For example, when describing his work as a young teacher and activist, Diego said, "We strengthened the bilingual issue throughout all the highlands of San Marcos, in all the municipios. And we made texts...and we initiated some awareness raising because [we were] *being Mam*. At that time, many other teachers wouldn't listen to us [because we were Mam]." This excerpt highlights Diego's definition of the Mam as a pueblo extending throughout the western highlands, beyond municipal borders. Situating himself as an activist and passionate educator earlier in his career, Diego was able to give meaning to his activism and Mam language education throughout the western highlands. Later in the same interview Diego situated himself as a state employee when he described current challenges for promoting Mam language education. His primary identification shifted from describing himself as an activist and educator to discussing his current dilemmas as a state employee because the interaction at hand, our conversation, transitioned into a new direction. In this latter way of identifying, Diego expressed frustration that some "Mam municipios" near the border, like Tacaná, no longer identify as Mam, so teaching the Mam language is a challenge there. Thus, depending on the context, Diego also sometimes defines the boundaries of Mam collectivity as coterminous with particular municipal borders. Diego's multiple identifications, and the intersections among them, lead him to define the boundaries of Mam collective identification differently in different contexts.

His experiences as a young teacher and his current circumstances include relationships with Mam at various socio-spatial scales, and these relationships shape

different expressions of the Mam as a collectivity. That is, he envisions the boundaries of Mam collectivity differently depending on which of these scales he is working at.

Weaving in and out of these various scalar narratives may not necessarily be intentional. Nonetheless, these examples demonstrate that Mam collective identification is not static but context-driven. This suggests that even if Mam narratives often align with state political-administrative borders in ways that reinforce political divisions, shifting social contexts can create openings for the Mam to contest these borders. In other words, while spatial boundaries certainly may influence how the Mam construct symbolic boundaries of collective identification, these symbolic constructions may also problematize those spatial divisions that divide their pueblo. In other words, the spatial and the symbolic may shape each other in a reciprocal fashion; they are co-constituting.

Shifting contexts may also create openings for indigenous activists to critique such spatial divisions. Indeed, activist efforts have challenged state borders by mobilizing Mam individuals around the idea that that the Mam are a nation spanning the contemporary Guatemala-Mexico border. One example took place in 2014, when Mam leaders and community members met in San Marcos to discuss the mining that is ongoing in San Miguel Ixtahuacán and Sipacapa (towns located in the department of San Marcos) and to revisit earlier accords in which communities had voted against such mining. Mam activists rooted their opposition to the mines in a discourse of their collective rights as a nation spanning the Guatemala-Mexico border. Carlos, a leader of a Mam NGO in San Marcos, asserted to the more than 60 individuals present:

> The constitution says we are little indigenous groups; the [Guatemalan]
>
> government doesn't recognize us as pueblos, as nations. But the pueblo Mam is

único (singular), there is no other pueblo Mam. There are [Mam] in San Marcos,

in Huehue[tenango], and southern Mexico, but we are one. It is the pueblo Mam.

We were divided. But it is not some coincidence that there is now…the pueblo

Maya-Mam. We have accomplished a lot. But there is still more [to accomplish].

But the pueblo is advancing.

Carlos recognizes the Mam in Guatemala and Mexico are part of the same nation.

Additionally, he recognizes that the construction of the "pueblo Maya-Mam" was not

revived through happenstance, but rather was an accomplishment of the people through

their active efforts. Those present—from diverse organizations representing

Huehuetenango, San Marcos, and Quetzaltenango—were witness to this assertion of

cross-border identification.

After Lox, a C.R.I.M.M.S. leader from Pavencúl, Mexico, met with Mam council

leaders from Guatemala, she explained to me that C.R.I.M.M.S. was now planning to

enter into a new phase focused on "socio-political work." This new phase she described

as similar to, while also a slight departure from, C.R.I.M.M.S.' focus on "rescuing [Mam]

culture." Following this cross-border meeting with Mam leaders from both sides of the

border, Lox explained to me that in addition to her work with C.R.I.M.M.S., on her own

she planned to speak more openly to her friends and family in Pavencúl about being part

of a Mam nation. Lox explained:

> [The Mam nation] Is principally one. Because we're Mam, both on the side of
>
> Guatemala and the side of Mexico. We're Mam. Our beginnings, we were
>
> together. I've got one or another uncle maybe in Guatemala. In other words, why
>
> divide us by a border? In other words, the pueblo Mam is not divided. The pueblo

Mam is love, it is union. And besides, if we unite…we're part of the same cause, which is to recognize our rights as [the] pueblo Mam. Well, more than anything, it's to be recognized. Create something for our own selves. So united, we become stronger. As Che'l [the president of C.R.I.M.M.S.] says, "one stick doesn't burn alone." We need other sticks… So both our *compañeros* from Guatemala and Mexico, united, we're going to become stronger. United together to be able to fight, really, to be recognized. [To] blur the borders…so that others respect us. Everything [in this struggle] is to have…a better quality of life for the pueblo Mam.

Lox later told me, "This is a message that has to be shared, both on the side of Mexico and the side of Guatemala. Both, so that the pueblo Mam can be more united together. Stronger that way." Lox's words, like Carlos' above, demonstrate that along with shifting social contexts, there are openings for Mam activists to use the symbolic boundaries of collective identification to problematize spatial boundaries.

Although I heard expressions of cross-border belonging by Mam individuals from a variety of backgrounds, Mam council leaders emphasized the cross-border character of the pueblo Mam more often than those who are not a part of these councils. Mam council leaders also tended to highlight the political aspects of this collective identification boundary narrative: that the Mam are a pueblo whose ancestral territory transcends state borders. As previously mentioned, Mam individuals who are not leaders in these councils also described themselves as part of a pueblo across the border but they focused more on sharing a culture (including a shared language) than on sharing politics (such as having a

shared ancestral territory) across the border.[20] That being said, interacting with Mam individuals on the other side of the border (or hearing stories about such cross-border interactions) seemed to matter more to my participants in shaping a sense of cross-border belonging than whether or not they were leaders of a Mam council or organization. In fact, on most occasions when Mam participants would talk about having a shared culture or territory across the border, they would harken back to a cross-border experience. In the next chapter I will describe how Mam councils are facilitating such cross-border experiences and then sharing those experiences to promote the construction of a cross-border nation.

Together with activist efforts, the context-driven character of Mam collective identification indicates that a Mam cross-border nation is being actively imagined, even though the details of this project are still in formation. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Mam council leaders are also involved in beginning to construct this cross-border project. Mam leaders seek the meaningful recognition of their people's collective rights to autonomy, territory, self-determination, and the legitimate existence of the cross-border nation (both among the Mam population and through the state's institutional structures). They do so in order to construct a sense of national belonging that promotes Mam society and culture, to advance contact and cooperation among the Mam across the Guatemala-Mexico border, and to better defend their territory from mining and hydroelectric activities that contaminate the Mam and their territory. In chapter four I will describe how Mam councils from each side of the border have begun to construct socio-

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[20] In chapter four I will further address how Mam leaders view their politics and culture as both intertwined.

political ties amongst themselves across the border. These efforts also signal how a Mam cross-border nation is beginning to be actively imagined.

In this section I showed that Mam collective identification boundary narratives are not used in a mutually exclusive manner. These symbolic boundaries of identification may shift depending on the context at hand. As Mam individuals weave in and out of different collective identification boundary narratives, they complicate the nation state framework that elides the cross-border character of the pueblo Mam. Along with activist efforts, the shifting and context-driven character of Mam collective identification point to the active imagination of a Mam cross-border nation.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have argued that there is an ongoing symbolic struggle between the Mam and the Guatemalan and Mexican states regarding the boundaries of Mam collectivity. Importantly, this analysis of Mam collective identification highlights how symbolic and spatial boundaries are actually co-constituting. In the beginning of this chapter I demonstrated how the boundaries of Mam collective identification are shaped by state political-administrative boundaries. I showed that Mam individuals and organizations will often conflate their collective identification boundaries with state-defined political-administrative boundaries (e.g., with municipal boundaries and with the Guatemala-Mexico border). However, the Mam also problematize such conflations as they define their collective identification boundaries in ways that transcend state political-administrative boundaries.

Although the Guatemalan and Mexican states have been effective in fomenting forms of identification that elide cross-border understandings of Mam nationhood, the boundaries of Mam collective identification are shifting and context-driven. As Mam individuals in their everyday lives weave in and out of different scalar narratives as they traverse different social contexts, they contest the state political-administrative borders that divide their pueblo.

In this chapter I also suggest that interpersonal cross-border experiences influence how the Mam imagine themselves as a collectivity. When Mam individuals from one side of the border interact with Mam individuals from the other side of the border (or even hear stories about these social interactions), such interpersonal cross-border experiences may shape how they envision the Mam as an indigenous people transcending state political-administrative borders. In the next chapter I will further extend this argument by suggesting that, at a collective level, cross-border experiences are facilitated by Mam councils on each side of the Guatemala-Mexico border to strengthen socio-political ties across the border. Unlike the unplanned character of interpersonal cross-border experiences described in this chapter, the collective cross-border experiences analyzed in the following chapter are typically scheduled events and meetings by Mam leaders. These collective cross-border experiences are also shared among the Mam (through council representatives), just as some Mam individuals share their interpersonal cross-border experiences, to promote a sense of cross-border national belonging. Therefore, even though some imaginings of Mam collective identification are circumscribed within state political-administrative borders, Mam individuals and councils are actively constructing alternative imaginings of national belonging through cross-border experiences.

CHAPTER 4

CONSTRUCTING SOCIO-POLITICAL TIES THROUGH CROSS-BORDER

EXPERIENCES

In 2014 The Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' (the Mam council in Huehuetenango,

Guatemala) and the Consejo Regional Indígena Maya-Mam del Soconusco (or

C.R.I.M.M.S., which is the Mam council in Chiapas, Mexico) convened twice across the

Guatemala-Mexico border to discuss becoming more united across the state border.

These cross-border meetings would mark the first time that Alejandra, a law student from

Tapachula, Mexico (a city in southern Chiapas near the border), interacted with Mam

individuals from the Guatemalan side of the border. Prior to these cross-border meetings I

wasn't quite sure if Alejandra considered herself Mam. Her ancestors are Mam and she is

even part of the leadership of C.R.I.M.M.S., yet she would often refer to the Mam in

Mexico and Guatemala with the personal pronouns of "them" and "they" rather than

"we" and "us." Additionally, I never really heard Alejandra speak about Mam territory

before these cross-border meetings. Her work with C.R.I.M.M.S., like the work of several

others who participate with C.R.I.M.M.S., was primarily focused on language and culture

revitalization rather than the politics of Mam territorial recognition.

However, in an interview following her cross-border experience, Alejandra

rhetorically asked a politically significant question that binds her to the Mam nation and

its efforts to denaturalize the Guatemala-Mexico border: "If they [the Mam] fought in the

past to be free as a nation, which it was, why can't we now continue to do so?" She later

explained, "The [border] lines are nothing more than imaginary creations in Mam territory…those lines, [individuals] make them."

Motivated by her first cross-border experience, Alejandra more openly identified as part of the pueblo Mam and she saw the border as a historically constructed impediment that divides Mam territory. Moreover, she wondered why her people shouldn't struggle for their recognition as an indigenous nation. It is noticeable that Alejandra toggled between the personal pronouns that define her both as part of the Mam collectivity ("we") and as external to it ("they"). However, following her cross-border experience she didn't always speak of the Mam as "them" and "they" anymore. More often (as in her rhetorical question) she spoke of the Mam "we" and "us." This transition did not occur all at once. In fact, she still occasionally transitions between such pronouns. Nevertheless, her cross-border experience shaped her individual identification as Mam, her socio-political tie to a Mam collectivity across the Guatemala-Mexico border, and her imagining of Mam territory.

In this chapter I detail how cross-border experiences among the Mam serve as a mechanism for problematizing their division by the Guatemala-Mexico border. By cross-border experiences, I am referring specifically to social interactions that may be realized by indigenous peoples divided by state borders. I conceptualize *cross-border experiences* as face-to-face social interactions among one or more indigenous individuals from the other side of the border whereby such individuals identify themselves as part of the same indigenous collective. In other words, cross-border experiences entail social interactions among Mam individuals from Guatemala and from Mexico, when such interactions are used as a means for identifying as part of the same pueblo. In essence, the Mam draw

upon cross-border experiences to sustain the broader collective identification boundary narrative discussed in the previous chapter that defines the Mam as a people transcending the border. In this chapter I focus on examples of cross-border experiences that are realized at the collective level, between Mam councils from opposite sides of the border.

I suggest that cross-border experiences are a form of what Tuhiwai Smith (2012) refers to as indigenous "networking." Tuhiwai Smith (2012:158) describes the "indigenous project" of networking with the following details:

> The face-to-face encounter is about checking out an individual's credentials, not just their political credentials but their personalities and spirit. Networking by indigenous peoples is a form of resistance. People are expected to position themselves clearly and state their purposes. Establishing trust is an important feature.

As outlined by Tuhiwai Smith in this passage, cross-border experiences allow Mam individuals to get to know and understand each other through face-to-face social interactions. Cross-border experiences among Mam councils (i.e., face-to-face social interactions between Mam councils from different sides of the border) may facilitate the construction of socio-political ties. Socio-political ties across the border form part of an indigenous network that begins to bind a Mam cross-border nation together. In line with Tuhiwai Smith's (2012:158) description, I suggest that cross-border experiences are a type of indigenous networking, which are, indeed, a "form of resistance."

Cross-border experiences, like other social interactions, provide a space for collective identification to be continually constructed (see Hall 1996; Mallon 1996; Melucci 1995; Nagel 1994; Nelson 1999; Wade 1997). As noted by Arendt (1958),

Markell (2003), and Wedeen (2008), collective identification is not something that we entirely have control over. But, rather, processes of identification may be shaped through ongoing social interactions. This argument aligns with Wedeen's (2008) research on national identification in Yemen. Wedeen suggests that identification "is not something over which agents themselves have control. Because we do not act in isolation but interact with others, who we become through action is not [simply] up to us; instead it is the outcome of many intersecting and unpredictable sequences of action and response, such that 'nobody is the author or producer of his own life story'" (Wedeen 2008:16, citing Markell 2003:13; Arendt 1958:184). I agree that we do not have entire control over our identities since identification is an interactive process of ongoing construction that extends beyond the individual. I suggest that as Mam councils facilitate cross-border experiences (creating opportunities for the Mam from either side to interact with each other), such interactions may shape how Mam individuals identify as a collectivity. Facilitating cross-border experiences certainly cannot *control* Mam collective identification, but the facilitation of cross-border experiences can promote a form of collective identification that speaks to the construction of a cross-border nation. Cross-border experiences contribute to the ways that the Mam cross-border nation is being actively imagined.

In this chapter I demonstrate that the Mam draw upon cross-border experiences, even those facilitated by Mam councils, to define the boundaries of their collectivity across state borders. In other words, cross-border experiences are a resource for the Mam to imagine their boundaries of collectivity transcending the Guatemala-Mexico border. I will show that while there are different political and economic impediments to the

realization of such cross-border experiences, there are also concerted efforts by Mam councils to circumvent these impediments and facilitate cross-border experiences.

I suggest that the Mam use cross-border experiences to bind together national ties across the border, which challenges the nation state framework. Indeed, the ongoing development of socio-political ties across state borders problematizes notions of national belonging that are confined within the state. Simultaneously, these cross-border experiences shape a sense of territorial belonging that transcends state borders. I suggest that although these experiences are often brief, they may have lasting consequences for the pursuit of collective rights as a cross-border nation.

I address these issues by describing a couple of cross-border meetings among the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' and C.R.I.M.M.S. The chapter is divided into three sections. First, I describe some of the planning that has gone into how Mam councils facilitate collective cross-border experiences. Second, I then detail some of the challenges Mam councils and individuals face when attempting to cross the border within their own territory. In effect, these are challenges to the realization of cross-border experiences among the Mam. Third, I describe two Mam council meetings that demonstrate how cross-border experiences take form at a collective level. The initial meeting took place in November 2014 in Tapachula, Mexico and the follow-up meeting took place a month later in Huehuetenango, Guatemala. In the description of these meetings I tease out a few characteristics of cross-border experiences among the Mam: acknowledging socio-historical differences among the Mam as they are divided by the border; identifying points of commonality as an indigenous people (including cultural and political common ground) in spite of this division; and seeking to denaturalize the border. In my description

of these meetings I also describe how Mam leaders share these cross-border experiences with others. The Mam councils hope that by sharing accounts of these cross-border experiences, they may influence how Mam individuals (who may be less aware of the Mam on the other side of the border) imagine themselves as part of a cross-border collectivity. Indeed, cross-border experiences may be an effective tool for the active construction of a cross-border nation.

PLANNING CROSS-BORDER EXPERIENCES

Would C.R.I.M.M.S. become part of the Council of the Mam Nation? This is one of several questions I continued to ask myself in the days preceding the meeting of the Mam councils to be held in Chiapas, Mexico. I also wondered how communication would be maintained between these councils. To what extent would this cross-border meeting shape how leaders viewed Mam collectivity, especially for those who had not interacted with Mam individuals from the other side of the border previously? And what might impede the realization of future cross-border experiences?

At the time, in November 2014, the Council of the Mam Nation (which includes the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx', and three other Mam councils in Guatemala) already acknowledged its cross-border character as a nation and would occasionally include Mam *individuals* from Chiapas, Mexico in their meetings. Such was the case when the Council of the Mam Nation was originally formed in Pavencúl, Mexico in 2011, and even in their more recent annual congress months prior (on August 5th, 2014) that was titled, "Toward the Reconstitution of the Nation." However, Mam council leaders from the Guatemalan side were unaware of the existence of C.R.I.M.M.S. (the Mam council in Chiapas). The

Council of the Mam Nation maintained contact with some Mam individuals from

Mexico, but they had no communication or lines of contact with C.R.I.M.M.S. The

Council of the Mam Nation's inclusion of Mam *individuals* from Chiapas is noticeable in

the political documents produced by the Council of the Mam Nation. For example, in a

document that stemmed from their August 5th meeting, the Council of the Mam Nation

asserts its authority as *the* political body to be consulted and to resolve issues related to

the imposition of programs, projects, and policies in Mam territory on both sides of the

border. The document is stamped by the four Mam councils in Guatemala and,

noticeably, signed by one of the Mam individuals from Chiapas who attended the

meeting (see Image 4).

Image 4. Council of the Mam Nation document sealed by the four Mam councils in
Guatemala and signed by a Mam individual in attendance from Chiapas, Mexico.

It was through fieldwork in Mexico that I became aware of a Mam council in

Chiapas. In 2013 and 2014 I conducted semi-structured interviews in Pavencúl, Mexico.

This is the same town in Mexico's Sierra highlands where Mam councils from Guatemala

convened in 2011 to establish the Consejo Mayor Mam, which today is the Council of the

Mam Nation. Following a conversation about my research among the Consejo Mam Saq

Tx'otx' in 2014, a school teacher in Mexico told me that an alumna from Pavencúl was

now attending college in Tapachula and she was part of a Mam council too. Through this

serendipitous exchange, I was able to initiate contact with C.R.I.M.M.S. and began

attending their Mam language classes in Tapachula. These classes were taught by leaders

from C.R.I.M.M.S. and they primarily focused on training Mam and Ladino/a college

students in Chiapas to speak the Mam language at a basic level so that they could be

certified as bilingual teachers. Following these classes, I also interviewed C.R.I.M.M.S.

leaders and began to attend their meetings in several Chiapas communities. Most of the

meetings centered on Mam culture and language revitalization, but they also occasionally

addressed territorial issues, such as the need to be united against transnational mining

companies across their ancestral territory.

During this time with C.R.I.M.M.S. I maintained contact with representatives of

Mam councils in Guatemala, especially the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' in

Huehuetenango, Guatemala. Over several months of research I gained a rapport with the

Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' and C.R.I.M.M.S. by keeping these councils well-informed of

my research progress while also attending planning and organizational meetings, cultural

and political events (such as commemorations of their community votes against mining in

Mam territory), and protests for different causes (such as manifestations against mining

and for the release of political prisoners who had protested against transnational projects

in the region). I also spent time with members of these councils in their daily routines. In

the context of these interactions I would occasionally be asked by leaders from each

council about the other. In particular, they were interested in the projects the other was

working on to support Mam collective rights on the other side of the border.

Since there was no formal communication between these councils, the Mam

leaders from each council asked me to share with them the email addresses of the other so

that they could initiate a cross-border meeting. The purpose of this meeting was very specific: the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' wanted to see if C.R.I.M.M.S. was interested in joining the Council of the Mam Nation. If so, C.R.I.M.M.S. would constitute the Mam council from the Mexican side of the border that would complement the 4 Mam councils in Guatemala in their socio-political efforts. C.R.I.M.M.S. did not hesitate to express their interest in becoming part of the Council of the Mam Nation and relayed their message to the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' through me, as their point of contact. One of the central leaders of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' then emailed[21] the leaders from C.R.I.M.M.S. the following message:

> The Consejo Maya-Mam Saq Tx'otx' greets you warmly *compañeros* y *compañeras* of the Consejo Regional Indígena Maya-Mam del Soconusco. Sincerely the news fell on us like the rain of May. To us the news sounds great to have a first meeting and exchange of work plans for the struggle in defense of the territory. We're proposing that we meet in the place of Comalapa [Mexico] on the date of November 10th at 9am. We believe it would be better for you to find the [exact meeting] location since it is in your region. This is only a proposal and we look forward to your reaction…[We send] a big hug to you all.

C.R.I.M.M.S. accepted this invitation and the meeting was scheduled. Although Comalapa was much closer to the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx (who would be traveling from Huehuetenango, Guatemala), the meeting location was changed to Tuxtla Chico, Mexico, which is a town near the border much farther south in Chiapas than Comalapa. This newly proposed location would not only be more convenient in terms of travel

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[21] The primary leader of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx sent this email on October 23rd, 2014. I was Cc'd on the email.

distance for leaders from C.R.I.M.M.S., but it would also allow both councils the opportunity to visit the Mayan archeological site of Izapa together (where Mam sacred ceremonies are occasionally held), since this site is located in Tuxtla Chico.

In the days prior to this meeting I was still unsure about how Mam leaders from each council would interpret the social, cultural, and political actions of the other. As detailed in chapter two, the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' and C.R.I.M.M.S. are both engaged in asserting Mam collective rights across the Guatemala-Mexico border, but they have done so by emphasizing different aspects of Mam collective identification. On the one hand, the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' has centered most of its attention on mobilizing the Mam against the transnational mining and hydroelectric companies in the region in their struggle to defend their territory. They have done so by defining their territory as an integral part of their collective identification. On the other hand, C.R.I.M.M.S. has centered most of its attention on revitalizing Mam culture and the usage of the Mam language in Chiapas, Mexico.

Before dawn could break on the day of the cross-border meeting in Mexico, I travelled with Antonio, Mauricio, and Elsa (three leaders from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx') in a pickup truck southward from the mountains of Huehuetenango to El Carmen, Guatemala, an official border-crossing town near Tuxtla Chico. Unfortunately, a last minute family health emergency precluded Pe'x, the president of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx', from joining us. However, like Pe'x, Antonio is one of four central leaders to the council. Thus, Antonio's presence in this cross-border meeting would be crucial if a cross-border socio-political tie would begin to be constructed between the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' and C.R.I.M.M.S. The drive would take us several hours to complete

so we took turns resting and discussed expectations for the meeting. Through the night and into the early morning our conversations carried on with the sun peaking over mountain ridges as we flew down the winding roads from the highlands to the coast, close to where we would cross into Mexico.

One of the lingering questions I had during this drive was whether the leaders of each council would describe their actions on each side of the border as part of the same struggle for Mam collective rights. As mentioned above, some of the differences were quite noticeable. Antonio explained to me and the others, "Look, what we're going to do is let them speak and then afterward we will speak about the Consejo [Mam Saq Tx'otx'] and the [Council of the] Mam Nation. And then we'll see if it's convenient for us to work together." By convenience, Antonio referred to whether it would be worth their while. This response somewhat surprised me because I thought that with this initial meeting it was already assumed that C.R.I.M.M.S. would be joining the Council of the Mam Nation. Antonio corrected this assumption when I asked him for clarification. I asked, "Well, isn't it important that the two councils begin to work together?" Antonio replied, "Yes, but it depends. It's just that we don't know really, really well if they are in the same struggle as us. That's why we have to find out if they are for [the struggle in] the defense of the territory and all that."

Antonio's comment caused me to wonder whether C.R.I.M.M.S.' focus on revitalizing Mam culture and the Mam language in Chiapas would hinder their invitation to be a part of the Council of the Mam Nation. I asked Antonio about this by reminding him that C.R.I.M.M.S. is interested in defending Mam territory the way that the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' does, but that C.R.I.M.M.S.' more central focus has been on teaching

the Mam language in Chiapas communities. Antonio corrected me for assuming that these are distinct struggles. He replied, "I understand that, and the struggle for language and the territory is the same. It is the same pueblo. But we want to see if they will support us and we want to find out how we can support them too."

This conversation with Antonio further highlights that the construction of a Mam cross-border nation will continue to be an ongoing process that will not simply culminate with the development of a cross-border tie among Mam councils. Antonio looked forward to this initial cross-border meeting as an opportunity to begin laying a foundation for understanding how both councils coincide. Importantly, he recognized that the basis for this common ground is that the Mam on both sides of the border are "the same pueblo."

Furthermore, Antonio's statements acknowledge that struggling for Mam collective rights across the border entails different aspects of the same struggle, including efforts to seek cultural and territorial recognition. Rather than seeing these aspects as distinct struggles, Antonio challenged me to consider how they are, in fact, part of the same collective rights struggle. Later, Pe'x further elaborated on the singularity of these seemingly different goals. When we returned to Guatemala following this initial meeting, Antonio, Mauricio, and Elsa reported to other members of the council about this meeting. In their recap, Mauricio mentioned that C.R.I.M.M.S. spoke a lot about "*el rescate de la cultura*" ("rescuing the culture") but not so much about "*la defensa del territorio*" ("the defense of the territory"). Pe'x quickly responded to Mauricio in a similar fashion as Antonio had to me during our travel to the border:

The focus on language revitalization, on *traje* [*típico*, indigenous clothing], on Mam music, all of that, this is all part of the defense of the territory. It's the same! It's the same struggle. Just as defending the territory from the mining. It is all political and part of the same struggle.

Pe'x's reply to Mauricio about seeing the cultural as political also echoed what I once heard a leader of a Mam NGO tell volunteers working on a community garden in Guatemala. During this NGO meeting in Comitancillo (a municipio in San Marcos, Guatemala) a few garden volunteers complained to Oscar, the Mam NGO leader, that it was increasingly difficult to coordinate with the entire community at a collective level on how to manage the garden. The alternative solution proposed by one of the volunteers was to simply find individual volunteers interested in working in the garden and then to just coordinate the management of the garden on an individual basis with those particular volunteers each month. However, Oscar disagreed with this solution. He told the Mam volunteers that as an indigenous organization they needed to focus on the collectivity. He noted that this is not because working as a collectivity was necessarily some "natural" way to do work or because it was easier to work collectively with entire communities to coordinate the management of the garden. In other words Oscar didn't attempt to romanticize notions of collectivity and being indigenous as some "natural" or essentialized affinity. And neither did he disagree with the difficulty in attempting to coordinate this garden project with many volunteers at a collective level across the community. Rather, Oscar eschewed the proposed alternative (i.e., working through individual volunteers) because he viewed Mam collectivity as a central aspect of their political work. He explained to the volunteers, "The garden, if you believe it, is a political

project." Oscar recognized that the members should try to see how even the slightest technical things they work on are part of this political project. He used other examples too, such as noting that the Mam women who weave *traje* with their organization are doing a political act. He explained, "It's not just a technical issue, it's political. Everything we do is political. That is why we are focused on the collectivity."

As our drive neared the border for this initial cross-border meeting in Mexico, I wondered more about how these three members from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' and the leaders from C.R.I.M.M.S. might each interpret the social, cultural, and political projects of the other. I also wondered whether C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders would suggest, as Antonio did, that their cultural engagements are part of a political project. Antonio's construction of the cultural as political, even noting how language revitalization and defending territory fall under the same umbrella of struggling for Mam collective rights in their territory, at least primed us to consider how a common ground could be envisioned during this cross-border meeting. And both Mauricio and Elsa seemed in concordance with Antonio's perspective.

Thus, while an attention to the differences between each council could have impeded the construction of socio-political ties across the border, Mam council leaders cautiously circumvented this impediment by strategically seeking to identify points of commonality. Specifically, Antonio prepared Mauricio and Elsa (and me) to reflect on how both councils are ultimately engaged in the same struggle of defending their territory.

CHALLENGES TO CROSSING THE BORDER

In this section I describe illustrative examples of how some Mam individuals cross the Guatemala-Mexico border without legal documents from the state. My aim with this description is to emphasize some of the challenges the border imposes on the Mam when they try to move across regions in their own ancestral territory.

Certain details about how Antonio, Mauricio, and Elsa would cross the border were not completely worked out by the time we arrived at the formal border-crossing town of El Carmen. Over several years I had received exit and entry stamps in my US passport from border officials of both countries on more than a dozen occasions when crossing the border at this particular location. My ability to cross the border with ease is predicated on my racial and national privilege as a white US citizen. I recognize that this privilege unjustly grants me differential treatment to cross the border without harassment from border officials, while it is far more difficult for Mam individuals (whose ancestral territory spans this border) to freely cross it.

In contrast to my ease and familiarity with this formal border-crossing location, this would be the first time that Antonio, Mauricio, and Elsa would cross the border at this location. And when we arrived at El Carmen and exited the truck—Mauricio left the truck in a parking lot—it seemed that the three of them were becoming slightly uneasy about the experience. Both Elsa and Mauricio were more fidgety in their mannerisms. This sense of nervousness was perhaps shaped by being the first time that the three of them had visited this town. Perhaps they were also taken aback by the several children who quickly approached us when exiting the pickup in competition with each other to attempt to earn a little bit of money for helping us ensure we had proper paperwork to

cross the border. Unlike Elsa, this was not the first time that Antonio and Mauricio had crossed the border into Mexico. However, they had only previously crossed the border at the formal crossing location of La Mesilla, Huehuetenango and also at other points that are not formal border-crossing locations. Moreover, neither Antonio nor Mauricio have crossed the border into Mexico more than a few occasions.

Another factor that may have contributed to this perceived uneasiness was that unlike Elsa and Antonio, Mauricio did not have a government issued identification card from Mexico's National Migration Institute (INM) to visit Chiapas. This Regional Visitor Card (TVR) has a five year expiration date and it can be used by Guatemalans to visit bordering Mexican states for up to 72 hours. To cross the border into Chiapas, the TVR can be presented to Mexican border officials at any one of four formal entry points along southern Chiapas' border with western Guatemala. Although the TVR is free to obtain, only requires an original and copy of either a Guatemalan passport or simply a Guatemalan Document of Personal Identification (DPI), and is even described by Mexican President Enrique Peña Nieto as "not only free, but now a […] simple process" (Nieto 2014), the actual procedure of obtaining the TVR can be quite complicated.

"Not Only Free, but Now a […] Simple Process"

In the following I highlight an example of the complications associated with obtaining the TVR. Earlier in 2014 Anibal, a research participant from Comitancillo, asked if he could accompany me to Tapachula, Mexico since he had never travelled to Mexico before. I needed to be in Tapachula to interview two Mam leaders in a couple days and Anibal happened to have time off from his new job as a tourism police officer in

Guatemala City. Yet I was not sure how the process of crossing the border would unfold since I had a passport and he did not. Anibal assured me that the crossing should be easy enough since he heard that there was now a Mexican migratory law that permitted Guatemalans to visit Chiapas for a few days at a time. However, Anibal and I made the mistake of not looking into the details before arriving at the entry point.

When Anibal and I arrived at El Carmen from Comitancillo around noon (our travel took us two chicken buses and a van ride, totaling about four and half hours) we proceeded toward the bridge that crosses the Suchiate River, which divides the countries at this point. I received an exit stamp through an office window from Guatemalan border officials per the usual procedure. Since Anibal was by my side when I received my passport stamp, he asked the Guatemalan border official at the window about how to obtain his TVR. The Guatemalan border official unpleasantly explained, "We don't have anything to do with that. That is from Mexico." Follow-up questions were barely replied to with stern quick phrases such as "*Saber?*" (Who knows?) and "I don't know." It seemed clear that this border official would not be much help.

Unsure how to proceed, Anibal and I decided to continue walking across the bridge. The bridge can be crossed on foot; by vehicle; or by tricycle carriers, which drivers use to transport merchandise and individuals across the border. The midway point of the bridge marks the boundary between the two countries. At this midway point, pedestrian travelers must enter a revolving gate to continue on the sidewalk leading toward the Mexican customs and immigration offices. I am used to seeing a couple Mexican federal police officers and occasionally one or two INM border officials at this revolving gate. In this instance, Anibal and I approached an INM border official who was

at the gate and Anibal asked him how he could obtain his TVR to visit Tapachula with me this afternoon. The border official snickered as if we were supposed to know that this would not be possible. Seeing our confused expressions, the official recognized that we truly did not understand the procedure.

"You can't cross today." The border official explained. "That's not going to happen. If you want your [TVR] card then you have to go through the whole process. They can't give it to you now."

"Well, what is the process?" Anibal asked.

"Look, there's no way to get it today."

"Okay, I understand that," Anibal noted, now with a slightly frustrated tone in his voice. "But if I want the card, how do I get it?"

The border official must have realized that Anibal and I were not going to walk away without more information. "Well, first you need an appointment date with the Casa Roja, he informed Anibal while pointing beyond Mexico's customs building and toward the Red House, which is literally a big red building of offices situated on a hill for Mexican INM officials to attend to the Guatemalan workers and visitors who plan to enter Chiapas. The Mexican border official continued, "But now the appointments are closed for the day. They give those in the morning."

Waiting to return to the border in the morning would add additional costs to the visit (including the financial cost of travelling to Malacatán and paying for a hotel for the night, which would be safer than some of the hotels in El Carmen, as well as the cost of time that we didn't want to spend in a city we were only planning to pass through). So

Anibal was persistent, "Well, can I see if *maybe* they'll help me now [at the Red

House]?"

"No, you have to get in line in the morning."

"What time?" Anibal asked.

"Well, first you need an appointment, a date with the Red House," the border

official explained. "To [get] that, you need to get in line well before 5 in the morning."

"5!" I called out surprised. Even if Anibal and I had known about the entire

process for him to receive a TVR, we would not have been able to arrive at this formal

border-crossing location by 5 in the morning from Comitancillo.

"Yes, at 5 in the morning at the latest." He seemed more irritated that we were so

unfamiliar with the process. "Some arrive much earlier than that, like 3, 2 even. They

only take so many people in to get an appointment in the morning and if you're not early

enough you will not be attended to. There are also teenagers who sell turns."

"What is that?" I asked, not sure what it meant to "sell turns."

Now it was Anibal who answered my question. Although Anibal wasn't familiar

with the particular process of selling turns here, he was familiar with this practice in other

contexts. "If we pay some teenagers we can buy their spot in line."

"Yes. They're not supposed to do it but there are always teenagers selling turns,"

added the border official. I was somewhat surprised by his candor in acknowledging that

INM border officials and the Mexican federal police officers turn a blind eye to these

practices at the borderline. "You can show up and they will be in line. You just 'buy their

breakfast' and they will give you their spot [in line]." This phrase—"buy their breakfast"

or sometimes "*comprar su cafecito*" [buy their little coffee]—in the border context

signifies paying someone off. Drivers of the tricycles often "buy breakfast" for police officers on both sides of the border so they can avoid paying taxes to customs when transporting goods from one side of the border to the other. For example, small shop owners in Guatemala frequently make bulk purchases from big chain stores, such as Sam's Club in Tapachula, which offers greater potential for turning a profit when these products are resold across the border in Guatemala.

But as I was still unknowledgeable about the process of the line for the TVR, I wasn't sure how purchasing a turn would affect those teenagers giving up their spots in line. Although I had a suspicion, I naively asked anyway, "Well won't those teenagers need their spot in line too? How are they going to cross?"

The Mexican border official's demeanor changed from being annoyed to somewhat humored by my question, as both he and Anibal laughed. "No, no," the border official clarified through his chuckle. "[The teenagers] don't *want* to cross. They only get in line to sell the places for the line." Suspicion confirmed.

After wrapping up this conversation, Anibal and I turned away from Mexico and returned past Guatemala's customs office while making new plans. We decided to return to Malacatán for the afternoon—a short taxi ride from the border—and after staying in a hotel for a few hours that night we would pay for a taxi to return us to the border in the middle of the night. I offered to pay for the taxis and hotel since I was fortunate to have such funds on hand and Anibal had not budgeted for this unanticipated extra travel cost. As I paid for these unexpected costs I also imagined what decisions Anibal would have had to make if he didn't have an extra day off of work. What would he have done without the assurance of a hotel for the evening? Although the answers to these questions are

unknown, this experience made me reflect on the decisions other Guatemalans surely must make when seeking a TVR.

After a few hours of rest in the hotel, we left Malacatán at 3am and arrived at the Guatemala-Mexico border shortly thereafter to see the already-forming line on the bridge's sidewalk. There were 11 people ahead of us (including a few were teenagers already attempting to sell us their spots) and we were told by different people in line that INM would take anywhere from 25-60 people to the Red House when they opened at 8am. Waiting on that dimly-lit bridge throughout the night scared me. I had heard several stories from locals of this town and from contacts I knew from another formal border-crossing location nearby (Tecún Umán/Ayutla-Ciudad Hidalgo) that these were not safe places to be outside overnight. These southern border towns have a notorious reputation for theft, kidnappings, and violence (Isacson, Meyer, and Morales 2014). Although I stood out as the only foreigner of Guatemala waiting in this line—my US passport could facilitate avoiding this process—I knew my fear was not unique. Before leaving the hotel Anibal told me that he too was a little nervous about having to spend most of the night on the bridge just to get a decent spot in the line.

Fortunately we encountered no safety problems during the night. The line had grown quite long by the time the sun rose. Some of the later arrivals purchased spots in the line from teenagers, which were mostly negotiated without any issues. Only one person tried to argue with a few of the teenagers about the fairness of selling spots in line that the teenagers had no intention of using themselves. But with enough of the teenagers holding spots arguing back about how this was their way of trying to make a wage, the issue went mostly uncontested.

When INM officials eventually began to escort those in line toward the Red House in the morning I was told that I couldn't follow Anibal and would need to go through the usual procedure for entering the country with my passport. I quickly returned to the Guatemalan border official offices to explain that I never actually left the country the day before and the Guatemalan border official told me that I wouldn't need an updated exit stamp from Guatemala and I could proceed back to the bridge. So I entered the revolving metal gate at the entry point to Mexico, walked along the fenced-in sidewalk, and received my entry stamp from Mexican border officials, as I had done on several previous occasions at this particular formal border-crossing location. Unlike my previous experiences though, I then headed up the hill toward the Red House. The plan was to meet up with Anibal at the Red House and then after he received his TVR from the Mexican INM officials we would get a taxi to Tapachula. At the top of the hill I saw Anibal standing among the 50 or so individuals who made the cut. Everyone was lined up into a few even rows as they listened to instructions from an INM official. I observed from a distance because I didn't want to interrupt the INM official's instructions or risk interfering with Anibal's turn to receive his TVR.

It didn't take long for me to realize that Anibal would not receive his TVR on this day. Several of those standing there looked frustrated. The INM official was telling everyone that since they made it through the line they would be given an appointment to return again for their TVR. Some others (but certainly not everyone) also seemed surprised by this announcement and must have assumed, as Anibal and I did, that this process would be concluded on this same day. After all, most everyone who was lined up

in these rows (except for some who purchased spots) just had to spend most of the night sleeping on a bridge in a border town.

All but a couple individuals, who were separated off to the side for failing to bring the correct identification, had already turned over their required identification and copies to the INM officials. Yet the speaking INM official explained that these were the same items everyone would need to bring with them on the day of their appointment. In other words, on this day they were simply verifying that the individuals had the proper identification and a copy and then they would need to return with those same materials later. It wasn't clear why the INM didn't process these materials on the same day. Row-by-row, the INM official then announced times and dates for the return appointments while another official made notes of the appointments on a clipboard and another returned identification documents and copies back to their owners. Anibal's appointment was a date two months later.

Everyone was then to be escorted back to the Guatemalan side of the border, while some stayed behind to ask INM officials different questions. I approached to overhear a conversation Anibal had already started with an INM official. Anibal still seemed dumbfounded by the process and told the official that he was a police officer in Guatemala and is likely scheduled to work the week of his appointment. Anibal asked whether he could either have a different appointment date (preferably one sooner) or even a note from INM he could show his captain so that he could perhaps receive permission to reschedule his assigned shift.

In a somewhat robotic fashion the INM official stated what he must be accustomed to repeating daily, "We don't assign different appointments. If you want your

[TVR] card you need to return on the date you were assigned. If you miss your

appointment you will need to line up again to receive a new appointment date and time."

"So if that's the case, then will you sign a note or write a note for my work?"

"We don't write notes for work."

"If I write the note can you or someone here sign it or stamp it then?" Anibal

asked, not quite ready to give up on his attempt.

"We don't sign or stamp notes for work. If you want the [TVR] card you will

need to be at your appointment." The INM official was done addressing Anibal. He

turned to another person waiting to ask a question, which—based on his robotic

responses—may have been quite similar to the questions Anibal had just asked.

Feeling deflated, Anibal and I said our goodbyes for the moment as he returned to

Guatemala and I headed to take a taxi to Tapachula, Mexico where I'd be meeting with

two C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders the following day. When considering all the indirect costs,

such as transportation and lodging (not to mention the cost of time from work and the

psychological and physical costs of staying in a dangerous location overnight) that it

would take to obtain a TVR, Anibal learned that the process was not free and it was

surely far from simple.

The second time Anibal wanted to travel with me to Mexico was a month later.

Since INM had yet to issue Anibal a TVR (his appointment with INM at the Red House

was still another month away), this time he decided to simply pay a tricycle driver to

quickly sneak him across the border while risking detention from border officials. While

crossing in this manner was not free either, it was definitely cheaper and certainly

simpler.

The example presented in this section conveys that although the TVR is described as a free and simple solution for allowing those in the borderland to cross into Mexico, the actual procedure for obtaining the TVR can be quite complicated. The procedure itself requires individuals to become subjects of the state through *waiting* (Auyero 2012). The difficulties Anibal faced when trying to obtain a TVR highlight how the border imposes on the Mam as they try to legally move across regions that are really part of their own ancestral territory.

C.R.I.M.M.S. Crosses with the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx'

Now preparing to meet with the Mam council in Mexico, Antonio, Mauricio, Elsa, and I walked toward the bridge that crosses the Suchiate River and marks the borderline. The plan was for Che'l, the president of C.R.I.M.M.S., to meet us at the bridge (where he would first cross from Mexico to meet us). Right before we parked the truck in El Carmen, Che'l called me to confirm that he would meet us on the Guatemalan side of the bridge. As we waited for Che'l, the four of us peered through the fence at the individuals moving commercial goods across the river below. We didn't have to wait long before I spotted Che'l approaching. I immediately noticed that he was dressed somewhat more formally than usual, wearing a white dress shirt that had "C.R.I.M.M.S." embroidered on his chest pocket along with their Mam council logo. With a big smile he embraced each of us in hugs and introduced himself to Antonio, Mauricio, and Elsa as the president of the Consejo Regional Indígena Maya-Mam del Soconusco.

Che'l asked about whether the three of them had documents and Antonio noted that not everyone had a TVR to cross. Che'l replied, "No, it's fine. We're going to cross

on the *cama* [bed]." In this borderland context, locals refer to the makeshift rafts on the

river as *camas*, which are used to transport individuals without legal border-crossing

documents. The Suchiate River was not very deep (only about waist deep at this

particular location) because it was no longer the rainy season, so individuals who could

not cross on the bridge could pay to have someone carefully walk across the river while

towing along one of the camas that supported undocumented passengers and commercial

goods.

Che'l suggested that I cross the border on the bridge with my passport, and that

the four of them would travel together on a cama so Mauricio would not have to cross the

river on his own. Che'l noted that I would likely stand out as "a gringo" if I were to cross

the river with them on the cama, perhaps drawing unwanted attention from border

officials. I decided to only temporarily accompany them to the opening of the alley where

they would pay for the service of a cama. I would then cross the border legally and meet

them down the road on the Mexican side.

After briefly discussing our plan, we followed Che'l off the bridge on the

Guatemalan side head toward the alley. However, after only a few steps off the bridge, a

tall Guatemalan border official with a stern look on his face put both his hands up in a

stopping gesture. The five of us halted. The Guatemalan border official's voice was very

blunt and his expression seemed accusatory. Or perhaps I was simply nervous about

potential detention for being an accomplice to their plan of crossing without legal

documents.

"Where are you going?" The border official asked with a deep voice through his

wide mustache. The question was simple, but the way he pronounced it felt very

disrespectful. In fact, although he stopped all of us, he used "Vos" as a personal pronoun when asking the question, which is an informal version of "Tú" in parts of Central America and Chiapas that may sound very rude when used toward strangers. The question seemed to be directed at Che'l who was in front of us all.

Without even looking at the border official in the eyes, Che'l maintained his usual quiet-tempered demeanor and pointed ahead on the road past the Guatemalan border offices, "We're going over there." And he continued walking past the border official. Antonio, Mauricio, Elsa, and I followed Che'l. I picked up my pace a tad because I was afraid of being the last one to have to answer any questions.

As we started in motion once more, the Guatemalan border official quickly followed up and called out again, "Where are you going?" His tone sounded even sterner than before—more of a demand for us to be still than a sincere question.

"We're going to eat breakfast," Che'l called back to the man, now standing a few steps behind us all. I knew that Che'l's response was not true, since we had previously discussed eating breakfast on the Mexican side of the border with others from C.R.I.M.M.S. and I knew that Che'l was leading us toward the alley where they would contract a cama. But I decided, along with the others, that it would be best to not intervene.

After the second response though, the Guatemala border official started to follow us, not willing to give up so easily. "No, no," he stated, as he projected his voice forward while keeping pace behind us. "If you're going there [pointing backward toward Mexico] or here [in Guatemala] you have to stamp your passport." He seemed perhaps unsure about whether we had all just crossed from Mexico to Guatemala or vice versa. Either

way he seemed quite suspicious that we were going to cross the border without official

documents. Even though this official was seeking to fulfill his job requirement of

ensuring that those who cross the border do so in a particular legal fashion as dictated by

the state, the four Mam leaders interpreted his rude approach as racist and out of the

bounds of his official duties.[22] Although the four of them came from both sides of the

border, together they felt harassed for being singled out and stopped, unlike others near

the bridge, for being indigenous.

Relentless, he asked a third time, "Where are you going?"

While all of us were still in motion and with the border official following close

behind, Che'l tactfully dodged the *real* question (whether we had official documents to

cross the border) as he turned his head to firmly reply. "No. We're going to eat breakfast

now and *then* we're going to cross."

The border official sped up his stride to pass us and he quickly positioned himself

in front of Che'l and stretched out his arms. His quick maneuver abruptly stopped Che'l

and the rest of us in our path. My heart was pounding. After jumping in front of us he

firmly stated, "First you must stamp your passport." Once again, the border official's tone

and word choice were condescending.

Che'l, who is a quiet and calm person on most occasions, now clearly showed his

frustration at being harassed by this border official. "No, *first* we are going to eat

breakfast. And *then* we will stamp them."

"Breakfast you can eat in a little bit. The first step is to stamp your passports."

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[22] This interpretation of the interaction with the border official was mentioned by each of these participants in conversations with me later that day and also during a cross-border meeting among both Mam councils.

At this standstill Che'l was no longer showing his usual calm demeanor. Antonio, Mauricio, Elsa, and I remained quiet throughout the entire exchange. As confirmed by later conversations, the four of us were mostly unsure about how to even respond. We trusted that Che'l, who lived close to this particular border crossing, knew best how to handle the situation. The rapid exchange between Che'l and the border official only lasted about 40 feet of walking. We had even already passed the offices of the Guatemalan border officials where passports are supposed to be stamped.

Now infuriated by the continued harassment, Che'l looked up at the tall Guatemalan border official. While staring in his eyes, Che'l boldly challenged the border official by finally erupting in frustration:

Look! We are adults and you are going to respect us! We have a right to be here. We already know our rights. We are here as friends from a council and we have a right to be together. You have no right to tell us where we are going and what we are going to do. But as adults, you will speak to me with respect!

Che'l silenced the Guatemalan border official. With raised eyebrows, the border official appeared to be caught off-guard by Che'l's remarks. He seemed surprised and also flustered. He didn't say another word.

Che'l then walked around the man. We followed close behind and continued walking toward the alley. After about another 15 seconds of walking I looked back at the stern border official, now in the distant background among the other pedestrians and vendors strolling in the street. The border official was no longer looking in our direction and it seemed like we were finally off of his radar. This exchange could have ended in so many other, less favorable, ways. I was still slightly nervous though, because I knew that

in a few minutes I would be returning to the offices of the Guatemalan border officials to stamp my passport and I was unsure how this border official might respond if he saw me without the others. I worried he might question me about their whereabouts. So I planned to deliver a naïve response if I were stopped and just say the other four individuals must still be eating breakfast. Fortunately I was able to cross the border without incident. And after crossing themselves, Che'l, Antonio, Mauricio, and Elsa were waiting for me on a side road in Mexico just beyond the border.

Movement across the border is quite limited for the Mam. Even so, some of the Mam do move about their territory (and even across the Guatemala-Mexico border) both with and without legal documentation. The above examples demonstrate that regardless of the state documents Mam individuals may have, their movement across Mam territory is consistently frustrated by both governments.

As highlighted here, the border is a mechanism for the state to assert itself as the legitimate authority over the Mam in their own territory. The examples given above demonstrate that the Mam may cross the border in diverse locations and by different means. However, the *legality* of where and how the Mam move across their territory is dictated by the Guatemalan and Mexican governments. The governments restrict this movement to only a few formal border-crossing locations and, because of the requirement of formal documentation, have even made it difficult for Mam councils and individuals to move freely across their own territory at these limited locations. In other words, the state asserts its authority over the Mam nation at the border. At the border, the state defines where and how the Mam may move about their own territory. In effect, as border officials enforce these restrictions, the Mam become subjects of the state. Any

noncompliance with this subjugation (such as crossing the border at places other than the state's few formal border-crossing locations) is an illegal act from the state's perspective.[23] Therefore, the border can be interpreted as a site of state subjugation for the Mam in their own territory.

COLLECTIVE CROSS-BORDER EXPERIENCES

In this section I detail some of the highlights from this initial meeting in Mexico and from an additional meeting with these two councils that was held a month later in Guatemala. Through these cross-border experiences Mam leaders further elaborated on the border frustrations encountered when trying to move across Mam territory. Additionally, through these cross-border experiences, Mam leaders detailed the social, cultural, and political actions that councils have undertaken on each side of the border. I provide examples of three characteristics of cross-border experiences that were present during these meetings: acknowledging socio-historical differences among the Mam as they are divided by the border; identifying points of commonality in spite of this division; and seeking to denaturalize the border. I will also mention that the Mam councils plan to share these cross-border experiences in different communities.

Once we had crossed the border into Mexico, Che'l arranged for us all to meet with other representatives from C.R.I.M.M.S. over breakfast in Tuxtla Chico, a small Mexican town near the border. Those who participated in this breakfast introduction expressed excitement that they were getting to know Mam from the other side of the border. This was Elsa's first time travelling to Mexico and also the first time she had ever

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[23] Importantly, these stringent legal restrictions on where and how to cross the border apply to everyone (not just Mam individuals). What is unique for the Mam in this context is that these legal restrictions subject the Mam to both states within their own ancestral territory.

met Mam from Mexico. For a few others from C.R.I.M.M.S. this was also the first time

that they had interacted with Mam individuals from the other side of the border. During

this breakfast Che'l (from C.R.I.M.M.S.) and Antonio (from the Consejo Mam Saq

Tx'otx') took turns presenting themselves as a more formal introduction to those present.

They each expressed gratitude for this opportunity to be meeting together and mentioned

that the more socio-political aspects of this gathering could be reserved for discussion at

the meeting that would follow breakfast. When breakfast wrapped up, everyone

carpooled to the C.R.I.M.M.S. office in Tuxtla Chico to discuss further developing a

cross-border relationship.

At this meeting the leaders described ongoing challenges their councils were

addressing on their sides of the border. As I have noted, C.R.I.M.M.S. has primarily

focused on promoting Mam language revitalization in the Soconusco and in the highlands

of Chiapas, while the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' has primarily focused on mobilizing

against the transnational mining and hydroelectric companies in western Guatemala.

Even though the meeting laid a foundation for discussing points of commonality and

difference between the councils, much of the discussion centered on celebrating this

historical moment of bringing together Mam councils from each side of the border.

Discussing points of commonality was challenging for one C.R.I.M.M.S. leader,

in particular, who mostly wanted to talk about Mam culture. Axel is one of the spiritual

leaders of C.R.I.M.M.S. who usually addresses the need to strengthen cultural aspects of

the pueblo Mam during community meetings. He frequently helped organize events

where he could teach others about the Mayan calendar and Mam ancestral "traditions,"

including "ancient gastronomy." During this initial cross-border meeting Axel repeatedly

asked leaders from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' about the possibility of coordinating a

cultural event at the Mayan archeological site of Izapa (also in Tuxtla Chico, Mexico)

where some trained individuals from Guatemala could come to perform the ancient

Mayan *pelota* (ball) game. Antonio, Elsa, and Mauricio, as well as others from

C.R.I.M.M.S., patiently listened to Axel's requests, but later told me that these requests

distracted from the more political agenda of uniting the Mam councils. Even though the

councils quietly allowed Axel to repeat these requests, Elsa later explained to me that

such an over-emphasis on culture, as in this instance, "focuses too much on the past."

This singular focus on trying to celebrate Mam culture was seen by some Mam leaders

from both councils as a distraction from addressing the contemporary struggles of the

pueblo on both sides of the border. Certainly leaders from both councils were interested

in discussing future cultural events, but overall there seemed to be a general consensus

that such plans should be balanced with efforts to politically unify these councils.

Conceding to this balance, everyone visited Izapa after the meeting.

Additionally, other members from C.R.I.M.M.S. and the Consejo Mam Saq

Tx'otx' spoke specifically about contemporary political struggles, including the need to

be organized in defense of their territory from the transnational projects supported by the

Guatemalan and Mexican governments. Likewise, leaders from both councils

problematized historical differences in how the Mam have been discriminated against by

the Guatemalan and Mexican governments.

However, it was apparent that the leaders needed more time to understand how

closely each council coincided. They agreed that a second meeting should be planned to

clarify how their cross-border coordination could be focused on what Antonio called "a

centered articulation." Near the end of the meeting Antonio explained that the idea of a centered articulation is to bring together the various social, historical, cultural, and political aspects mentioned during this initial meeting into a unified focus for both councils. In essence, what single thread, if any, could be woven through to bind their work together?

A month and a half later, on December 19th, the second meeting was set in motion as five leaders from C.R.I.M.M.S. travelled from Tapachula, Mexico to Huehuetenango, Guatemala. Notably, Axel and Lox (a female leader for C.R.I.M.M.S. in her mid-twenties who is quite vocal about socio-political efforts to bind the Mam together) were not able to attend this second meeting as they had the first. Aside from Che'l (the president of C.R.I.M.M.S.) and Alejandra (a law student who is also a representative within the leadership of C.R.I.M.M.S.), the other female and two male members of C.R.I.M.M.S. who travelled to Guatemala were not in attendance in the first meeting. Moreover, one of the travelling members, Francisco, was a young school teacher from Pavencúl who had only recently joined C.R.I.M.M.S.

The original plan was for C.R.I.M.M.S. to travel northward in Chiapas and cross at La Mesilla, which is a different official border crossing that is part of the department of Huehuetenango. But Che'l changed the plans at the last minute because he admitted that since he was less familiar with this location he was unsure of what obstacles they might face trying to cross there. On the other hand, he was more familiar with where we had crossed the previous month. Although this other border crossing location also poses frequent problems of harassment, he was at least familiar with the process there. And just like the previous month, Mam leaders were once more mistreated when crossing the

border from Mexico into Guatemala. At a desk on the bridge separating the two

countries, Mexican border officials checked the citizenship documents of C.R.I.M.M.S.

leaders and entered a record of their information for their later return. This part of

crossing into Guatemala from Mexico was easy. However, similar to the crossing

challenges in the previous month, once on the Guatemalan side of the border there were

two Guatemalan border officials who wanted C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders to pass by the

Guatemalan border offices. These border officials seemed intent on abusing their

positions of power for economic gain.

This time Che'l followed the instruction from the Guatemalan border officials to

walk toward their office windows since he was not worried about any documentation for

those who were crossing with him. However, once near the windows of the border offices

the two Guatemalan border officials explained that the group would have to pay a fee

"for security" for crossing the border and entering Guatemala. Che'l scoffed at this

request. The border officials explained that Che'l could simply buy them a "*cafecito*"

(little coffee), which was code for "paying them off." The cafecito is sometimes called a

mordida (bite). If not paid, the border officials warned that they might have to pay more

at the window. When I went to the window to stamp my passport I was also asked to pay

a fee of 20 Quetzales. I simply asked in annoyance, "For what?" Somewhat taken aback

by my quick refusal, I was answered with a stuttered reply, "Oh, it seems you paid last

time. You can go, you can go then."[24]

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[24] On previous occasions I was also pressured by Guatemalan border officials to pay a "fee" for crossing
the border at this location, which was unwarranted. I soon learned that if I told the border officials that I
could pay the "fee" but needed to have a receipt for my records for reimbursement from my university then
the border officials would typically become frustrated with my request (stating that they aren't allowed to
write receipts for this "fee") and they would usually permit me to pass without paying. On one occasion
though I was riding a bus from Guatemala City to Tapachula, Mexico, which happened to also have a lot of
American tourists aboard. These tourists were able to exit the bus before me. Since they were all in line to

Once more, Che'l refused to give in to these requests and firmly stated to the border officials, "We know our rights and we don't have to pay. I have crossed many times and know we don't have to pay." Che'l continued, "Respect me as a human being. I'm a man and you shouldn't be treating people like this." For whatever reason, the Guatemalan border officials sort of snickered as they turned to each other (almost as a subtle laughter that seemed to be in a mocking fashion). But they did not continue to pursue the manner further as Che'l and the others from C.R.I.M.M.S. simply walked away. When I followed up about the situation later, definitely sensing that Che'l and some of the others were nervous, Che'l denied the severity of the situation. He seemed dismissive of my observation and explained, "They will always try to take advantage of us, sometimes it's when we're going to Guatemala or sometimes if we're coming back [to Mexico]." He continued, "But we have to be firm. We know our rights. I wasn't scared." Later, others expressed to me less confidence in the situation. Alejandra told me, "Yeah, I was a little nervous. Because I didn't bring that much money for this trip. I didn't know if we were going to have to keep paying money because I've never come [to Guatemala] before."

When we eventually arrived in Huehuetenango that evening there was a celebration for both councils, which included food, music, and dancing. That evening there were 7 people from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx'. The meeting wouldn't be held

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stamp their passports before I could get to the window of the Guatemalan border offices, and the tourists each seemed to unquestionably hand over this "fee," I had less leverage to argue against paying or to demand a receipt (and avoid paying this "fee" that corrupt border officials requested). I mention my experience with this corruption among border officials to note that harassment is not reserved only for the Mam when crossing the border. However, harassment against the Mam has a uniquely insulting dimension in that this oppression is occurring by the state against the Mam when moving across regions in their own ancestral territory. There is also a racialized dimension to this harassment. Mam leaders expressed that while the border officials probably don't know they are Mam leaders, they *are* seen as indigenous and harassed for that reason.

until the following morning, but even without the socio-political agenda of the meeting

this celebration continued to bind these Mam councils together. Che'l would later tell me

that this was "an unforgettable *recibiemiento* (introduction)." He said, "I will never forget

how they received us. We are truly in their debt." At the conclusion of the evening's

celebration, Pe'x (the President of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' who was not able to

attend the first cross-border meeting in Mexico) happily announced that even though this

evening was a wonderful time to joke around and get to know each other, the "hope that

we share is that tomorrow we will be able to accomplish a lot toward working on an

enlace (tie) with C.R.I.M.M.S." Pe'x explained that both councils should continue to

think about their points of commonality. He asked, somewhat rhetorically (since he didn't

expect a response until morning), "What are we searching for?" Following this question,

Pe'x looked to Che'l and suggested that each council come to the meeting in the morning

with 3-5 points considered highest priority, "because we could list many things and not

accomplish anything. It would be better to focus on just a few things where we coincide."

Below I describe three characteristics of cross-border interactions that were

present during these Mam council meetings. I then turn to explaining how the Mam

councils have mobilized these cross-border experiences in their efforts to promote

collective identification as a cross-border nation.

Characteristics of Cross-Border Experiences

The following day both councils clearly intended to define such a "centered articulation"

by identifying points of commonality. And they did so while also acknowledging that

there are socio-historical differences among the Mam on either side of the border. As

they identified points of commonality and acknowledged differences, they also discursively denaturalized the border. In this section I suggest that identifying points of commonality, acknowledging differences, and seeking to denaturalize the border are characteristics of cross-border experiences that the Mam draw upon in their construction of a cross-border nation.

The meeting initiated with a sense of urgency, considering that time was limited since C.R.I.M.M.S. would have to return to Mexico later in the day. Once all the leaders and representatives were seated in the small office, everyone around the room took a turn reintroducing themselves. But while I was used to this formality of sharing introductions, especially in a circumstance where there were representatives from both sides of the border, I was surprised by how quickly most leaders wanted to finish their introductions to begin discussing why they were here: to formalize this cross-border alliance between these Mam councils and define how their efforts coincide. This newly formed socio-political tie represented a significant step for the construction of a Mam cross-border nation.

One characteristic of cross-border experiences is that they provide a space for the Mam to identify their points of commonality as an indigenous people across the border. Antonio and Pe'x (from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx) and Che'l (from C.R.I.M.M.S.) were the most vocal during this meeting. They immediately began to facilitate a discussion about what points of commonality the Mam share as a pueblo. Pe'x used the term *nation* to explain to everyone that the Mam have a shared history, culture, and territory. He also stated that the Mam councils are organized as the Council of the Mam *Nation*, emphasizing the word *Nation*. He explained that to form the Council of the Mam

Nation, C.R.I.M.M.S. would need to work in coordination with the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' and the other Mam councils in Guatemala that form the Council of the Mam Nation. Pe'x explained:

> [We want] the strength of C.R.I.M.M.S. and of the Council of the Mam Nation, [including the Consejo Mam] Saq Tx'otx' to move forward. Then whether we want [to be] here [in Guatemala] or we want [to be] in Tapachula [Mexico] we can be coordinated. There are also our brothers and sisters of the Council of the Mam Nation of San Marcos, Quetzaltenango, and Reu [Retalhuleu]. In this consists the number one point: if we coincide, if we are in agreement…we can say we are *hermanos* Mam.

Pe'x pointed out that the key to coordinating across state borders is to be in communication with the other councils of the Mam Nation and to understand that the Mam share points of commonality across these regions.

Pe'x then attempted to spark encouragement for brainstorming about topics where both councils coincide in order to further emphasize their points of commonality. Following Antonio's earlier comment, Pe'x was seeking to define this "centered articulation." He wanted it to be clear that if both councils were to continue coordinating their efforts across the border as part of the Mam nation then they would have to sustain each other:

> Our friend here [signaling to Che'l from C.R.I.M.M.S.] expressed that they have an upcoming event, well someone from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' will reach out to share their message of encouragement, of strength there [in Mexico]. [And] when we have some important date here in Huehuetenango someone from

C.R.I.M.M.S. should also come here to share their message. This way the camaraderie isn't only in the structure [of the councils] but that it may have a national and international impact to show that truly we are united with Chiapas, Mexico. Yes, there is a border, there are monuments…But [as a pueblo] we have no border, we have no monuments. I cross, you cross. Excellent. What I am saying is that if we want to coordinate [across the border] it will not be a divided coordination. It is a *centered* coordination and it is a *centered* articulation. For example, the hydroelectric issue, [also] the issue of electricity that our friend [from Mexico] just spoke about. If we want to realize a large action regarding these issues, well the people of Comalapa, Chiapas can block the Mesilla border [highway] of Huehuetenango with us. This blockage is just an example of a strong articulation.

This was a call for both councils to identify their points of commonality and engage in a cross-border political coordination. Interestingly, Pe'x distinguished a "national" from an "international" impact when discussing this unified coordination across the border. He noted the political impact these councils may have within each country but also as a unified body politic across the Guatemala-Mexico border. Pe'x and other Mam leaders from these councils envision collective identification as inherently linked to political action. In other words, collective identification is not just about identity and belonging, but it is also about using their points of commonality to address social, cultural, environmental, and political demands. Pe'x noted that such actions may be particular to each state, but they may also coordinated across state borders. By coordinating such

efforts together as an indigenous nation across the state border, this "centered coordination" concurrently challenges the reification of the nation state framework.

Image 5. Guatemala-Mexico border monuments.

This signals another characteristic of cross-border experiences that was present during this meeting: they provide a space for the Mam to denaturalize the Guatemala-Mexico border. In Pe'x's statement above, he played down the divisive capacity of the Guatemala-Mexico border for the Mam nation. He mentioned that the border exists, along with border monuments (the cement markers that dot the Guatemala-Mexico borderline at intervals, in some cases even dividing border towns in two (see Image 5)). Nevertheless, he poignantly proposed that for the pueblo Mam "*no hay fronteras*" (there are no borders) or markers of *inter*-national division because the Mam are a singular

nation. Pe'x's description of the Mam nation coincides with that of the Council of the Mam Nation as a whole.

Francisco (a newer leader from C.R.I.M.M.S.) added his voice in concordance with Pe'x's call to identify commonality among the Mam by interjecting, "It's said that when the pueblos are united their strength is like a volcano." Other leaders in the room nodded in affirmation. Then Che'l contributed by rhetorically asking, "Won't [the cross-border] unification make the powers of the Guatemalan and Mexican states tremble?" Although Che'l did not expound upon this rhetorical question, his statement calls attention to the fact that these councils seek to use this cross-border tie to make demands on both states. Che'l's statement emphasized the potential for more coordinated and articulated action that leaders in these Mam councils see developing from establishing a cross-border tie.

Most of the meeting involved input from leaders from each council about what their commonality entails and what coordinated actions would speak to this centered articulation. One of the problems noted during this meeting is that some of the ideas focused on important actions that these councils could support but without first identifying their points of commonality. For example, some leaders from C.R.I.M.M.S. mentioned how it would be great to have additional support from the Mam councils in Guatemala with their cultural revitalization projects, such as building Mam language schools and creating Mam *danza* (folk dance) groups in mountainous regions. And some leaders from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' mentioned how it would be beneficial to have additional support from C.R.I.M.M.S. when protesting the transnational mining and hydroelectric projects in Mam territory. While no one opposed the idea of such

coordinated efforts, there were some voices that continued to remind those present about the need to identify a common objective these various social, cultural, and political actions. The more important task seemed to be formulating each of these actions as part of a singular centered articulation that this cross-border alliance between these Mam councils could address.

Elsa, a leader from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' who also had been present at the initial cross-border meeting in Mexico, then added that all of these suggestions have to do with what is occurring and what needs to occur throughout Mam territory on both sides of the border. I wasn't surprised when I heard Mauricio, Pe'x, Che'l, and others from these Mam councils add their staggered voices of agreement: "*Así es*"; "*Sí, pues*"; "*Eso*." Pe'x took a quick tally of those in attendance who were in agreement and after an apparent unanimity, he typed out on the document that was projected for all to see: *Lucha para la Defensa del Territorio* (Struggle in Defense of Territory). This somewhat ambiguous, but often repeated phrase among Mam councils, intended to capture the unique challenges that the Mam councils faced in their territory on each side of the border and also collectively across the border.

The identification of this point of commonality, or broad, overarching goal, further signaled that both councils view themselves as part of the same indigenous pueblo. Che'l suggested that everyone share ideas about particular actions the councils could coordinate that speak to this "centered articulation." Doing so created an opportunity for Mam leaders to also acknowledge that their actions are diverse and, to a certain extent, will continue to be diverse because there are unique socio-historical differences among the Mam in spite of their points of commonality.

Thus, cross-border experiences also provide a space for acknowledging unique socio-historical challenges indigenous peoples might face on opposite sides of state borders. Just as the Mam were able to identify points of commonality as pueblo, this brainstorming discussion allowed Mam leaders to acknowledge various differences within their pueblo that are shaped by their social, historical, and political division. These differences were especially noted as leaders spoke about the work that they have engaged in on opposite side of the border.

Leaders from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' spoke about the mining companies that continue to harm Mam territory in Huehuetenango, Guatemala and their ongoing mobilization against them. Antonio explained:

> [We've said,] "No to the mining. Be gone," to the transnational companies. Mother earth is not for sale. With our territory there is no negotiation. The water is sacred and it gives us life so we must protect it. We have used the *Consultas* [where indigenous communities have collectively voted against mining in their territory]. The actions we have taken to defend [the territory] are diverse.

Antonio explained that the Mam have needed to respond to unique challenges, specifically protesting and voting against mining in their territory, on the Guatemalan side of the border. While he used the words "we," "us," and "our" in ways that pointed to the commonality among the Mam as an indigenous people, he also was clearly articulating the actions that that the Mam are engaged in on the Guatemalan side of the border.

Just as Antonio highlighted some of the actions of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' in Guatemala (especially in the department of Huehuetenango), leaders from

C.R.I.M.M.S. further elaborated on some of their distinct actions in Mexico. Che'l observed that on both sides of the border the Mam face the challenge of ensuring that their language is spoken and preserved, but he noted that on the Mexican side of this has been a particularly daunting task:

> Look, in Mexico it is, it is hard. That's why…we are working [on the Mam schools]… There…in Mexico it seems it's been harder, harder with the extinction of the Mam language. That's why there [in Mexico] we speak so much about *rescate*, *rescate*, *rescate* [rescue, rescue, rescue] there in Mexico.

Che'l acknowledged that the Mam face unique challenges on each side of the border. While there are communities on both sides where Mam individuals told me about their frustrations with Mam children and youth who do not speak Mam in their schools, this issue was mentioned more frequently among participants on the Mexican side of the border.

To address this challenge in Mexico, Che'l further distinguished the actions of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' from the actions of C.R.I.M.M.S. by detailing their ongoing efforts:

> We have given PowerPoint [presentations] in the [academic and governmental] institutions, we have given conferences, we have presentations, and we have made the sacred fires [a Mayan ritual]. Yes, we have a [Mam] grammar group at the state level where we have worked, just as some in Guatemala have worked, [to create] dictionaries, pamphlets, and dialect guides. There's a tremendous group that we have that we've been teaching. In the Mam schools now we can see 40 instructors, here [in this room] we have an instructor [pointing to

Francisco]…who teaches the Mam language to children and teenagers and everyone. So we want to invite you [from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx'] that when we have workshops about the Mam language, even from UNAM in Mexico [a Mexican University] …that you can also come and share. But the idea is to join our ideas, join forces…Because they have discriminated against us a lot in Mexico. There is a lot of discrimination in Mexico.

In this statement Che'l summarizes a variety of actions that C.R.I.M.M.S. has taken in response to discrimination on the Mexican side of the border. In particular, he describes how their efforts have centered on promoting instruction of the Mam language in various institutions. Alejandra seconded this observation and added that C.R.I.M.M.S. has worked in these schools at various levels: "We've entered primary [schools], secondary, preparatory, and universities." This summary of actions taken on by C.R.I.M.M.S. allowed some of its leaders to distinguish the socio-historical challenges the Mam face on each side of the border.

One significant difference participants acknowledged has to do with the ways that the Guatemalan and Mexican governments have responded to demands to teach indigenous languages in public schools. Che'l acknowledged that, somewhat differently than the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx', the Mam council in Mexico has worked with the state to begin teaching Mam in public schools while also developing their own Mam language schools in different communities. The Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx', on the other hand, has been able to dedicate its efforts on different aspects of seeking collective rights since one of the state's institutions (ALMG, the Academy of Mayan Languages of Guatemala) has taken the reins on promoting bilingual education in Guatemala. A

discussion ensued about this socio-historical difference among the Mam on each side of the border:

Mauricio: Speaking about the theme of languages, of education here in Guatemala it's a little the other way around. Not 100%. Not everyone speaks Mam and Spanish in schools, but it's more or less moving in that direction. Before the official language and still today in the constitution it's written in Spanish or Castellano. And in some few articles of the constitution it speaks about "ethnic groups."

Alejandra: Ethnic groups?

Mauricio: Well…they've wanted to call us small groups, 'To hell with [the indigenous]!' But after the Peace Accords, [which came] after suffering 36 years of war in Guatemala, one of the themes [that came up] was education and language…One of the themes that's there is the rights of the indigenous peoples… But many of the rights of indigenous peoples still haven't been recognized. But to some extent in the schools there are bilingual [teachers], bilingual Mam and Spanish, in writing and reading… It's still not 100%, but with more than two decades after the Peace Accords [work is being accomplished]…Next steps would be [recognizing] the Mam language as an official language; [speaking of] the pueblo Mam and other indigenous pueblos, not just "the four pueblos," etc.

Alejandra then seemed quite surprised that on the Guatemalan side of the border the government was working to ensure that there were bilingual teachers in the schools after signing the Peace Accords.

Francisco, who is a school teacher from Pavencúl (but who teaches in a small community in Motozintla, Mexico), then pointed out that the situation in Mexico isn't actually so different. Francisco elaborated:

It's supposed to be bilingual there [in Mexico] too. But the Mexican government wants to divide us [speaking of the Mam *within* Mexico]. The government doesn't want people that speak and write in Mam. They want to divide [the Mam within Mexico]. For example, I'm a teacher and I'm Mam, but they're not going to send me to a Mam community [to teach]. They're going to send me Tojolab'al community, a Chuj community, to some other community [that's not Mam]. I, as a teacher, have to teach there even if I don't speak the same language. So I'd have to teach in Spanish. That's what the government has done in Mexico.

Che'l (who used to be a school teacher in Mexico) confirmed what Francisco was saying with an example of his own. These experiences were articulated by each Mam council to highlight distinct socio-political actions they have taken on each side of the border. Such experiences also speak to how Mexico and Guatemala have responded differently to the indigenous peoples in each country. Cross-border experiences provide a space for identifying points of commonality but also for articulating unique distinctions in the lived experiences of the Mam.

In other words, cross-border experiences provide a space for acknowledging differences and for identifying points of commonality. One only needs to look at how the

Mam councils discussed the concept of *culture* to understand that they share points of commonality and yet are marked by difference across the Guatemala-Mexico border. For instance, Francisco proposed that the Mam seem to "practice [their] culture" more in Guatemala than in Mexico. He took the floor and explained:

> Fortunately I am now a part of this organization [C.R.I.M.M.S.] but being honest, I'm new [to C.R.I.M.M.S.]… I like the Mam language, I like to write [in Mam], I like to [know about] my roots. But what I'm seeing here in Guatemala [during this visit], I congratulate you because you speak Mam, you practice our culture, you even dress in this way [signaling to those wearing *traje típico* in the room] as part of Mam culture. Unfortunately we, over in Chiapas, well part of the problem is the lack of our economy; we migrate to other countries like the United States, and now when the young kids return from there they think that they don't want to speak [Mam] anymore. They don't want to. [Just] English. For example, my…nephews don't speak even one word in Mam. Not anymore.

Pe'x interjected, "*Pero si dices* 'Yes…'' (But if you say, 'Yes,' in English)." Francisco confirmed, "Exactly, that!" He continued:

> …I [make a plea] that it's necessary that you support us there in Chiapas, to show your culture as you practice it here [in Guatemala]. There in Pavencúl now they don't speak the language anymore. Only the adults, and those older than 70, 80. But like us, from my generation, they don't practice it anymore. That is what I am interested in. That is why I came [to Guatemala].

For Francisco the border is not something that can be so easily dismissed. Although cross-border experiences provide the Mam with a space for identifying their common

interests and shared culture across the border and an opportunity to denaturalize this division, cross-border experiences also provide a space for acknowledging that the Mam are also "culturally" different because of the border. In other words, Francisco occasionally distinguished the Mam in Mexico from the Mam in Guatemala. He went back-and-forth with personal pronouns that both unified and divided the pueblo. This is especially noticeable when he mentioned how culture is *practiced* on each side of the border. He spoke of "our culture" (across the border) and he spoke of "your culture" (on your side of the border). His observations about younger generations travelling to other countries and then returning without a desire to speak the Mam language or "practice Mam culture" are observations shared by Mam individuals on both sides of the border.

In Francisco's words, practicing Mam culture includes speaking the Mam language and wearing *traje típico*. His distinction between how the Mam practice their culture in Guatemala and how they practice their culture in Mexico primarily rests on the observation that the younger generations of Mam individuals in Mexico do not speak the Mam language or wear *traje típico*. But Francisco's observation of how Mam culture is and is not practiced is not unique to Mexico. Mam individuals on both sides of the border expressed a similar hope to see Mam culture practiced in a particular way. Many of the characteristics of Mam culture that individuals hoped they would see practiced more often were also related to speaking the Mam language and wearing *traje típico*.

The latter is a gendered expectation. Some Mam men and women said in different indigenous meetings that they hoped more women would wear *traje*. In contrast, it was rare to hear such expressions for men to wear *traje*. Indigenous women in the region are expected to have their culture inscribed on their bodies through *traje*, in effect becoming

"authentic" icons of tradition (Nelson 1999; Warren 2009:779). Thus, Mam women are expected to be the "legitimate bearers of tradition and culture" (Warren 2009:786-87). Indeed, most representations of *being Guatemalan* and *being Mayan* "depend heavily on indigenous women in traje" (Nelson 1999:38). Watanabe (2000:238) explains, "After language, traditional handwoven Maya dress remains the most obvious expression of Maya identity, especially for women." Yet many indigenous women and men contest this perspective of culture by asserting that they are part of an indigenous pueblo but do not practice culture through such characteristics (see Nelson 1999). Indigenous peoples contend that being indigenous is just as political as it is cultural (Richards 2013).

In sum, Francisco's words highlight once more that cross-border experiences may provide a space for articulating points of commonality, in this case a shared culture. But noting how Mam culture is practiced differently across the border also demonstrates how cross-border experiences provide a space for acknowledging differences among the Mam because they are divided by state borders.

At one point the acknowledgement of these differences became slightly contentious. This occurred as Alejandra suggested that C.R.I.M.M.S.' work in Chiapas, Mexico may be twice as difficult as the work of the Mam councils in Guatemala. Alejandra explained:

On the Mexican side, which includes the Soconusco region, what [C.R.I.M.M.S.] has tried to do is rescue more the traditions of the pueblo. Because, as [Che'l] said, [the culture] is being lost, almost no one speaks [Mam] anymore. On the other hand, here [in Guatemala] the advantage is that everyone still speaks it. Everyone continues with their *costumbres* [customs], which makes me think then

that in Mexico we have twice the work. Because aside from defending Mam

territory, we have to also work on preserving the language, the culture, the

traditions. That's what we've worked on the most [in C.R.I.M.M.S.].

As she explained this, several others in the room shook their heads in disagreement.

Alejandra suggested that since the Mam council in Chiapas was speaking out against

mining and also developing Mam language schools and other culture revitalization

projects in Mexico, the work of C.R.I.M.M.S. was perhaps more challenging than the

work of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx'. However, such contentions were quickly put to

rest as other leaders from both councils reminded everyone, once more, that the cultural

and the political go hand in hand. Both councils are engaged in addressing these

dimensions in their work on each side of the border. Elsa explained to Alejandra that

even though the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' has not focused on building language schools

like C.R.I.M.M.S. has, in Guatemala they also frequently speak about Mam culture in

their political gatherings.

My previous fieldwork with the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' attests to Elsa's

observation. For example, two months before this cross-border experience the Consejo

Mam Saq Tx'otx' met with various NGOs in Quetzaltenango, Guatemala to discuss

challenges the Mam, other indigenous peoples, and ladinos/as face in western

Guatemala.[25] A brainstorming activity called for everyone to write on sticky notes the

broad array of concerns everyone has in the region. Some leaders of the Consejo Mam

Saq Tx'otx' wrote down specific socio-political challenges that they are protesting.

Antonio, for instance, wrote down "Contaminación río Cuilco, Huehuetenango. Por la

mina Marlin" (Contamination [in the] Cuilco River, Huehuetenango. By the Marlin

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[25] This meeting will also be described in chapter five.

mine). Lene, a representative of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' helped lead a 20 person

discussion (from several different organizations) following this activity. Lene

summarized the variety of notes by saying:

> We're involved in many political activities. [I don't mean] Political parties, not
>
> political parties because as someone wrote, the parties many times divide us. But
>
> we're politically united in protecting mother earth. Others wrote that we also have
>
> to remember who we are. At times we forget our culture. We forget our roots.
>
> Many times it's the teenagers [who are] embarrassed maybe. We should wear our
>
> *corte* and *hupiles*, the men [should wear *traje*] too, speak our languages. We
>
> should be proud of our cultures. I'm Mam and here we have representatives from
>
> the pueblo Mam, the pueblo Quiché, Ladinos and Ladinas, everyone. We have our
>
> cultures.

Like Elsa explained to Alejandra during this cross-border experience, Lene's words

confirm that the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' not only focuses on the importance of

engaging in political activities to address their rights as an indigenous people, but their

work also speaks to cultural aspects of their identification that are just as valued. Lene's

words emphasize the need to engage in political action but to also express a pride in one's

culture. She speaks of culture in a pluralistic sense that is distinct from one indigenous

pueblo to another. Again, the political and cultural reinforce each other. As Richards

(2013) notes, indigenous peoples may seek ancestral rights to territory (arguably a

political goal) through the discourse of cultural distinctiveness.

In this section I have argued that cross-border experiences have created

opportunities to identify points of commonality and acknowledge differences among the

Mam across state borders. Additionally, Mam leaders have used these cross-border experiences to denaturalize the border in their efforts to construct a cultural and political sense of cross-border belonging.

Outcomes of Cross-Border Experiences

The aforementioned characteristics of this cross-border experience (identifying points of commonality; acknowledging differences; and denaturalizing the border) shaped how Mam leaders would articulate future socio-political actions across the border. In other words, the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' and C.R.I.M.M.S. brought all three of these characteristics of cross-border experiences together as they developed plans for a coordinated action. The action that they planned was the development of a Mam credential/identification that both councils could use to move freely across their territory (including movement across the Guatemala-Mexico border). The Mam councils took several minutes to discuss the practicalities of developing such a credential, which they hoped could be an affordable alternative to a passport for the Mam. But more than just providing access to cross the border, they discussed how this proposed credential was a way for them to also assert their rights as a people to their ancestral territory. Ideally, such a credential could make future cross-border experiences less difficult since Mam leaders frequently encounter problems when trying to convene in their territory on the other side of the border.

The plan to create such a credential taps into the three characteristics of cross-border experiences. For one, the leaders discussed that the credential would show that the Mam maintain a sense of shared identification as an indigenous nation with its own

territory and authority. Alejandra wrote down that this would be the "creation of a covenant between Mexico-Guatemala for the free transit inside of Mam territory [for] Mam authority[ies]." She then made a side note that this was a "struggle for an international passport." Pe'x proposed that such a credential would challenge the Guatemalan and Mexican governments to recognize that the Mam share commonality as a nation on both sides of the border. Some discussion focused on whether the credential should mention "Mam territory," and overwhelmingly the response was in the affirmative as a way of "show[ing] that for the pueblo Mam we don't have this border," as Elsa added. In effect, Elsa's words suggest that this plan denaturalized the border. Some of the discussion about this plan also related to acknowledging the different lived experiences of the Mam on opposite sides of the border. Mam leaders addressed how this credential could be used for addressing different social, cultural, and political actions on both sides of the border. For example, Mam leaders from Guatemala talked about how this credential would make it easier for them to mobilize against mining operations in Mexico (as they have in Guatemala). And Mam leaders from Mexico talked about how this credential would make it easier for them to participate in social and cultural community events in Guatemala (as they have in Mexico). By acknowledging different cultural and political issues on each side of the border, the Mam council leaders saw this credential as a means for more easily engaging in interrelated and yet distinct socio-political actions across the border. Che'l and Pe'x talked about who would need to sign the credential for it to have any actual power at the borderline so that the border officials would accept it and allow Mam leaders to cross without harassing them as in the past. Questioning

whether such a credential, even with the appropriate signatures, would be considered valid at the borderline is a warranted concern.

Barreiro (2005) describes a similar concern as delegates from the Six Nations (Iroquois) Confederacy, the Haudenosaunee, attempted to use their Haudenosaunee passports with Swiss immigration officials in the Geneva airport on their way to a UN meeting in 1977. The Swiss officials were reluctant to recognize the Haudenosaunee passport. One of the Swiss interpreters suggested that maybe this wasn't the place for "a political fight" and perhaps it was more important to just "get in," even if it means using a special entry permission instead of the Haudenosaunee passport. The Haudenosaunee delegate disagreed, saying, "No…The important thing is not to get in—the important thing is to make sure that every step of the way our validity as Indian nations is recognized" (Barreiro 2005:59). More recently and with much international attention, the Haudenosaunee passport was again rejected as a "valid" document for international travel as players for the Iroquois National lacrosse team attempted to travel to the world championships in England. The Iroquois Confederacy, like the Mam Nation, spans the border between two states (spanning the Canada-United States border) but neither the United States nor Canada recognize the Haudenosaunee passport as valid. The Mam leaders I later spoke with seemed unaware of the passport challenges faced by other indigenous nations. Yet these Mam leaders expressed that it would be an ongoing struggle to have such a credential validated by the states at the borderline, even though they would be traveling within their own ancestral territory (just like in the case of the Iroquois Confederacy).

Mam efforts to seek a means for more easily crossing the border and moving about their territory to discuss social, cultural, and political actions also aligns with Article 36 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2008):

1.   Indigenous peoples, in particular those divided by international borders, have the right to maintain and develop contacts, relations and cooperation, including activities for spiritual, cultural, political, economic and social purposes, with their own members as well as other peoples across borders.

2.   States, in consultation and cooperation with indigenous peoples, shall take effective measures to facilitate the exercise and ensure the implementation of this right.

Although both the Guatemalan and Mexican governments have adopted the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, like several other countries in Latin America, the realization of such rights remains in question (Maddison 2015). Mam council leaders did not cite Article 36 in this meeting (although some leaders would occasionally reference the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples), but they did express uncertainty about how such a credential could become validated at the state level. Alejandra explained that without the backing of both governments, the card would not be recognized by border officials.

Plans for a coordinated action to develop a credential for Mam leaders to cross the border in their territory were an important outcome of these meetings. These plans were certainly shaped by efforts to identify commonality, acknowledge differences, and denaturalize the border. However, while cross-border experiences may shape socio-political actions, it is important to note that such actions may not materialize or they may

not materialize as intended. In fact, the credential discussed above has yet to be materialized. After this Mam council meeting, both councils have done very little to follow-up on developing this credential. When I spoke with Pe'x 6 months after this meeting, which was after I collected most of my dissertation data, he very vaguely explained:

> We've barely been in contact since that meeting because we [in the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx'] have been very busy with different *asuntos* [matters]. We still haven't done the credential. At first we were sending lots of emails [to C.R.I.M.M.S.], and Lox [from C.R.I.M.M.S.] would tell us about different events in Chiapas, but in these [recent] days we just have sort of stopped writing. We'll start again though. We'll probably start [to be in contact] again soon.

Lox gave me a similar explanation from the perspective of C.R.I.M.M.S., also with similar intentions to follow-up. Interestingly, even without this coordinated action in place, the Mam councils still seem to consider this cross-border experience successful. After the meeting Pe'x said to me, "I'm pleased, very pleased." And 6 months later he again told me that he considers this meeting "a great achievement, a success." Pe'x explained that he is pleased with what was accomplished during this cross-border experience because it helps their councils focus on "who we are as a pueblo."

As noted at the beginning of this chapter, prior to these Mam council meetings Alejandra had never interacted with any Mam individuals from Guatemala. I also never heard her speak about Mam territory prior to these meetings and she rarely even spoke of herself as Mam. It was fascinating to see how her way of communicating who the Mam are as a people shifted over the course of just a few days through these cross-border

experiences. In a follow-up interview a week after this meeting, Alejandra frequently used the personal pronouns of "we," "us," and "our" when discussing Mam territory and describing the pueblo Mam on both sides of the border. For instance, when I asked her about what *territory* means to her, she explained, "Our territory is ancestral. As we talked about in Huehue[tenango] this has always been our territory and we have to protect it…We have to defend our territory." Alejandra noted that much of C.R.I.M.M.S.' focus has been on the *rescate de la cultura* (rescuing Mam culture) but before this meeting she didn't really have an idea of the ways that their struggle as a people also entailed a more political aspect. She was not entirely dismissive of C.R.I.M.M.S.' previous work, saying that teaching the Mam language and other cultural practices "are important, but they aren't everything." Alejandra singled out Axel for being one of those in C.R.I.M.M.S. who is continually focused on "Mayan art, culture, and spirituality," reiterating that it's important for C.R.I.M.M.S. to continue focusing on different aspects of Mam culture. But she said that she learned from this meeting that "It's not like we can return to a life from before." She explained, "Our life, as an indigenous people has a space in the times of now." Alejandra seemed to be conveying that their work cannot continue to merely be about attempting to recover some pristine culture from the past but, rather, to understand how Mam culture and politics are vibrant and do not have to be juxtaposed with notions of modernity. She described their work as "a struggle that continues and will change." For Alejandra, C.R.I.M.M.S. now has an opportunity to play a role in this ongoing struggle for collective rights as a cross-border nation.

In sum, plans for coordinated actions are not the only result that may stem from cross-border experiences. While cross-border experiences may be ephemeral social

interactions, they may also have lasting consequences for how individuals identify as part of a collectivity. For some of the Mam leaders who had never previously interacted with Mam individuals from the other side of the border (such as Alejandra), these cross-border experiences in Mexico and Guatemala shaped how they imagined themselves as a cross-border nation. As shall be seen in the following section, this is especially apparent when Mam leaders share their cross-border experiences with other Mam individuals in different communities, emphasizing that the Mam are an indigenous nation with territory on both sides of the border

Mobilizing Cross-Border Experiences

Following this meeting in Huehuetenango, Guatemala, both councils travelled to the archeological site of Zaculeu (Saqulew) for lunch and to share in the experience of visiting a sacred site where Maya-Mam ceremonies are held, just as they had done the previous month at Izapa in Mexico. On the bus ride to Zaculeu, Mauricio explained to the leadership of C.R.I.M.M.S., "We're going to see our sacred temple, even though it is not in our hands right now." Mauricio was referring to the fact that Guatemala's Ministry of Culture and Sports currently runs the day-to-day operations for maintaining the site. Mauricio spoke of the history of Spanish conquest in keeping Zaculeu in the hands of the state. But he also spoke of how this history points to their unification as a people, which is a message that was emphasized through this cross-border experience:

> We can say that everything we had before was taken from us by the Spaniards, it
> was taken from us. But really we still have in our hearts [the message] that we're
> the pueblo Mam. Our grandfather, Kayb'il B'alam fought against all those

[conquistadores] who came, and from his heart…is this message that we have in

this moment.

In this explanation Mauricio speaks to C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders using "us" as a personal

pronoun to identify their shared history as a people.

But Mauricio and other Mam leaders emphasize that they cannot be the only ones

familiar with this message. He told both Mam councils:

I believe that here we are in a meeting of much importance…But at the same time

we could say that we are…a small team. But there are more *compañeros* in the

communities that we have to [seek out] and tell [about this meeting], who for

economic reasons could not be here. [There are] so many [others].

In essence, Mauricio was calling for the councils to recognize that cross-border

experiences such as these meetings are not accessible to all Mam individuals. On both

sides of the border the Mam face economic constraints (such as the ability to pay for

travel) as well as political constraints (such as not owning a passport to legally cross the

Guatemala-Mexico border) that make it challenging for them to interact with the Mam

from the other side of the border. Therefore, their task is to share these experiences in a

way that their impact can extend beyond the individuals who could attend.

In this section I provide some examples of how Mam council leaders are

beginning to mobilize their cross-border experiences. Mam councils are organizing these

cross-border experiences into a movable story that can potentially travel to Mam

individuals on both sides of the border. They are making plans to share these cross-border

experiences with the hope that the Mam who have not personally interacted with Mam

individuals on the other side of the border can, nevertheless, also imagine their boundaries of collectivity transcending the Guatemala-Mexico border.

After this cross-border meeting I spoke with Elsa about what the next steps were for the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx'. She replied that, just like in other meetings of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx', there is now a need to disseminate the proceedings to other leaders who could not be in attendance as well as to Mam individuals in different communities. Elsa explained:

> And it's challenging, but that's why I always come to participate and every time that I come to a meeting I have to…[return] to San Pedro [Necta] and present to my other three *compañeros* [from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' who are representatives in San Pedro Necta]. And then [they have to bring together] the people of the municipio in a meeting, so that they know what work [was accomplished] with the Mam councils and of what themes we spoke [about]…We have to share it… Because if there's nothing more than us coming together here and the people don't know, then why are we here?

According to Elsa, cross-border experiences mean very little for the construction of a Mam cross-border nation if they are only accessible to Mam leaders. These Mam council leaders are actively engaged in promoting an imagining of collectivity that transcends the border as they mobilize their cross-border experiences and make such experiences accessible to the Mam in various communities on both sides of the border.

Similar to Elsa's account on the Guatemalan side of the border, in my follow-up interview with Alejandra in Mexico she told me that she spoke with Lox (one of her friends from C.R.I.M.M.S. who was not able to travel to Guatemala) and told her about

the meeting. She said that she told Lox about how surprising it was for her to hear the Mam leaders from Guatemala talking about "their territory." Alejandra told me that now she and Lox wouldn't only focus on language and culture revitalization with C.R.I.M.M.S. She said:

> Here in Chiapas and when I joined the council [C.R.I.M.M.S.], I was never told, 'You know what we want? We want the state of Mexico to recognize Mam territory.' But now, just now, in every meeting I am going to try and speak and say—my *compañeros*, because the majority of them are about the culture, the traditions—[but] I will…try to work so that the people here in Mexico wake up a little their interest, and so that C.R.I.M.M.S. wakes up a little its interest, in defending Mam territory.

Motivated by her cross-border experience, Alejandra explained that while she was unaware of Mam individuals and councils seeking to defend their territory across the border from transnational mining companies, she now understands that she too has a role in this struggle. For Alejandra, this role includes sharing this cross-border experience with other C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders who were not in attendance and other Mam individuals in Mexico so that they may "wake up" with an interest in defending their territory across the border.

In addition to mobilizing cross-border experiences through interpersonal interactions, C.R.I.M.M.S. has effectively used a local news station in Tapachula, Mexico to share details about their actions. After this meeting in Guatemala, Che'l and two other C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders who were not in attendance (Lox and Axel), reached out to this news station to share details about this cross-border experience. On the morning that they

would meet in a park with the news team, Che'l told me that this was a way that both those who are Mam and those who are not indigenous in Chiapas can learn about this *enlace* (tie) that was accomplished across the border.

Even though Lox was not present during the meeting in Guatemala, she had already spoken with Alejandra about the meeting. Like Alejandra, Lox was very excited about focusing more on the need for the pueblo Mam to be united across the border and on other aspects of defending their territory beyond efforts to revitalize Mam culture in Chiapas. But she was reluctant about whether this should be mentioned at all to the news team once they arrived in the park to conduct their interviews. Lox mentioned that this issue of mining in Mam territory and seeking recognition as an indigenous nation is important but, she said, "We have to work on these themes strategically."

When I asked what she meant by "strategically," Che'l intervened to back up Lox by responding, "We can't all at once work on those themes, which in some way can harm us." Che'l reminded me that unlike the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx', some of the little funding that C.R.I.M.M.S. receives comes through the university in Tapachula, which is connected to the government, and C.R.I.M.M.S. is primarily seen by these units as an organization that celebrates Mam culture. Che'l said that having this closer connection to the government is effective in some respects (such as funding), but the way that the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' works completely outside of the government is also effective. As Richards (2013:185) describes, indigenous movements may need indigenous people "in different places, both within and outside of the government" (see also Park and Richards 2007). "But," Che'l noted, "If we want to work on these themes [speaking about seeking recognition as an indigenous nation] we have to do it strategically so the state

isn't aware of what we're doing." He continued, "Otherwise we might lose the little funding we receive now for different projects."

Axel also seemed in agreement with this move, which was interesting to me since many consider Axel to be the leader of C.R.I.M.M.S. who focuses the most on Mam culture without also addressing how it is situated in contemporary struggles. Using language that is fitting with the Mayan calendar, Axel told the three of us, "We just closed a cycle and now in this New Year that is coming [this was the end of December] we are opening a new cycle where we will begin to handle those political themes. But like Lox and Che'l, Axel also emphasized, "We have to work on these themes now, but strategically." Che'l said this is also the case as they are about to speak with the news. Che'l was skeptical that the news would print anything they said about Mam territory so they would have to be more subtle about what was discussed with the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' in Guatemala. Lox then told me, "But in the communities it will be easier to speak about [the meeting in Guatemala]. In the communities we will talk more about our territory, the defense of territory."

When the two young men from the local news team arrived to conduct their interviews, Che'l, Lox, and Axel seemed a little bit nervous. They wanted to share this cross-border experience through the media but they didn't quite seem sure how. Several things could have contributed to this sense of uneasiness. For one, Lox and Axel may have doubted how their interview would contribute to the story since they did not travel to Guatemala with Che'l and the others. They were also nervous, possibly, because they didn't rehearse what they would say to the media ahead of time. Likewise, and perhaps most importantly, since this cross-border experience was quite political, what *could* they

say? They already mentioned wanting to address more political topics in a strategic manner, but how could they do so?

Lox and Axel were interviewed first and the news reporters seemed fairly disinterested, perhaps because Lox and Axel both told these reporters about C.R.I.M.M.S.' work and events they had already mentioned to them on previous occasions. Lox talked about C.R.I.M.M.S.' efforts to construct Mam schools in Chiapas and different events where they've celebrated Mam culture. Axel spoke to the reporters about the Mayan calendar and an invitation for an upcoming sacred ceremony to be held at the archeological site of Izapa. When it was Che'l's turn to be interviewed I listened closely because I was very curious about how he would respond to the reporters who continued to ask questions about "*la cultura*" (the culture).

Interestingly, Che'l began the interview using a lot of the "cultural" language that was solicited by the reporters and that he frequently used prior to this cross-border experience. Che'l fumbled with his words as he seemed to be wrestling with how to maneuver between discussing Mam culture while also trying to "strategically" discuss the socio-political tie that resulted from this cross-border experience:

Prensa: And you, what are you going to talk about Don Che'l?

Che'l: I'm going to talk about a meeting, a cult[ural], a meeting between Mexico
            and Guatemala. In Zaculeu, Huehuetenango.

Prensa: Your name please Don Che'l, and your organization? [Camera begins
            filming]

Che'l: Good afternoon, my name is Che'l, President of the Consejo Regional
            Indígena Maya-Mam del Soconusco.

Prensa: You had a meeting or you're going to have a Maya-Mam meeting in

            Guatemala?

Esteban: Yes, we had an unforgettable meeting with our *compañeros*…Maya-Mam

            de Zaculeu, Huehuetenango with the intention that this cultural meeting,

            [uh] binational meeting, between Mexico and Guatemala…the intention

            was to make a recognition to the ancient civilization and foment the *usos y*

            costumbres…That we have with these two. A coordination. There we have

            a regional council that is called the Consejo Saq Tx'otx', of

            Huehuetenango. And they also work on the same causes as us. The same

            as what we do in the Soconusco. So at the root of that, we had a cultural

            meeting with our *compañeros* of Mexico and Guatemala. Precisely we

            were there the 19th, 20th, and 21st, where we experienced together part of

            the *usos y costumbres* that we share and manage with our *compañeros*

            there [in Guatemala].

In this back-and-forth exchange, Che'l seems to fumble through an explanation for the

purpose of this meeting in Guatemala. He barely spoke at all to what occurred in this

meeting. He seemed to continually trip on his words as he tried to focus on "*la cultura*"

without discussing the significance of this socio-political tie across the border between

these councils that stemmed from this cross-border experience. And Che'l himself

seemed unpleased with his comments.

    The interviewer seemed like he wanted to wrap things up. But fortunately, for

Che'l, there was a moment for redemption as the interviewer asked, "Do you want to

comment on anything else?" Che'l seized on this question.

Che'l: We want the [Mam] civilization, that the collectivity, that the civilization

          or the collectivity here, Soconusquense, knows that we have a

          coordination and an articulation of actions among the pueblo Maya-Mam

          of Guatemala and Mexico…We want the support of an international law,

          of an international passport. And, well, that was one of the intentions was

          a covenant between them [the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx'] and us. To unite

          us in defense of our rights as an indigenous people, both in Guatemala and

          Mexico.

Prensa: How would that law that you're requesting help you?

Che'l: It would help us in transit. Free transit between Mexico and

          Guatemala…What happens is, well, the discrimination has always existed,

          the minimization. Because at times, maybe you won't believe it, well if

          we're going to have an exchange between both [countries]…at times they

          put in front of us some obstacles.

Prensa: Who are those people? Migration, customs…

Che'l: Yes…they are those employees of customs. Well here in Mexico we

          haven't had so much of a problem. But on the…part of Guatemala this last

          time that we went [to Guatemala], well this man [speaking of a

          Guatemalan border official] wanted to return us [to Mexico]. They held us

          back there for a little bit, but thanks to God the passage opened, but it was

          an obstacle. [The border] is an obstacle for passing there [to Guatemala]

          and here [to Mexico]. That's one of the most basic points that we

          addressed [with the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' in Guatemala]. And here

we're going to work through the government of Chiapas and the

government of Guatemala. And they will support us.

With this opportunity to add more, it seemed like Che'l no longer wanted to hold

anything back about the meeting and some of the socio-political tasks the Mam plan to

engage with on both sides of the border. At some moments he seems to be specifically

speaking to Mam individuals in Mexico who are not affiliated with C.R.I.M.M.S. For

instance, he begins by saying that he wants the Mam, as a collectivity, to know that a

socio-political tie is being formed among Mam councils on both sides of the border.

Additionally, some Mam council leaders have begun to use social media to share

information about their council's actions, which have included online postings about

these cross-border experiences. Several months after these meetings in Mexico and

Guatemala, Lox posted photos of the meeting in Tuxtla Chico on her Facebook page. She

commented on the pictures, for all of her social network "friends" to view, "And we can

find the map of the Mam Nation… There is life and there is hope." Lox was specifically

referencing a point from the meeting: the Mam nation is coming together across the

borders that are articulated on state maps. Through social media she shared this cross-

border experience by expressing optimism that the Mam can and will find a way to

reimagine themselves in relation to geographic space.

By sharing these experiences via social media, the Mam also become what Nelson

(1996) terms as "Maya-hackers." The binary semiotics of identity suggest that ladino

identification is rooted in "modernity" (even in terms of technology) and the indigenous

are consigned to the past (Nelson 1999). When the Mam use social media to share cross-

border experiences they become "Maya-hackers" who challenge this binary "by

appropriating so-called modern technology and knowledges while refusing to be appropriated *into* the ladino nation (Nelson 1996:289).

As I've noted here, the Mam councils have shared these cross-border experiences so that Mam individuals who have not interacted with the Mam on the other side of the border can imagine themselves as a cross-border nation. The leaders of these councils recognize the value in such cross-border experiences for shaping how Mam individuals may imagine the boundaries of collectivity. Likewise, they are confident that hearing and sharing stories about such cross-border experiences are also an effective means for shaping the construction of a cross-border nation.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I described some of the challenges the border imposes on the Mam when trying to move across their own ancestral territory and how the Mam are denaturalizing this division through collective cross-border experiences among Mam councils. I addressed how cross-border experiences provide a space for indigenous peoples to identify points of commonality and acknowledge differences among themselves in the context of their socio-historical division. And I have also addressed how the Mam are beginning to share these cross-border experiences in their efforts to promote collective identification as a cross-border nation. In sum, collective cross-border experiences are viewed by Mam council leaders as an important resource for constructing a cross-border nation.

The Guatemalan and Mexican governments have made it challenging for the Mam to cross the border at certain locations in their own ancestral territory. The border is

an impediment for the Mam, but not necessarily because Mam individuals cannot cross it. Certainly it is less difficult for the Mam to cross the border without legal documents at different points along the borderline, especially in the absence of border officials at unofficial border-crossing locations. Rather, the border impedes Mam collective rights by legitimizing the state over the authority of the Mam nation. State governments limit the movement of Mam councils and individuals in their own territory by restricting legal access across Mam territory to only a few formal border-crossing locations. Legal access to cross the border is also expensive (it might include the economic cost of paying to travel back-and-forth for appointments with border officials authorized to grant legal border-crossing identification, the time required to wait for such appointments, and the mental cost of coping with fear during an overnight stay on a bridge in dangerous border town). Such obstacles make it challenging for Mam councils on both sides of the border to interact with each other for social, cultural, and political purposes. Although several Mam participants in this study denaturalize the Guatemala-Mexico border by viewing it as nothing more than a superficial line across Mam territory, in certain places this border stands as a critical impediment for the Mam to move freely about their own ancestral territory.

Certainly there are other impediments as well. For instance, Mam councils and individuals in their everyday lives may not have time to visit sacred Mam sites or meet with other Mam individuals across the border. And lacking financial resources or dedicating those resources to other pressing issues (such as paying bus fare to protest against the transnational mining companies) may also impede such cross-border experiences.

In the face of such challenges, Mam councils have organized meetings on both sides of the border. These cross-border experiences represent ongoing efforts to establish socio-political ties across the border. The Mam councils hope that as these cross-border experiences begin to be shared with others, they may shape how Mam individuals imagine themselves as a pueblo, even as a cross-border nation.

CHAPTER 5

COUNTER-MAPPING *TX'OTX'*

"Definitions of maps and understandings of cartography both involve issues of power.

Politics stands as a metaphor for social processes that provide the context for

cartography and mold much of its content and reception."

-Jeremy Black (1997:28)

"Will you ever begin to understand the meaning of the soil beneath your very feet? From

a grain of sand to a great mountain, all is sacred. Yesterday and tomorrow exist eternally

upon this continent. We natives are the guardians of this sacred place."

-Peter Blue Cloud (Mohawk)

Maps and mapping are political endeavors. Although many indigenous territories

transcend contemporary state borders, cartographic representations of the state and its

borders typically ignore altogether indigenous nations and their territories across

geographic space. In other words, maps often sustain the legitimacy of the state and the

nation state framework while disregarding altogether indigenous peoples and their

territories.

In a very broad sense, maps may be characterized as "graphic representations that

facilitate a spatial understanding of things, concepts, conditions, processes or events in

the human world" (Harley and Woodward 1987:xvi). But maps are not merely visual

representations of geographic space. By showing certain points and relationships, maps are *political* constructions that define space and spaces (Black 1997; Wood 1992). Brian Harley's seminal essays for critical geography highlight how maps are texts infused with power. Harley (1989) explained that "maps have politics" and "power [is] embedded in the map text." In other words, not only do politics shape map-making processes (including decisions regarding scope and what is represented within a visual frame), but politics are infused *within* the map itself. Drawing from his interpretation of Foucault (Rose-Redwood 2015), Harley (1989) suggested that "cartographers manufacture power: by [creating] a spatial panopticon."[26] Rather than viewing maps as merely visual representations of geographic space, maps should be viewed as instruments of "governmentality," which "[sift] and [sort] populations and territories into grids of power and normalization" (Clayton 2015:20).

Likewise, maps can be understood as hegemonic forms of symbolic and informational capital concentrated by the state. Extending Max Weber's conceptualization of the state, Bourdieu (1994) argues that the state concentrates and monopolizes several forms of interdependent capital, including: the capital of physical force, which is central to most conceptualizations of the state (including formulations by Max Weber, Norbert Elias, Charles Tilly, and Marxist models); economic capital; symbolic capital; and informational capital. Through this concentration and monopolization of interdependent forms of capital, states "[take] the vantage point of the whole, of society in its totality, [whereby] the state claims responsibility for all operations

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[26] Although Harley's characterization and usage of Foucault (among other limitations) have been scrutinized by critical cartographers, his writing continues to be widely cited for its contribution to the deconstruction of maps. For critiques of Harley see Belyea (1992) and for a discussion of how Harley's work has withstood its own limitations see Rose-Redwood (2015).

of *totalization*…and of *objectification*, through cartography (the unitary representation of space from above)...as well as all operations of *codification*…" (Bourdieu 1994:7, italics in original). In essence, maps are a form of state informational capital that make people subjects of the state (Bourdieu 1994).

The state exerts symbolic violence over its subjects when individuals and collectivities effectively internalize the state as a "natural" institution, rather than something that is continually constructed through maps and other forms of concentrated capital (Bourdieu 1994:3, italics in original):

> The state is an X (to be determined), which successfully claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical and *symbolic* violence over a definite territory and over the totality of the corresponding population. If the state is able to exert symbolic violence, it is because it incarnates itself simultaneously in objectivity, in the form of specific organizational structures and mechanisms, and in subjectivity in the form of mental structures and categories of perception and thought. By realizing itself in social structures and in the mental structures adapted to them, the instituted institution makes us forget that it issues out of a long series of *institution* (in the active sense) and hence has all the appearances of the *natural*.

Maps are but one example of an object that shapes how we see the world through the lens of the state. And indeed, maps may become effective mechanisms for states to exert symbolic violence on indigenous peoples because maps promote the mental internalization of the state and the nation state framework. In other words, state maps can be interpreted as socio-political-cultural objects charged with symbolic violence to the

extent that they elide the recognition of indigenous nations and territories. Moreover, maps are also charged with symbolic violence since it is through such socio-political-cultural objects that indigenous peoples may internalize the state (including the state's spatial territoriality and borders) as preordained or "natural."

Specifically to this case, maps of Guatemala and Mexico constitute a form of symbolic violence since it is through such representations that the pueblo Mam is made invisible and many Mam individuals internalize the state segmentation of geographic space as somehow "natural." Maps of Guatemala and Mexico simultaneously divide the pueblo Mam and make Mam individuals subjects of each state. In essence, such maps bolster the nation state framework and, consequently, perpetuate social, cultural, and political divisions among the Mam.

However, there is more to this story. The pueblo Mam not only internalizes the state through maps, but they contest the state through maps and mapping as well. While cartographic representations of the Guatemalan and Mexican states may constitute a form of symbolic violence against the pueblo Mam, I suggest that we must also seek to understand the ways that the Mam actively contest these representations and denaturalize state political-administrative borders through the imagining of alternative, or counter-, mapping. Not only are counter-maps a means for the Mam to denaturalize state borders, but map-making (even counter-mapping) is also one of the central features of nation-building (Anderson 1991; Warren 2013). Therefore, in this chapter I will address how Mam councils and individuals in their everyday lives contest state maps. While most maps of Guatemala and Mexico make the Mam and their territory invisible, how do the

Mam engage in map-making (conceptualized as the process of counter-mapping) to assert their presence across state political-administrative borders?

To contextualize this question I will first address two examples of state maps that divide the pueblo Mam. I will also describe examples of how these maps have shaped how Mam participants internalize the state and its borders as "natural." Although I have no way of "getting inside the heads" of participants, what I am more interested in exploring in this section is the discursive ways that Mam participants seem to accept these state maps as "natural." I will then turn to counter-maps as a way of denaturalizing such divisions. I will discuss examples undertaken by other indigenous cross-border nations to construct counter-maps, primarily focusing on Sarah Warren's research (2013) on Mapuche "territorial dreaming" across the Chile-Argentina border.

Following these examples from other indigenous cross-border nations, I will turn to ways that the Mam, themselves, have constructed counter-maps. These examples, while noteworthy for their attempt to assert the presence of the pueblo Mam across state political-administrative borders, are not without limitations. The map-makers designed these counter-maps by drawing upon state maps with the purpose of deconstructing dominant ways of seeing and knowing the world. But since these Mam counter-maps draw upon state maps, they contain contradictory characteristics that have resulted in conflicting interpretations. Therefore, I will not only discuss how these Mam counter-maps deconstruct certain ways of seeing and knowing the world, but also how they may unintentionally reproduce state hegemony as well.

Then lastly, I will focus on how the Mam are engaged in the process of counter-mapping by going beyond "the map." In this sense, counter-mapping is the expression of

how Mam councils and individuals in their everyday lives see and talk about their

territory in ways that contest and deconstruct, without reproducing, hegemonic

cartographic representations. In essence, I argue that it is not just maps that divide the

Mam, but even how we think about spaces and places through the gaze of the map that

creates social, cultural, and political division. Following several examples of how the

Mam talk about territory, I suggest that as sociologists and researchers from other

disciplines, we should consider alternative ways that individuals and collectivities think

about space and place when analyzing social and spatial relationships across state

political-administrative borders. In particular, I encourage us to ask: how might these

alternative ways deconstruct state maps without reifying the state?

STATE MAPS AND COUNTER-MAPS

In this section I will show how the pueblo Mam is made invisible through various maps.

These maps detail political-administrative borders that cut through Mam territory in

different ways without acknowledging the pueblo Mam or Mam territory. Likewise, these

maps conflate a *singular* nation with the state, reinforcing the nation state framework that

denies the recognition of indigenous peoples as nations. Following these examples of

state maps, I will discuss examples of how indigenous peoples have engaged in

constructing counter-maps that challenge state maps.

State Maps

State maps are graphic representations of spatiality that reify the state and its borders as

"natural." By *state maps* I mean those created by state governments, at their behest, or

approved by them (including later recreations thereof). State maps are not only drawn and reproduced by government agencies though. For example, academics frequently reproduce state maps in their publications. Academic publications about indigenous peoples and their ancestral territories even frequently include state maps. In contrast, some maps challenge state borders and the nation state framework, which I will refer to as counter-maps and the process of counter-mapping. I mean to distinguish state maps from counter-maps in this way, because the latter may also be interpreted as "state maps." State maps and counter-maps each provide different ways of seeing and knowing the world.

In the Gramscian sense, state maps (and the borders on them) are hegemonic constructions since they are not only imposed on subjects from above (as a coercive mechanism for domination), but they are also reproduced and re-created by subjects of the state as "common-sense" ways of seeing and knowing the world (as a consensual mechanism of domination). Thus, state maps are hegemonic constructions in two senses: first, power is manifest in the way that such maps shape how collectivities and individuals in their everyday lives internalize the state and its political-administrative borders as "natural" (i.e., maps are infused with symbolic violence); and second, these maps are not only produced by the state (from above), but also may be reproduced by collectivities and individuals in their everyday lives (from below). For instance, some school children in Mexico have been assigned by their teachers to draw maps of "the nation." In other words, state agencies may produce state maps, but these maps are also internalized, reproduced, and shared—bolstering the nation state—by ordinary citizens.
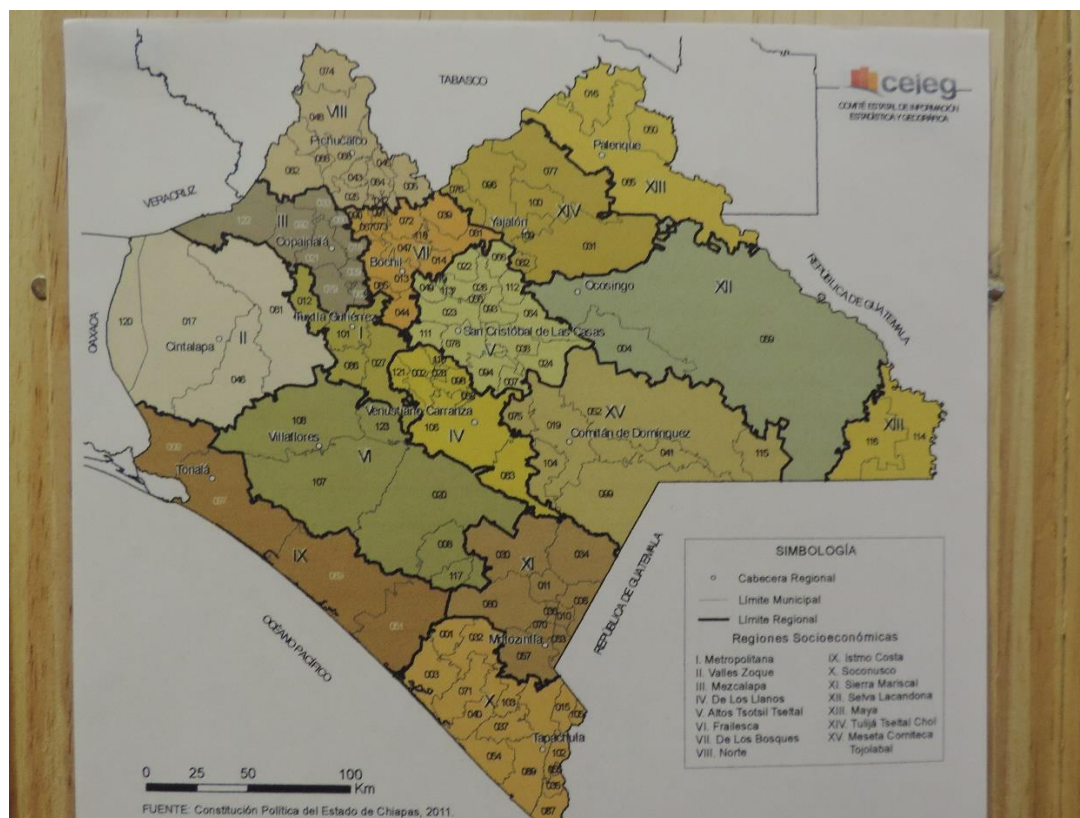
Image 6. Map of Chiapas, MX displayed on school wall in Pavencúl, MX.

For example, Image 6 is a state map of Chiapas, Mexico that a school teacher has hung on their classroom wall for young students to see in Pavencúl, Mexico. This state map depicts municipal borders within Chiapas without recognizing the indigenous peoples and their territories across such borders. For example, this state map makes no reference to the Mam across municipal borders in Chiapas, much less to the Mam as a people across the Guatemala-Mexico border. The legend on this state map draws attention to 15 "socio-economic regions." A few Mayan peoples (Tzotzil, Tzeltal, and Ch'ol) are mentioned as part of these "socio-economic regions," but they are not referred to as peoples. Notably, "Maya" are also listed as one of these "socio-economic regions" (separate) from those previously mentioned Mayan peoples. Some Mam children in

Chiapas see this map in their classroom daily and, yet, there is no way for them to locate their pueblo on it.

State maps may also appropriate symbols of indigenous peoples (see Image 7). When state maps appropriate indigenous symbols they formalize the notion of a singular multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual nation (as referenced in Guatemala's Indigenous Rights Accord), while eliding the recognition of indigenous peoples as nations (see Casaús Arzú 1998; Sieder 2001).

Image 7. Map of Guatemala displayed at meeting for indigenous organizations.

This particular map of Guatemala (Image 7) was hung up by organizers for a meeting in western Guatemala where invited representatives were to discuss challenges and solutions related to environmental degradation. This was a backdrop banner that remained hanging in the large hall behind all of the meeting's speakers. The meeting included several indigenous pueblos and organizations (including the Consejo Mam Saq

Tx'otx'), farmer organizations, and nonindigenous activists from western Guatemala. The map of Guatemala depicted in Image 7 uses the Mayan cardinal points and colors (white, red, yellow, black, green, and blue) that are symbolically significant for Mayan peoples. The map for this meeting also contains and the image of a plant or tree sprouting up with the caption, "From our roots we plant the seeds for a new society: You will grow Guatemala!" This metaphor similarly draws upon an often-cited poem that Che'l, a leader of C.R.I.M.M.S., frequently recites with some variation: "*Se llevaron nuestros frutos, cortaron nuestras ramas, quemaron nuestro tronco, pero no pudieron arrancar nuestras raices*" (They took our fruits, cut our branches, burned our trunk, but they couldn't pull out our roots).

Image 8. Guatemala military sign appropriating Mayan symbols.

Ironically, by appropriating Mayan symbols, this map could be interpreted as an additional example of continuing to take away Mayan "fruits." Ajb'ee Jiménez, a Mam anthropologist, pointed out that the appropriation of Mayan symbols in official state

representations is not uncommon. One afternoon in 2013 I accompanied him to a meeting where he presented his research to community leaders in Colotenango, Guatemala. Following this meeting we drove down the inter-American highway toward the center of Huehuetenango, where he pointed out a road sign made by the Guatemalan government for its military that appropriated the 20 nahuales of the Mayan calendar (see Image 8). The nahuales represent the 20 days of the Mayan calendar and they are the sacred forces that may accompany humans, plants, animals, and the rest of the environment the Maya Cosmovision. Again, such appropriation formalizes and reifies the singular Guatemalan multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual nation state. But the appropriation of indigenous symbols does not signify that state officials will give heed to the demands for recognition and collective rights of indigenous peoples. As noted by Cojtí Cuxil (2007:131), "The same public offices that use indigenous names and decorations discriminate against the living Maya, Xinka, and Garifuna."

As a form of symbolic violence, state maps—even those that appropriate indigenous symbols—may facilitate the internalization of the state as natural. For example, in many instances during the meeting in Quetzaltenango where Image 7 served as a backdrop, indigenous leaders were encouraged by the meetings organizers to use the meeting's theme regarding unification so that Guatemala "will grow" ("*Florecerás Guatemala!*"). During a brainstorming session where all of the leaders from a variety of organizations divided into groups and circled around to discuss the particular challenges in their communities that they felt were priorities, one of the meeting's organizers who worked for the Farmer's Committee of the Highlands (CCDA) entered a discussion group and took charge of the conversation's direction. It became quite apparent that he wanted

to keep everyone in the group on task, to be specific in their comments and suggestions, and also to keep in line with "the theme" of the meeting. Printed next to the map on the hanging banner (Image 7) was the theme: "From our roots we will plant the seeds for a new society: Guatemala, You Will Grow!" He told the group, "Many times we focus on our diversity in Guatemala when we should focus more on unity." He continued:

> Yes, there are different nations within Guatemala, such as the Maya nation, the Xinca, Garífuna, and mestizo. But we need to focus on how we, in the first place, are Guatemalans. That is our identity. That is what we have in common. Yes, we are from different cultures and we have our identities, but in the first place we are Guatemalans!

This organizer spoke of indigenous peoples as nations, but he suggested that such recognition is less important than identification as part of a singular national identity. In effect, similar to the ways that state maps may appropriate indigenous symbols to suggest more inclusivity while sustaining the nation state framework, this man's comment appropriated a significant indigenous demand (that of recognition). He suggested that the state represents what those present have in common. Guatemala, in this case, is framed as the natural common ground. State maps simultaneously reinforce the legitimacy of the nation state and reflect how some Guatemalans and Mexicans embrace the nation state framework (disregarding indigenous demands for recognition as nations).

Following his comment, an older man who identified himself as a farmer who isn't indigenous, and who had not yet made any comments in the discussion group, spoke up:

> The path that we need to take is with everyone. That there aren't *ladinos* (the non-indigenous) and there aren't indígenas (the indigenous), there aren't the rich and there aren't the poor. We lose when we say 'the indigenous are better than the ladinos,' or 'the ladinos are better than the indigenous.' We are human beings with the same conditions. And that is how we [end up going] backwards. I have always told my friends: I am fighting for tomorrow. That is what we need to have in our minds, for our children.

This man's comments, echoing what the organizer told the discussion group, focused on unification, but not the unification of indigenous peoples.

And while there were a couple individuals who voiced disagreement, I was surprised to notice several heads nodding in affirmation. Even some of the Mam leaders from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' whom I had previously interviewed were nodding in agreement. Yet many of these leaders previously shared with me very different perspectives about identity and unification. Indeed, several of these leaders in attendance told me that Mam individuals should identify first and foremost as Mam rather than Guatemalan or Mexican, yet now they seemed to go along with this juxtaposing position. Lene, a representative of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' who spoke with me not much earlier about the need to "decolonize our thoughts" about our identities, even followed this man's comment of unification by telling the group, "It doesn't matter if we are ladino, Xinca, Garífuna, Maya. If there is mining then we need to be against it together. United, as a whole, as *paisanos* (fellow countrymen) in Guatemala." On the one hand, efforts to develop and strengthen alliances (while still acknowledging differences among those alliances) may make strategic sense for indigenous pueblos and organizations

seeking to put additional pressure on the government. For instance, Keck and Sikkink (1998) argue that when state governments have violated human rights, some social movement organizations have responded by strategically forming alliances with transnational organizations. Those transnational organization have, in turn, successfully put international pressure on those governments to change policies and uphold international norms (Braun and Dreiling 2015; Keck and Sikkink 1998). However, rather than calling for alliances between culturally and politically different groups, here Lene's words seem to suggest calling for alliances that may flatten those differences in defense of Guatemala. Thus, in this setting Lene spoke of "*la defensa del territorio*" (the defense of territory) as "defending Guatemala from the mining and hydroelectric companies," conflating Mam territory with the state's territorial limits.

There were others who spoke about strengthening indigenous languages, using indigenous clothing, and sharing indigenous traditions. But these comments each seemed to speak more to the multicultural character of Guatemala's indigenous peoples, rather than the political character of indigenous peoples and their territories in Guatemala. By shaping the discussion around the state, with the map of the state and its theme ("Florecerás Guatemala!") as the backdrop to the discussion, this meeting reflected Guatemala's "*Indio Permitido*" (Permitted Indian), par excellence (Hale 2006). There was space to be indigenous, but only a particular type of indigenous. The "Indio Permitido" could speak about celebrating their culture, including their language and traditional clothing. The "Indio Permitido" could even speak about "the defense of territory." But only if by *territory* they meant Guatemala.

In sum, state maps may facilitate the internalization of the state as the "natural" unit for a *national* unification. In this particular case, even the theme ("Florecerás Guatemala!") that was printed next to the map affected how Mam individuals spoke about their collective identification and territory. However, while maps may be mechanisms for internalizing the state and its borders as "natural," constituting a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu 1994), indigenous peoples are both aware and critical of such (mis)representation through maps. Some have even engaged in deconstructing such maps through counter-maps. It is to this issue that I now turn.

Indigenous Peoples and Counter-Maps

One of the ways that indigenous peoples have been able to challenge state maps, therefore, is by engaging in map-making themselves (Anderson 1993; Eades 2015; Escobar 2008; Jacobs 1993; Warhus 1997; Warren 2013). Eades (2015) points out, while referencing Arturo Escobar, that these efforts are part of much broader efforts to counter colonization, or as Escobar (2008) puts it, to engage in "counter work." Indigenous peoples also demonstrate that it is "not necessary to accept Western definitions of maps" (Black 1997:27). Therefore, we should also consider alternative ways that indigenous peoples engage in constructing counter-maps that may not conform to typical graphic representations of spatiality.

For this analysis, I conceptualize counter-maps as the following: a representation of social, political, and geographical relationships between spaces and places at different scales in ways that conflict with how states structure spaces and places (including political-administrative borders) at different scales in cartographic representations. Thus,

counter-maps define spatial and symbolic borders in ways that challenge dominant ways of seeing and knowing the world. Counter-maps are simultaneously a critique of the state's epistemic perspective and an expression of a subaltern epistemic perspective. In a crude sense, counter-maps are simply maps with borders that diverge from borders on state maps.[27]

Counter-maps are not only constructed through graphic or visual representations, but also through words (Black 1997). For example, the Tohono O'odham Nation, an indigenous nation across the Mexico-US border, explains on their webpage that O'odham land was divided almost in half with the Gadsden Purchase in 1853. They engage in map-making by spatially defining some contemporary O'odham communities in Mexico as "separated only by the United States/Mexico border" (www.tonation-nsn.gov). They denaturalize the Mexico-US border by mapping it as an "artificial barrier," noting that "the division of O'odham lands has resulted in an artificial division of O'odham society" (www.tonation-nsn.gov). By defining the Mexico-US border as "artificial" and re-defining social, political, and spatial borders in ways that conflict with the nation state framework of both Mexico and the United States, the Tohono O'odham Nation have used visual cartographic representations and words to develop counter-maps of their territory.

Similarly, Sarah Warren's (2013) research on the cross-border Mapuche nation highlights how the Mapuche are engaged in "territorial dreaming." The examples she provides demonstrate that the Mapuche have defined their ancestral and contemporaneous territory in a variety of ways across the Chile-Argentina border. Warren (2013:258) explains:

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[27] In the next section I will further this conceptualization by focusing on counter-*mapping* as a processual exercise, rather than merely a socio-political-cultural object.

In their maps, the Mapuche cartographers do not show the Andes as a geographical dividing line; instead, they 'flatten' the Andes and thus disrupt what is taken to be a 'natural' division between the Chilean and Argentine nation-states. In addition to denaturalising the Andes as a political border, Mapuche intellectuals also disregard other political borders, extending the reach from the Atlantic to the Pacific and incorporating large swaths of land that are currently part of Chile and Argentina.

Warren's (2013) research suggests that as indigenous peoples engage in "counterwork" (Escobar 2008), they decolonize imaginings of space in relation to contemporary state political-administrative borders.

One of the ways the Mapuche have denaturalized the state and its borders is by emphasizing a common territorial name in the Mapuche language (Warren 2013). Warren (2013:258) explains that by defining Mapuche territory through the Mapudungun word *Wallmapu*, which "encompasses land in Chile (*ngulumapu*) and land in Argentina (*puelmapu*)," the Mapuche are able to speak of their territory as spanning both states without relying "on the language or the borders of these states." Warren (2013:258) explains, "By naturalising Wallmapu as Mapuche territory that has 'always been out there', Mapuche activists are challenging the framework of the nation-state by implying an existence that long predates the nation-state and its arbitrary borders."

In the following two sections I analyze ways that the Mam have engaged in counter-mapping. Similar to Warren's (2013) research among the Mapuche, many of these counter-maps superimpose indigenous territory over the state and its borders. First, I offer a critique of such counter-maps. And then I analyze an alternative approach to

constructing counter-maps. Some Mam counter-maps are similar to those described by

Warren (2013) in the sense that they are mostly constructed by indigenous leaders,

intellectuals, and activists. But "counter-work" (see Escobar 2008) or counter-mapping is

also done by others who imagine and visualize their territory without using traditional

state maps as a template. Therefore, I will also analyze ways that Mam individuals in

their everyday lives engage in counter-mapping without drawing upon state maps.

FROM STATE MAPS TO MAM COUNTER-MAPS

I never saw a map like this before. While conducting interviews and fieldwork in 2014, I

spent months looking specifically for counter-maps of Mam territory. In particular, I was

hoping to find a visual representation of Mam territory that corresponded with the

narratives of several Mam participants from both countries: that the Mam are one pueblo

divided by the Guatemala-Mexico border. Yet I had no luck. I even began to wonder if

any such counter-maps existed. But then one October morning in 2014 I came across a

counter-map of Mam territory.

After spending a weekend attending the inauguration celebration of a Mam school

in Pavencúl, Mexico with C.R.I.M.M.S., I planned to cross the border to head to

Comitancillo, Guatemala to conduct more interviews. Before departing and knowing that

I would be travelling to western Guatemala, two C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders asked me to do a

favor and submit a letter to the Guatemalan Academy of Mayan Languages (ALMG).

Their letter was simply a follow-up request for Mam language-learning materials to use

for the Mam schools that they were establishing across the border in Mexico. Although I

had never visited the offices of the ALMG, I promptly accepted this request since the

C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders had already contributed so much to my research. I also saw it as an opportunity to interview additional Mam participants who work for the Guatemalan state.[28] After describing myself as a researcher at the front door to the offices of the ALMG, a representative invited me into their building. Once inside, I immediately noticed the map (see Image 9). I was astonished to see a large print-out banner hanging from the wall inside the entrance that in many ways coincided with the collective identification narratives and definitions of Mam territory expressed to me by Mam participants. I did my best to compose my excitement and explained to Ti'ne, the young Mam ALMG representative I just met, that this was the first time I saw a map like this. As best as I tried to hide my over-enthusiasm, I'm sure she could tell that I really wanted to talk to her about the map and she happily invited me into her office to do so.
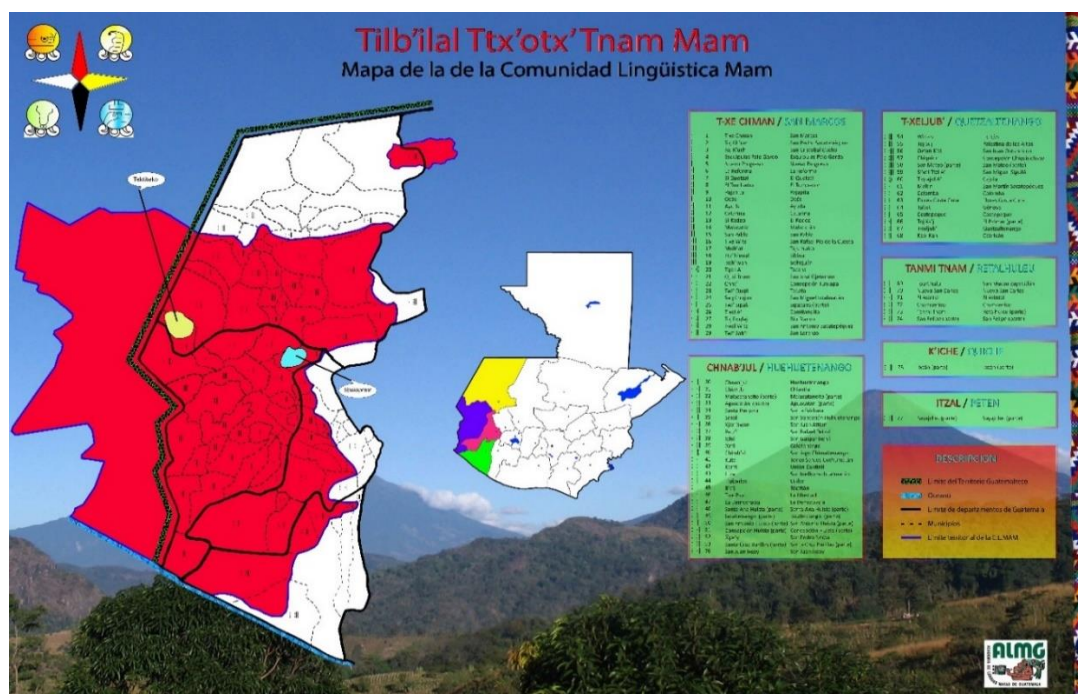

Image 9. ALMG counter-map of Mam territory across the Guatemala-Mexico border.

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[28] The Guatemalan Academy of Mayan Languages (ALMG) is a state organization that was developed in late 1990 following the Guatemalan Congress' passage of the *Ley de la Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala*.

Sitting behind her desk, Ti'ne observed what my previous few months of research had already confirmed: there is an obvious lack of counter-maps that define Mam territory across the Guatemala-Mexico border.[29] Ti'ne referred to the historical and political division of the pueblo Mam and how this division continues to be made publicly visible through maps:

> The pueblo Mam is fragmented, well, it's politically fragmented by the borders that are established [Ti'ne says this while pointing to her computer at an online map of the Guatemalan state we were discussing as an example]. So a part of the pueblo Mam stays in Guatemala and the other part stays in Chiapas. So a part of the pueblo Mam then is reduced by the limits that are established between the states of Guatemala and Mexico.

Ti'ne's explanation highlights how state borders, represented on maps of both Guatemala and Mexico, fragment the pueblo Mam. She noted that while there are few alternatives to the maps that ignore altogether the pueblo Mam, counter-maps *do*, in fact, exist. The banner of this counter-map hanging in their offices is one example.

An analysis of this particular counter-map reveals several interesting details, which I analyze in this section. My analysis first addresses how images and words on this counter-map and others like it may convey different meanings. I then address how this counter-map was constructed, paying particular attention to the ways it is superimposed onto a map of Guatemala and Mexico. Lastly, I address how this counter-map was carried to its intended audience and I discuss some of the challenges associated with mobilizing alternative ways of seeing and knowing the world.

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[29] It is important to note that "counter-maps" is an analytic category for this study and Ti'ne and other participants did not use this term when describing maps of Mam territory that are different than state maps.

Characteristics of Counter-Maps

Several of the counter-map's details in Image 9 warrant attention, including: the ways it draws upon maps of Guatemala and Mexico, which include state political-administrative borders that socially, culturally, and politically divide the pueblo Mam; the articulation and lack of articulation of state political-administrative borders; the scope of the counter-map in relation to the map-makers; and perhaps most importantly, the politics behind the contradiction in what the counter-map claims to represent. I argue that these details suggest that certain characteristics of counter-maps may, as intended, denaturalize state political-administrative borders, while at the same time they may unintentionally legitimize such borders. I will address each of these details in turn.

Foremost, as a counter-map, the visual representation of Image 9 challenges the "naturalness" of the Guatemala-Mexico border by depicting the Mam as a cross-border people. The counter-map's legend signals that the blue line represents the "*Límite territorial de la C.L. Mam*" (territorial limit of the Mam linguistic community). This limit, as depicted here, for the most part does not coincide with the legend's indication of the territorial limits of Guatemala, the departmental limits within Guatemala, or municipal borders within Guatemala. As a minimal exception on this counter-map, there are a few parts of Mam territory (in the departments of Quetzaltenango, Huehuetenango, and Retalhuleu) that are depicted as corresponding with limited portions of municipal borders. However, this alignment is minimal. Only 13 of 100 municipios on the counter-map have partial segments of their municipal borders aligning with the delineated border of Mam territory. In other words, this counter-map primarily depicts Mam borders as distinct from state political-administrative borders.

On the Mexican side of the Guatemala-Mexico border, the political-administrative borders within Mexico are not articulated on this counter-map. In fact, this counter-map does not even label "Mexico." Therefore, from this cartographic representation it is unclear how far the limits of Mam territory are imagined to extend in relation to the representation of space and place (specifically, in relation to the representation of political-administrative borders within the Mexican state). The criteria for how the ALMG constructed this counter-map, which we will turn to shortly, only slightly speaks to this issue. More importantly though, the criteria is absent from the counter-map itself so it is not readily apparent to the viewer. Likewise, while the counter-map delineates Mam territory within a portion of the municipio Santa Cruz Barillas, Huehuetenango and extending across the northeastern border of Huehuetenango and Santa Cruz Barillas (into the department of K'iche), the counter-map's depiction of the limits to Mam territory in K'iche are less clear. In both instances (Mexico and the Guatemalan department of K'iche), the lack of articulation may be a function of scope. By *scope* I mean the relevant area of focus for the map. Scope is about the intent of the map.

Invariably map-makers must make choices about scope to include and exclude certain places and spaces. Without such considerations, maps are of little use. As an extreme example, a lost pedestrian seeking directions to downtown could greatly benefit from a map with a narrow-enough scope to make visible relevant streets within the city for orientation purposes, but they would not benefit from a globe of the earth.[30] Thus, one of the primary reasons that this particular counter-map more clearly defines political-administrative borders within western Guatemala than in Mexico (specifically, the municipal and departmental borders in four western Guatemalan departments) has to do

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[30] I credit David Smilde for this humorous example regarding the importance of considering scope.

with the intent of the map. In this case, the counter-map's scope is based on the map-makers' occupational jurisdiction. As noted by the logo on the bottom right-hand corner of the counter-map, this cartographic representation was made by the ALMG. Remember, the ALMG is a state organization that promotes Mayan languages and culture in Guatemala, specifically here the Mam language in the four departments colored on the map on the right side of Guatemala (the department of Huehuetenango as yellow, San Marcos as blue, Quetzaltenango as pink, and Retalhuleu as green). Therefore, the political-administrative borders are more clearly defined in these four departments on the Guatemalan side of the border due to the ALMG's scope and purpose in designing the map.

Perhaps the most interesting detail to this counter-map is its title. After all, a map's title may convey an intended interpretation for the overall cartographic representation. In the Mam language the title reads: "Tilb'ilal Ttx'otx' Tnam Mam." Below the title lies a Spanish translation: "Mapa de la de la Comunidad Lingüistica Mam." The Spanish title contains a grammatical error (the repetition of "de la") that is corrected in Image 10, which was also made by the ALMG in tandem with Image 9. The counter-map shown as Image 10 also labels Mexico ("JLAJXI") and the pueblo K'iche or Quiché ("KY'ITXE TNAM"), which I have already mentioned are absent from Image 9. But more important than these details in both counter-maps is the distinction in meaning between the title in the Mam language and its translation in Spanish.

Tilb'ilal Ttx'otx' Tnam Mam
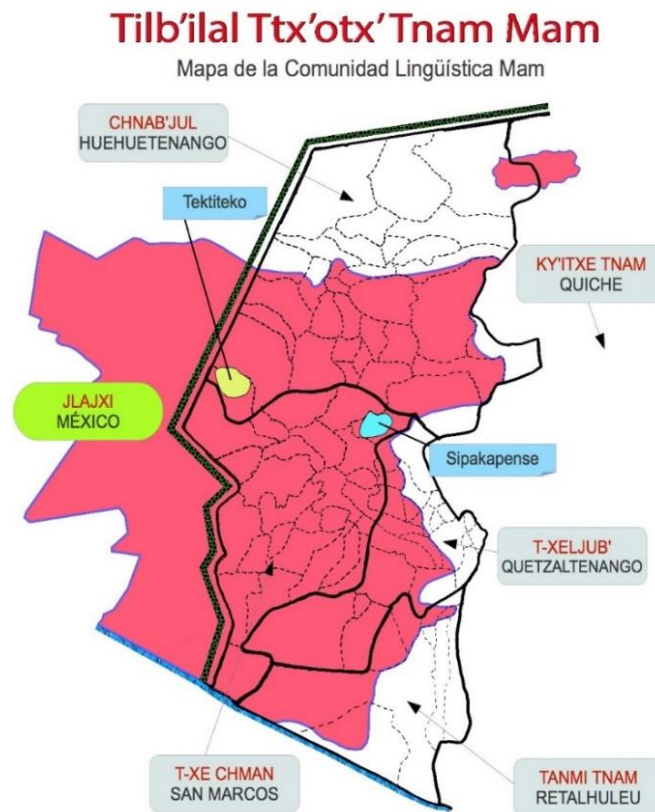
Mapa de la Comunidad Lingüística Mam

Image 10. ALMG counter-map of Mam territory across the Guatemala-Mexico border.

The Spanish title for these counter-maps could be translated into English as "Map of the Mam Linguistic Community." In a similar fashion, the legend in Image 9 signifies that the portion of the counter-map highlighted in red (pink on Image 10) denotes the *Límite territorial de la C.L. Mam* (Territorial limits of the Mam Linguistic Community). Defining the Mam as a "Linguistic Community," rather than as an indigenous pueblo or nation is a strategic maneuver on the part of the ALMG. Labeled in this fashion, these counter-maps could be interpreted as simply maps where the Mam language is spoken. This interpretation makes sense when considering, again, the scope of the map-makers' occupational jurisdiction. The ALMG is primarily organized to promote, normalize, and standardize Mayan languages. As a state organization, the ALMG appears to have created

cartographic representations that align with the singular multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual Guatemalan nation as established in the Indigenous Rights Accord (Casaús Arzú 1998; Sieder 2001). From this interpretation, *territory* is more of a cultural boundary than a political boundary.

However, the Mam title for these counter-maps conveys a radically different interpretation. Breaking down the Mam title indicates that this is a "Drawing (or representation) of the Territory of the pueblo Mam." Two key words in the Mam title deserve particular attention in this analysis: *Tnam* and *Tx'otx'*. In certain ways, the word tnam may refer to a spatialized location, as in its Spanish translation as "pueblo," which also takes on this double-meaning of place and people. For example, in the Mam language, *Ma chin b'ine toj tnam* can be translated as "I just went into town." As a case in point, on the front of Comitancillo's municipal building it is labeled in Spanish as "*MUNICIPALIDAD DE COMITANCILLO*" (Municipality of Comitancillo). The front of the building is also labelled in the Mam language, which reads "*TJA TNAM TE TXOLJA*" (House/Building of the Place/People of Txolja/Comitancillo"). As alluded to in this translation of tnam, in addition to the spatialized location aspect of the word, it can also be translated as pueblo or people or nation. For instance, in Image 10 the department of K'iche or Quiché is labeled as "*KY'ITXE TNAM*," which defines this spatialized location (department) also as a space of the K'iche people. "*Tnam Mam*" in these counter-map titles thus speaks to how these are cartographic representations of both a Mam spatialized location and of the Mam people.

Just as important to the Mam title on these counter maps is the word *tx'otx'*. Tx'otx' can be translated as territory. But the word tx'otx', translated as territory,

signifies more than a demarcation of land that designates the limits to sovereignty, power, or jurisdiction. In addition to the politics of territory, tx'otx' signifies an all-encompassing spatialized interdependence—fitting with the Maya Cosmovision—that includes the mountains, volcanoes, trees, plants, rivers, and even air; it encompasses the living and non-living beings (including humans and animals). The background photograph in Image 9, which is superimposed upon by the map's legend, the map of Guatemala, and the map of Mam territory across western Guatemala and southern Mexico, also draws attention to tx'otx'. The background photograph in Image 9 depicts the sky, clouds, crops, trees, hills, mountains, and volcanoes. Due to this all-encompassing and interdependent character, the limits of territory, when translated as tx'otx', are more challenging to define.[31]

In essence, the Mam title conveys that these counter-maps are more political than their Spanish translation may indicate. The Spanish translation coincides with the nation state framework by calling attention to the Mam as a linguistic community, but not as a people or nation, and suggests that these cartographic representations are merely indications of where the Mam language is spoken. Conversely, the Mam title for these counter-maps suggests that these are representations of the territory of the Mam nation. The Mam title for these counter-maps in conjunction with the cartographic representation of Mam territory raises two important points: First, both Guatemala and Mexico are actually plurinational states, which is a reality neither state has formally recognized; and second, the Mam are a cross-border nation whose territory transcends municipal and departmental borders as well as the Guatemala-Mexico border.

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[31] I will further examine tx'otx' in the next section.

Constructing Counter-Maps

The contradiction in the title's translation was noticeable to me that morning in the offices of the ALMG. So I sought to resolve this contradiction by asking Ti'ne about what the map represented and how the ALMG constructed the map. In other words, what criteria were used to design this counter-map? Ti'ne explained that she was not a part of the ALMG team that made these counter-maps in the previous year (2013) so she was unsure about all of the criteria they used to develop it. But she emphasized that she did know that this is a political map, this is "a map of Mam territory." So then, what criteria were used to construct these counter-maps of Mam territory?

Through follow-up communication with the ALMG, I was able to contact Nile, one of the ALMG workers who constructed these counter-maps. Nile is Mam, has a Master's degree in Social Anthropology, and he has worked on many Mam education projects within and outside of the ALMG (such as Mam language curriculum circulated by Guatemala's Ministry of Education). When I inquired about how the counter-maps were designed, Nile described the criteria they used for its construction and more about the intended interpretation of the counter-maps. Like Ti'ne's interpretation of the counter-map, Nile explained, "Well, effectively, the map is an effort…[to show] the territory of the Mam nation."

Nile clarified that the criteria they used were both contemporary and historical. The contemporary indicators, fitting for the ALMG, focused primarily on "Mam-speakers of the language." He repeated that this contemporary "criteria [is] about the usage of language." Together with historical criteria, "What is marked [on the counter-maps] is where there is a presence of Mam-speakers of the language, which is much smaller than

the ancient territory [of the Mam]." Nile noted that several means were used to measure

this language criteria. First, the map-makers at the ALMG did fieldwork where they

travelled to different regions asking individuals in communities and teachers to "identify

the presence of Mam-speakers." Doing so, he mentioned, also resulted in including

municipios where "before there wasn't much of a presence of Mam-speakers, but with

the migratory phenomenon, now there is a presence of Mam-speakers. For example,

Ixcán, Quiché, Sayaxche, Petén, and various municipios of northern Huehuetenango and

of Retalhuleu's coast."

In addition to their fieldwork, they used language as a criteria in constructing

these counter-maps by turning to Guatemala's Law of National Languages (Law 19-

2003) regulated by the Ministry of Culture and Sports. Nile described using this law as

part of their criteria because it "lists the municipios and departments where the Mam

language is spoken, just as it lists other languages, but here the criteria was the presence

of Mam-speakers."

On the Mexican side of the border, which again is less articulated on these

counter-maps, the ALMG depicted the limits of Mam territory through "criteria [that]

was more linguistic than historic. In other words, where Mam-speakers actually are." The

map-makers primarily relied on a study done in 1995 by Mexico's National Institute of

Statistics and Geography (INEGI), wherein it "lists the municipios where the Mam

language is spoken, especially by adults, and it indicates the following municipios:

Bellavista, Amatenango de la Frontera, Bejucal de Ocampo, La Grandeza, Siltepec, El

Porvenir, Mazapa de Madero, Motozintla, Cacahoatán, Tuxtla Chico, Tuzantán, Unión

Juárez, Tapachula, and Las Margaritas." Not only were the names of municiaplities listed

by the INEGI used for the criteria by the ALMG, but the map-makers at the ALMG used the INEGI's maps as well. Nile explained, "…looking at the maps that the INEGI mapped out, we proceeded with the outline on that [INEGI] map, which coincides with the map [of] the Mam community."

In addition to tracing Mam territory based on language in Mexico, as outlined through Mexico's INEGI study (1995), Nile said that two visits ALMG workers made with their "Mam brothers in Chiapas" in 2013 were fundamental:

> First was a meeting with Mam brothers of Unión Juárez and then in Cacahoatán [two Mexican border municipios], where we could find out more information about where Mam was still spoken, where the majority of Mam-speakers are…because the map only reflects the nucleus zone of the Mam nation. [The map]…represents the territory…where the Mam have always been. Even when the territory was reduced [by the governments]. We tried to find the way to follow the municipal boundaries of Chiapas [when making the map], but we don't have a lot of knowledge about the [boundary] lines [in Chiapas]. [So] perhaps the [boundary] lines [in Chiapas] are imagined [by us] in many cases.

In this explanation Nile mentioned several notable details in relation to what these counter-maps represent and how the ALMG constructed them. For one, this statement indicates that counter-maps may be informed by cross-border experiences, such as those analyzed in the previous chapter.[32] From his cross-border experience with his "Mam brothers" in Mexico, Nile later explained that the first conclusion drawn from this

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[32] I will further explore this interwoven character of cross-border experiences and counter-mapping in the concluding chapter.

encounter was that "The most important [thing] is that we recognize each other as Mam first, rather than Guatemalan or Mexican."

Additionally, Nile's statement reiterates that the ALMG in large part constructed these counter-maps by superimposing Mam territory over municipal boundaries already defined by the Mexican state, just as on the Guatemalan side of the border. He even said that they tried to follow "municipal boundaries of Chiapas." As is the case for the other measures used to construct these counter-maps, Nile continued to describe language as the defining criteria, attempting to identify municipios in Mexico where Mam is spoken.

Importantly, the language criteria that the ALMG used to construct these counter-maps in most instances was informed by state political-administrative units (including municipios and departments with their borders). Sure, counter-maps may denaturalize state political-administrative borders by showing how indigenous territory does not align with state borders. But map-makers who use state political-administrative borders as part of their criteria for constructing counter-maps of indigenous territory may, intentionally or not, legitimize and naturalize such state divisions. In other words, counter-maps informed by state maps may, in fact, reinforce the social, cultural, and political divisions of indigenous peoples.

Using language as a criteria is highly problematic. Many Mam individuals do not speak the Mam language but still identify as part of the pueblo Mam. Relying on whether individuals speak the Mam language as a criteria for being Mam rigidly essentializes identification. In a classic article, Sol Tax (1937) defined the identity boundaries between Mayan peoples and ladinos/as in the following manner:

Indians speak Indian languages, wear Indian costumes, have Indian surnames, and live like Indians. A ladino has a Spanish surname and speaks Spanish as a mother tongue; he wears European-type clothes, wears shoes, lives in a house with windows, is usually literate, and has, in general, a better standard of living than his Indian neighbor.

This perspective continues in the region today so that by "seeing *traje* (indigenous clothing) means one is seeing Indian" (Nelson 1999:181; Warren 2009:779; Fischer and Brown 1996; Andolina, Laurie, and Radcliffe 2009:27). Although individuals may be perceived as "authentically" indigenous if they speak an indigenous language or wear particular clothing (some of the Mam even draw on these cultural characteristics when identifying as Mam), the Mam also contest the notion that cultural characteristics are essential to being Mam. Richards (2013) highlights the argument that culture is dynamic and there is no "authentic" indigenous "essence" unchanged over time that does not adopt elements of other cultures. Therefore, using language as a primary criteria for designing counter-maps may exclude parts of Mam territory where Mam individuals do not speak the Mam language.

Nile also talked about this counter-map in terms of territory, not just linguistics (as the map's title suggests). In addition to using language as a criteria, Nile said the maps also took into consideration "the history of Mam territory." He spoke of a territorial nucleus of where the Mam "have always been." Thus, in addition to language use, history was utilized as a key criteria for the ALMG's construction of these counter-maps. Nile explained:

The pueblo Mam, as such, is one of the most ancient [Mayan] peoples, and as such, it is here where the pueblo Mam has always been. And [the pueblo Mam] didn't migrate with the other Mayan peoples to Tula, as it's said, [the pueblo Mam] has always been here, it's been calculated as more than 10,000 years…The pueblo Mam before the coming of the Spaniards was a nation with its own state, with a principal government and regional governments. In the period of the invasion, Ka'yb'il B'alam was the great governor, and there were regional governors…Much later, much later, the nation-states of Mexico and Guatemala appeared, which divided the Mam nation, that is clear. The map is an effort for the territory of the Mam nation, even though we no longer have a state.

The history that Nile recounted points again to his view that this counter-map is an effort to demonstrate that the Mam are an indigenous nation historically and contemporaneously divided by the Guatemala-Mexico border and the nation state framework. He noted that this history informed the territorial nucleus of the Mam that they depicted on these counter-maps.

Additionally, Nile's historical account frequently transitioned between "then" (*antiguedad*, ancient) and "now," as part of the criteria the ALMG used when constructing these counter-maps. For example, he explained:

Something very important is that the Mam know the exchange routes to the other side. It has always been that way. It's our ancestral territory, even when the Guatemalan and Mexican states place the border and customs, the life of the Mam still continues as in antiquity. Even when the border divided us a lot.

Very fluidly, these sentences use verb tenses that transition back-and-forth across time.

Nile's sentences convey a historical and contemporaneous linkage to space and

knowledge the pueblo Mam has about movement across space (specifically, across Mam

"ancestral territory"). Likewise, this fluidity across time conveys an acknowledgement of

how both states divided the Mam nation and continue to divide the Mam nation through

the border. Moreover, Nile noted that it is not only the border itself (the "artificial

barrier") that divided/s the Mam nation, but also each state's efforts to police and control

movement, even through customs, across tx'otx'.

Just as the criteria the ALMG used to construct this counter-map was informed by

the map-makers' occupational priorities (namely, the promotion of the Mam *language*),

the ALMG's position as a state organization is also informative regarding the

construction of counter-maps. Since the ALMG is a state organization, the efforts by its

workers to construct a counter-map (even one that appropriates and in some ways

legitimizes and reinforces state-political administrative borders in its construction) are

very intriguing. When I shared a copy of this counter-map with Ajb'ee Jiménez, who

hadn't seen it before, he seemed quite surprised, noting, "The interesting thing is also, is

that it's…official; it's from, from an institution of the state." Here the symbolic

boundaries between state and activist are blurred, which points to the possibility of using

the state for activist ends (Park and Richards 2007; Postero 2004; Van Cott 1994, 2000).

Nile and others (who Gramsci might have defined as "organic intellectuals") strategically

defined the Mam as a nation with its own territory while working for a state organization.

But this blurring may leave several questions unanswered. In this case, we are presented

with a counter-map but, since it is made by a state organization, do we say that the state

made it? And if we say that the state produced it, then is it even a counter-map? Or is it made by Mam activists who have infiltrated that state? The blurring between these symbolic boundaries suggests that it may be both. Nile and others constructed these counter-maps at this blurry activist/state intersection. Their counter-maps simultaneously challenge the nation state framework and state political-administrative borders while sustaining them as well.

In sum, the characteristics of these counter-maps correspond in several ways with the methods used by the map-makers. This may be of little surprise. But this point re-emphasizes that when map-makers use methods that draw upon state political-administrative borders, even when seeking to denaturalize such borders through counter-maps, those borders may become reified in cartographic representations.

Carrying Counter-Maps to Others

Following the characterization of counter-maps, and the construction of counter-maps, we should consider how counter-maps are carried to their intended audience. In other words, how do map-makers and others mobilize these counter-maps once they construct them? Additionally, once these counter-maps have been carried to their intended audience, how does that audience interpret these cartographic representations?

To understand how map-makers and others share counter-maps with their intended audience, we should first not lose sight of *why* there is an effort to mobilize counter-maps. Mam participants who contributed to making counter-maps of Mam territory, and also Mam participants with a less active role in their construction, explained that the primary reason for mobilizing these cartographic representations is the following:

counter-maps are part of the ongoing effort to "*acercarse más*" (come closer together). The previous chapter's discussion of efforts to develop socio-political ties across state borders coincide with this analysis here. Just as the mobilization of cross-border experiences can be understood as a process that sustains cross-border collective identification, the mobilization of counter-maps may also strengthen efforts to "acercarse más." Since trying to come closer together is a forward-looking call for the unification of the Mam as one indigenous nation, then as part of this forward-looking effort, counter-maps may be conceptualized as tools for imagining cross-border unification. Bearing in mind *why* Mam map-makers and others mobilize these counter-maps, in this section I will analyze *how* map-makers and others share these counter-maps with Mam organizations and individuals in their everyday lives.

One afternoon in late October, 2014, shortly after I had first seen the counter-map depicted in Image 9, I travelled to a small rural hamlet in the mountains Huehuetenango, Guatemala to interview a mother and daughter, named Liy and Paxe, whom I had met following a meeting with the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx'. As we sat in front of their home and conversed about their work as representatives of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' within the municipio where they lived, Liy explained that "When we fight against the mining companies to defend our territory, we have to be united. We have to fight together, *acercarnos más* (come closer together)." Paxe added her voice to her daughter's words, explaining that all of the pueblo Mam in Guatemala, and not only Guatemala but Mexico too, should fight "in the defense of territory."

I was surprised when Paxe mentioned the Mam in Mexico, because we were primarily speaking about the Mam in Huehuetenango (the Guatemalan department where

the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' operates) up until that point. So I asked Liy and Paxe to speak with me more about the Mam in Mexico, specifically how she learned about the Mam in Mexico. Liy explained that they know of the Mam in Mexico from a workshop. She then quickly sprang out of her chair and entered her house, where I could see she began looking for something among stacks of disorganized papers and folders, likely from the many meetings she and her mother have attended together over the years. Calling from inside the house, and seeming determined to locate a document, she told me it would only be a minute. Paxe shouted into the house to ask Liy what she was looking for and they then briefly communicated with each other in Mam. They spoke so quickly that my beginner Mam language abilities could only pick up the words "jun tilb'ilal" (a drawing or a map). But just as Paxe was getting out of her chair to help her daughter, Liy called back from the room that she found it.

Returning outside, Liy brought a wrinkled and folded sheet of paper. I couldn't believe it! It was a copy of the counter-map made by the ALMG (Image 9). Less than a month earlier I was doubting whether any Mam counter-maps had ever been created. But then I came across this particular map again—twice in the same month—and even in a different department than the offices of the ALMG. I immediately began to wonder if my presence as a researcher visiting the offices of the ALMG and talking about this particular counter-map may have influenced its circulation in recent weeks. I wondered if perhaps those in the offices of the ALMG had not given the counter-map much thought as of late and maybe after seeing through my best attempts to curb my enthusiasm they decided to distribute the counter-map more broadly. But this somewhat vain and naïve suspicion about my ability as a researcher to shape my field of study was quickly

resolved. It turns out that this serendipitous re-encounter with this counter-map could be

traced back to a workshop a friend working for the ALMG invited them to attend earlier

that year along with 8 others from their community.

Liy told me that her interpretation of this counter-map is based on the information

the ALMG taught those in attendance at the workshop. Most of her interpretation of the

counter-map is historical:

> That's what they taught us that time…They gave us a map. I sort of knew that
>
> before, though, before. Because they say that Guatemala owed Mexico, or
>
> something like that, and that's how Chiapas came about…But yes, Guatemala
>
> owed Mexico and for that, they owed, and that's why they took Chiapas. So then
>
> all of those people who spoke Mam, basically together next to Huehue[tenango],
>
> and that's why, well, we were divided.

Liy's historical account is not an uncommon narrative in Guatemala. With different

variations among indigenous and non-indigenous individuals in Guatemala, there is a

memory of state officials who out of greed (for corrupt personal gain) or necessity either

sold or turned over Chiapas to Mexico. I have even heard some Guatemalans say that the

reason why Chiapas even has its name is because it belonged to the Chapines (a term for

people from Guatemala). Liy continued:

> But they say that that's the way the history was of that, of Guatemala, of
>
> Huehuetenango, of Mexico. And it's for that reason [Guatemala] didn't have a
>
> way to pay, well, that's why Chiapas was [and is] part of Mexico. And [the Mam]
>
> stayed…But only, what they told us at the training in [the offices of the ALMG],
>
> they say that there is a part, yes it's also part of the border [in Mexico]…but I

can't remember the name of the place, but I believe it is on the other side of the

border…where they say that they also speak [Mam] and they want to unite all of

the pueblo.

Liy's interpretation of this counter-map is highly conditioned by the way that the ALMG

presented it to her. She viewed this counter-map as a historical representation of how the

pueblo Mam has been divided by the annexation of Chiapas. It is also important to note

that while Liy viewed this as a historical representation (noting that this is the way the

counter-map was mobilized through the ALMG workshop), she also used the present

verbal tense to define the Mam as a pueblo still divided by the Guatemala-Mexico border.

In addition to mobilizing these counter-maps through workshops, the ALMG have

posted Images 9 and 10 on their governmental webpage. The ALMG share these counter-

maps online to reach a wide audience, especially since it is not possible for all to attend

workshops such as the one previously described. However, while these counter-maps can

be downloaded by anyone with an internet connection, obviously this does not mean that

these counter-maps are necessarily widely accessible. For one, in Guatemala and Mexico

numerous communities (many rural communities in particular) still do not have great

access to the internet. The globalization of technologies continues to rapidly change this

fact, but as of now this access is still limited in different regions of Mam territory in both

Guatemala and Mexico. But access to these counter-maps is also limited in another way.

Many people do not even know that these counter-maps exist, much less that they can

find them on the ALMG webpage (the maps can be found under the e-resources tab:

http://mam.almg.org.gt/e.tttm).

Nevertheless, some Mam individuals who attended the ALMG workshop have also attempted to further mobilize these counter-maps in their respective communities. After attending the ALMG workshop, Liy and Paxe tried to mobilize this counter-map within their own community in Huehuetenango. Their stewardship, as representatives of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' in their community, helped facilitate efforts to share the ALMG counter-map. In this case, the counter-map depicted in Image 9 is significant in that its scope not only corresponds with the occupational jurisdiction of the map-maker (ALMG), but interestingly the scope of the counter-map also corresponds with the location of the Mam Councils that compose the Council of the Mam Nation (on the other side of the border in Mexico and in the four Guatemalan departments labeled on Image 9 as "T-XE CHMAN/SAN MARCOS"; "CHNAB'JUL/HUEHUETENANGO"; "T-XELJUB'/QUETZALTENANGO"; and "TANMI TNAM/RETALHULEU"). As representatives of one of these councils (the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx') a primary responsibility of Liy and Paxe is to convey to their community the proceedings of meetings and workshops among the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' leadership. With this stewardship, Liy and Paxe also feel they have an obligation to share additional relevant information, which may stem from meetings and workshops outside of the purview of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx', with their communities. It's with this sense of responsibility that Liy and Paxe attempted to share the ALMG counter-map with those in their community. But their efforts met with only minimal success.

Liy and Paxe explained that even with counter-maps, such as the one constructed by the ALMG, an ongoing challenge is that not all Mam individuals care about efforts to "acercarse más." They noted that apathy is a common impediment. When they returned

to their community there were only a few people who seemed interested in hearing about the importance of a counter-map of Mam territory and seeking unification as a cross-border pueblo. Liy clarified, "That is what we do: we explain. [But] there are, in other words, there are many people who don't, we could say [that] are not interested in the topic." On top of that, she said an additional challenge is that when she returns to her community to share ideas from various workshops and Mam council meetings, even those who do listen do not all agree with the information that is brought back to the community. In this particular example, Liy said that after sharing this Mam counter-map and discussing Mam collective identification as a cross-border pueblo there were some who disagreed: "*No. Ya ellos son de México, nosotros de Guatemala*" (No. They are now from Mexico, we are from Guatemala), refusing to view the Guatemala-Mexico border as an impediment to the pueblo Mam and Mam territory.

Diego, the Mam activist discussed in previous chapters who works for Guatemala's Ministry of Education, provided an additional example of this relationship between the mobilization of counter-maps and efforts to "acercarse más." Like Nile, as a state employee Diego also blurs the symbolic boundaries between the state/activist binary. Sitting across from me at his office desk I could sense his frustration in his tone of voice and mannerisms. He didn't just *know* that there were significant impediments to the ongoing construction of the Mam nation, his expressions conveyed to me that how he *felt* about this knowledge was just as important and intense. It was as if Diego wanted to shout that something needs to happen, but he wasn't quite sure what, or how, in order to help the pueblo Mam "acercarse más." Diego told me that while he is hopeful, there aren't many ways or resources for the pueblo Mam to "acercarse más" or "unite and fight

for a better future" right now. But as a notable exception he mentioned that there are some specific instances of this, including the counter-maps, made and being mobilized by the ALMG. However, in line with the challenges to mobilizing these counter-maps that I have described, Diego said, "[…] I know that on the part of the Academy of Mayan Languages there is an intent [to] come closer together." As an "intent," it still remains to be seen how successful the ALMG will be in their efforts to carry these counter-maps to Mam organizations and individuals in their everyday lives.

Like Nile and those working at the ALMG, Diego has also contributed to the construction and mobilization of counter-maps. Not unlike the others, the counter-maps that Diego has circulated among school teachers contain characteristics that seem contradictory. Here I will address two counter-maps (Images 11 and 12) that Diego and other Mam employees working in his Ministry of Education office included in a 2011 curriculum book for promoting Mam as a second language in the department of San Marcos. Image 11, which Diego had a prominent role in constructing, is located at the end of the book. And Image 12, which he did not help construct, appears near the beginning. Just as the contradictory details embedded within Images 9 and 10 have informed conflicting interpretations of the counter-maps mobilized by the ALMG, the counter-maps depicted in Images 11 and 12 also contain contradictory characteristics that may facilitate conflicting interpretations.

For instance, teachers and students who receive these materials may see these cartographic representations as cultural—noting that they represent "*idiomas*" (languages)—but also as political because they reference indigenous "pueblos" (Mam, Sipakapense, and K'iche'). Unlike images 9 and 10 made by the ALMG, Image 11 (made

by the Ministry of Education) addresses how the Mam language is not rigidly defined by municipal borders. Indeed, this cartographic representation shows how the Mam are a pueblo that transcends the rigidity of municipal boundaries. However, once again the scope of the map-makers' occupational jurisdiction (in the case the department of San Marcos) in some respects presents the viewer with a cartographic representation of the Mam as a pueblo defined within the limits of a particular Guatemalan department and certainly within the limits of the Guatemalan state.
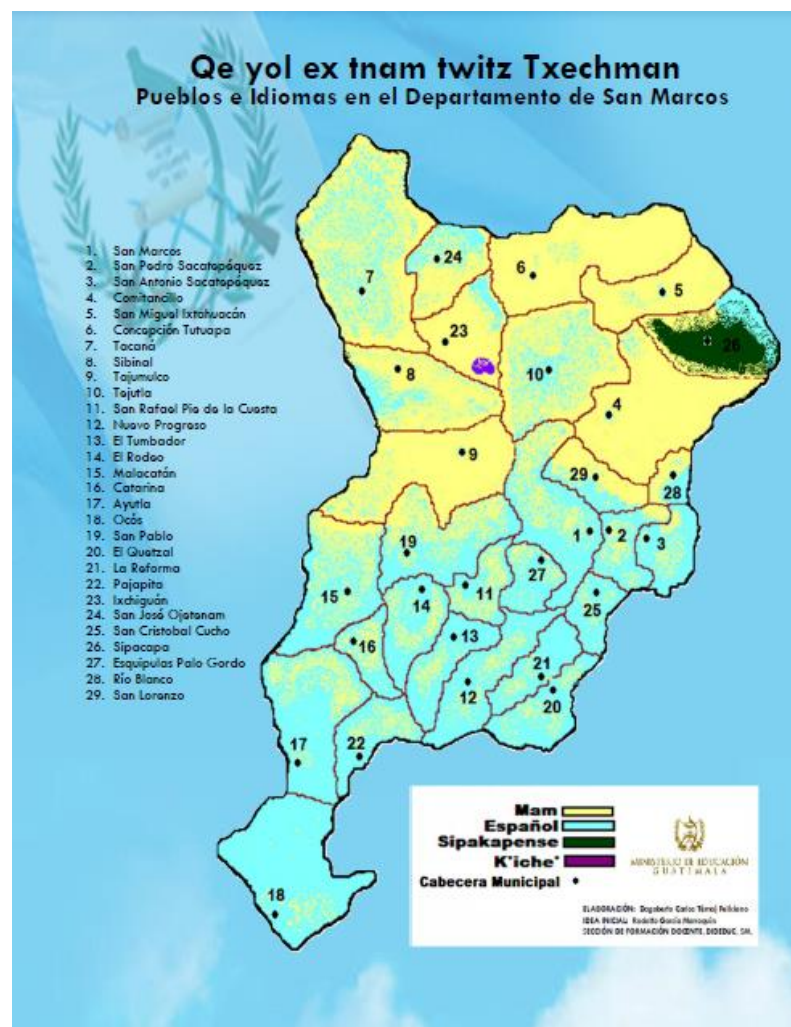

Image 11. Ministry of Education counter-map of San Marcos, Guatemala.

Additionally, rather than being superimposed upon a photograph that speaks to the fluidity and complexity of tx'otx', as in the case of Image 9, Image 11 only makes a slight connection by depicting clouds and a background color that may be interpreted as a depiction of the sky. More noticeable, on the other hand, is the manner that this counter-map further sustains the nation state framework by drawing upon the "national" symbol of the Guatemalan flag as the background photograph for the counter-map. Like the other counter-maps discussed in this chapter, once the Ministry of Education distributes these materials to teachers and students they may interpret them as both challenging and sustaining the nation state framework.

In essence, these counter-maps are packaged and carried to their intended audience (i.e., school teachers and eventually students) in a contradictory fashion. On the one hand, they highlight the multicultural character of the Guatemalan state and legitimize state political-administrative borders, even drawing upon the "national" flag of Guatemala. Likewise, both of these counter-maps are carried to their intended audience without making claims regarding tx'otx' or Mam territory. Unlike the more political title in Mam for Images 9 and 10, Images 11 and 12 do not make any reference to tx'otx' or territory in either their Mam or Spanish titles. In fact, on the bottom of Image 12 it explicitly indicates that this map is based on 1994 census data and it is "not a map of ethnicity, history, or actual indigenous territory."
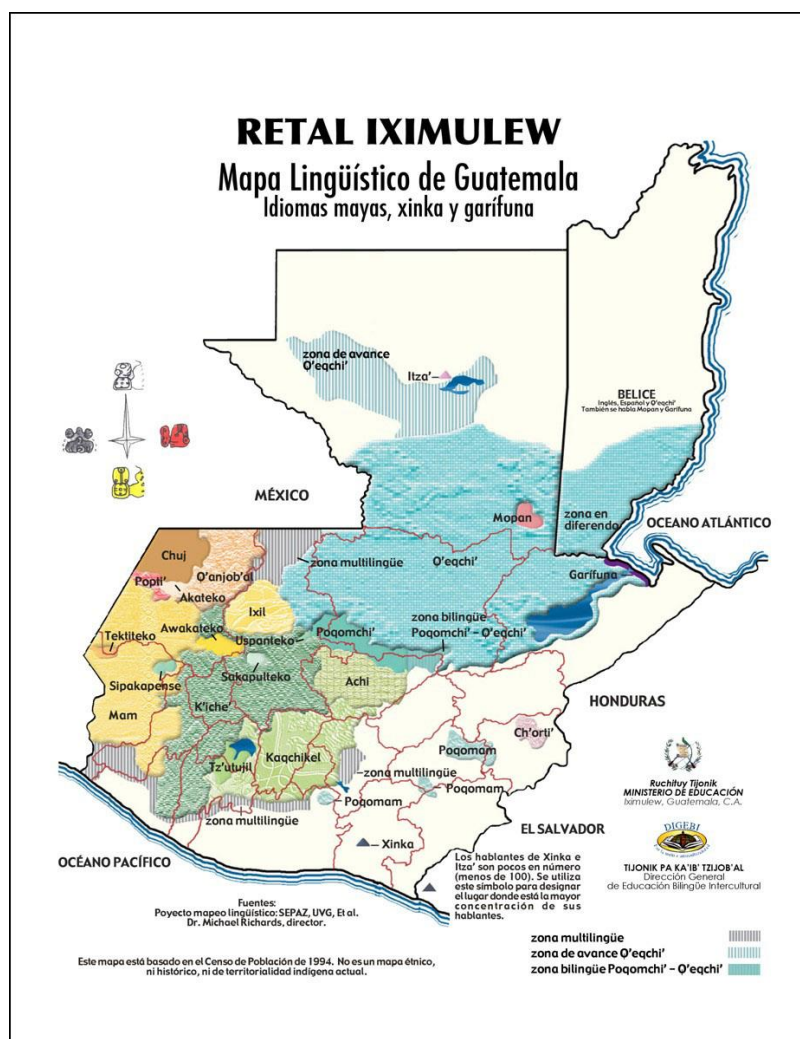
Image 12. Ministry of Education counter-map mobilized through curriculum.

On the other hand, these counter-maps are distributed to teachers who may use certain details on these cartographic representations to challenge the nation state framework. For example, while Image 12 is explicitly a language map, this does not mean that all teachers will interpret it as *solely* a language map. In June 2015 I spoke with Pancha, a Mam school teacher from a rural community in Quetzaltenango, about Image 12. In our conversation Pancha explained, while pointing to the location of the Mam language marked light brown, that "This is where we are [pointing to the department of Quetzaltenango]. All of this [pointing to all of western Guatemala marked light brown],

this is, this is where you can find the Mam-speakers. Us. Our pueblo." In our

conversation, Pancha viewed this cartographic representation differently than what Image

12 suggests it represents, by interpreting it as an indication of the location of the pueblo

Mam across departmental borders in western Guatemala. But Pancha also did not indicate

to me that the pueblo Mam's location extends across the Guatemala-Mexico border. This

example demonstrates how the mobilization of counter-maps with contradictory

characteristics may result in conflicting interpretations.

As I have argued throughout this chapter, counter-maps that are designed from

state maps (i.e., that use the state's epistemic perspective of how spaces and places,

including borders, are naturally structured) may deconstruct certain ways of seeing and

knowing the world while they simultaneously and unintentionally contribute to the

reproduction of state hegemony. In other words, the mobilization of counter-maps may

lead to interpretations that both reify and challenge the nation state framework;

interpretations that both naturalize and denaturalize certain state political-administrative

borders.

COUNTER-MAPPING BEYOND *THE MAP*

Thus far I have argued that through counter-maps indigenous peoples may contest state

maps and assert their presence as nations within states and across state borders. However,

all of the aforementioned examples of maps in this chapter may be interpreted as

perpetuating symbolic violence, to some degree or another, because each of them

reinforce the state's perspective of space. More specifically, these maps all capture the

division of geographic space by state political-administrative borders at different scales.

In other words, each map thus far (including the counter-maps) reproduce a certain way of seeing and knowing the world without acknowledging other subaltern vantage points. Therefore, the problem does not necessarily lie solely in whether the Mam are made (in)visible in different state maps or whether Mam territory is represented on state maps. Rather, the problem may lie more directly in taking for granted the premised perspective of *the map*. By *the map*, I mean the cartographic perception of the state from an aerial gaze at different scales.[33] Put differently, the problem may lie with legitimizing *the map* itself, or privileging a certain way of seeing and knowing the world, while eliding subaltern epistemic and ontological perspectives.

While attending the 2015 Latin American Studies Association (LASA) international congress in Puerto Rico, I was enthused by a session where panelists shared research that touched on the topic of indigenous territories in Latin America. At the end of the presentations the discussant, a well-known and respected geographer (Sarah Radcliffe), made a concise critique that caused me to ponder my own assumptions built into this current project. She said that as researchers from a variety of social science disciplines our tendency seems to be to "go to *the map*" when discussing indigenous territory. She suggested that we, as academics, tend to think of *the map* (defined by state political-administrative borders and represented from an aerial perspective of delimited space) and then where indigenous territory fits on *the map*. In other words, our default approach to understanding indigenous territory is to define how indigenous territory fits and doesn't fit on *the map*. In the context of indigenous cross-border nations, her critique could also be extended to the examples in this chapter that define Mam territory across

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[33] *The map* is not a single map, but any map of the state and state political-administrative borders that take on this aerial gaze at different scales.

the Guatemala-Mexico border, but still turn to *the map* to do so. As the maps in the previous section demonstrate, the tendency to "go to *the map*" is not exclusive to academics. Some indigenous activists "go to *the map*" as well when creating counter-maps that represent indigenous territory.

If maps are cartographic representations of how states structure spaces and places (including political-administrative borders) at different scales, then counter-maps that are superimposed onto state maps (i.e., "[going] to *the map*") may do little to challenge the symbolic violence infused within *the map* itself. In other words, to a certain degree counter-maps that appropriate the premised perspective of *the map*, in turn, legitimize *the map*. Counter-maps may seem promising as a tool to challenge cartographic representations that are charged with symbolic violence, yet they also may reinforce already-dominant ways of seeing and knowing the world. How might indigenous peoples resolve this dilemma? In what ways do Mam engage in the process of counter-mapping while deconstructing, rather than reinforcing, *the map*?

In this section I argue that we need to consider other conceptualizations of counter-maps and the process of counter-mapping. Rather than focusing solely on counter-maps as an alternative map that overlays *the map* (i.e., that uses *the map* as a starting point), I contend that we should consider counter-mapping as a processual exercise that does not necessarily "go to *the map*." Conceptualized as a processual exercise, counter-mapping involves the ongoing production of culture (including socio-political-cultural objects that may be less static than typical maps and texts, such as stories and discourses) regarding geographic spaces and places in ways that challenge the (re)production of hegemonic cartographic representations. In essence, counter-mapping is

both an act of nation-building and an expression of resistance without "[going] to *the map*."

Counter-mapping, in this sense, may be quite different from the counter-maps presented in the previous section. Certainly the counter-maps presented in the previous section might draw upon state maps intentionally. These counter-maps may be strategic constructions designed to demonstrate that Mam territory transcends state borders. Different from these counter-maps though, counter-mapping (without going to *the map*) is an expression of how the Mam imagine their territory without privileging the state's perspective of geographic space.

In this section on how Mam councils and Mam individuals in their everyday lives engage in counter-mapping without going to *the map*, I focus on three aspects of Mam counter-mapping: how Mam councils and individuals draw on a holistic conceptualization of territory as tx'otx'; how Mam councils and individuals defend tx'otx'; and how Mam councils and individuals discursively mobilize the meaning of tx'ox' to others. Although these three aspects are separated for analytical reasons, there is much overlap between them.

Counter-Mapping: Mam Territory as Tx'otx'

Mam counter-mapping relies on a flexible conceptualization of territory that is not confined to demarcating the limits of political jurisdiction on land. Indeed, Mam counter-mapping relies on a conceptualization of territory that is defined through a collective understanding of tx'otx'. Even when the Mam do not use the word tx'otx', they may call attention to trees, mountains, rivers, animals, etc., drawing attention to a more holistic

understanding of territory. I suggest here that as Mam councils, organizations, and individuals in their everyday lives imagine Mam territory through the concept of tx'otx', they engage in the process of counter-mapping without going to *the map*. As Warren (2013:258) notes, when indigenous peoples use words in their own languages to define territory, without relying "on the language or the borders of these states," they naturalize other ways of seeing and knowing the world while denaturalizing the nation state framework. So how do the Mam define tx'otx'?

One participant, José Gómez,[34] who was part of the leadership of the Consejo Mam de Quetzaltenago, co-authored an essay that defined tx'otx' (Mash-Mash and Gómez 2014). Mash-Mash and Gómez (2014) write that Mayan peoples "call Earth 'Qtxu tx'otx,' or Mother Earth, because she gives us life, water, air, fire, and nourishment, and she protects us.[35] We are part of her and she of us." Their definition of tx'otx' more broadly attempts to address how Mam views of territory are akin to notions of Earth in its entirety. In fact, Gómez says that this is how Mayan peoples view Earth. This is not merely a question of scale (panning from the local to the global), but rather a way of viewing the local *as* global (see Herod 2003). Indeed, within the Maya Cosmovision, tx'otx' refers to an interdependence among humans, animals, trees, plants, rivers, mountains, volcanoes, the air, etc. Through this conceptualization, landscapes may be envisioned as sacred and transcending the political limits of states (Bassie-Sweet 2008). Mam conceptualizations of territory (that draw attention to tx'otx'), therefore, cut across the "artificiality" of state political-administrative borders.

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[34] In this instance, I am not using a pseudonym since I am referencing his essay published online.
[35] Mash-Mash and Gómez (2014) refer to Mayan peoples, but more specifically they are referring to words in the Maya-Mam language.

Image 13. Volcano Tacaná divided by the Guatemala-Mexico border.

Tx'otx' also includes Mam sacred sites that cut across the Guatemala-Mexico border. For one, even the volcano Tacaná, which is divided in two by the Guatemala-Mexico border, is sacred (see Image 13). Nile explained:

> In Mam territory you can make a cartography of *Pop U'j* [the Popol Vuh], written in K'iche': in Paxil, el Maíz (la Libertad, Huehuetenango) was found; in Niky'aj, the grandmother Ixmukané planted the corn in memory of her grandchildren, today it is the aldea Nicá, Malacatán, San Marcos; the grandmother Ixmucané is represented by the volcano Tacaná, the [volcano] Tajumulco is the grandfather.

By emphasizing the sacred character of certain Mam places (such as the volcano Tacaná), the Mam may draw attention to how tx'otx' transcends state political-administrative borders.

Similarly, the Council of the Mam Nation, which is a unification of the four Mam councils in Guatemala and the Mam council in Mexico, declared in August 2014 during their annual assembly that:

> We are moving towards the recuperation of our ancestral territories and cities, among which we highlight Saq Tx'otx', Abaj Tajalik and those that are located in the Soconusco, such as the case in the archeological zone of Izapa, in the municipio of Tuxtla Chico, Chiapas, Mexico, territory that from right now we are going to recuperate.

By using tx'otx in official documents about territory, such as this declaration, the Council of the Mam Nation can express how their territory is expansive and includes sacred and historical locations, without reifying the nation state framework.

Mam councils frequently define tx'otx' during workshops, leadership meetings, and community presentations. Sometimes these definitions of tx'otx' are less direct. For instance, in December 2014 I helped organize a cross-border meeting between the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' and C.R.I.M.M.S. held in Huehuetenango, Guatemala.[36] This was not the first time that both councils had met. In this meeting leaders from Mam councils in Guatemala and Mexico detailed the ongoing work of the councils on each side of the Guatemala-Mexico border. Earlier in this meeting Che'l, a leader of C.R.I.M.M.S., explained how most of their council's efforts have focused on culture, and specifically language, revitalization in the region. Pe'x, a leader of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx', later proceeded to explain their council's engagements "in the defense of territory," while broadly defining territory (tx'otx') in relation to C.R.I.M.M.S.' engagements with culture revitalization:

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[36] The previous chapter discusses this cross-border meeting in greater detail.

According to us, we [as the] Consejo Maya Mam Saq Tx'otx' are advancing…in

the defense of territory, in its strengthening, now and forever. And we have also

said in regional assemblies that it is necessary to globalize these two forces [i.e.,

strengthening Mam culture and Mam territory]. Neoliberal-capitalist globalization

is big, very big. But there's also the fact that now we're uniting with you [the

Mam council in Mexico]. I believe that we both have to help, we have to have that

shield for the defense of territory. And, well, I think that to not confuse you,

perhaps at the end of the day you may say what, what is the heart of the matter?

What is our common [ground]? I think that there is one. Because the strategic

plan of the Consejo Maya Mam Saq Tx'otx', in summary, is the defense of

territory. That is how [the council] began and it hasn't changed. And I don't think

it will change. It's the defense of territory. And what aspects does the defense of

territory contain? We must defend mother earth, the water, the air, everything

pertaining to global warming, everything pertaining to our environment. In the

case of the organization CUC [Peasant Unity Committee], which [works with] the

Consejo Maya Mam Saq Tx'otx', which also is dedicated to agrarian issues, well

that is also the defense of territory. And there is the [struggle against] other

hydroelectric dams, which is the defense of territory… That is why we have said

that the strategic plan has not changed, it is the defense of territory. But also

inside of that [the defense of territory] is what you [of C.R.I.M.M.S.] have

mentioned today. You have been dedicated to the rescue of, be it culture, of

ethnicity, of the music, of the sports, of everything. To us [as Mam], that is part of

tx'otx' as well. In other words, *tx'otx'* has an integral character that is very big.

In this message to Che'l and other C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders, Pe'x called attention to their environment (including the water and air). Pe'x engaged in counter-mapping by drawing upon the environmental and cultural aspects that comprise Mam territory. But Pe'x does not "go to *the map*" as he is counter-mapping with those in this cross-border meeting. Rather, by explaining how the defense of territory is being accomplished across the region in different ways, he defined Mam territory as more than a political demarcation of land.

Counter-mapping beyond *the map* is not only a process undertaken by Mam organizations in the defense of territory, but it is a process that Mam individuals in their everyday lives engage in as well. Ajb'ee Jiménez said to me that we must consider the alternative ways that the Mam who are not leaders in Mam councils and organizations also visualize space and territory:

The other point is that when analyzing the theme of the Mam Nation it's also important to…take into account other leadership [and others]… People from other groups. Right? Women, the elderly, [etc.], who perhaps don't have a position of authority, like in the Mam Council or something like that. But they are going to have…a point of view or a critique, or…maybe they're going to show an unawareness of the process [of the Mam councils]. But that doesn't mean that they don't visualize. That's why, in my dissertation, for example, I say that the act…of visualizing or…of thinking about, or of *pensarse en* [thinking one's self], better said, in different communities is an example of that…consciousness that there is a broad community. In other words, a community that's not just part of a municipio, or of my place…where I plant my corn. No. Rather, it's a community

that's more, more utopian. Right? Much broader. Utopian because it involves

politics, it's political. But its borders are not geographic. Right? Rather, they will

be a type of, of confluences, of communities. In which they look, they imagine,

right? And they form a part of [the community]. Well that captures a lot of the

idea. Even the same Mam Council, and a Mam Nation, geographically defined,

which is important, but it's not the only thing. Right? So then [we should] hear

those other ideas, [an] analysis of…how to see the community, which is key.

As Jiménez points out, we must consider how Mam individuals in their everyday lives

define the pueblo Mam as a community across geographic space. We must consider how

Mam individuals engage in visualizing and imagining—in counter-mapping—without

"[going] to *the map*" that compartmentalizes tx'otx' through state political-administrative

borders.

Indeed, even during community meetings and celebrations organized by Mam

councils, there are occasionally moments when Mam individuals who are not part of

Mam councils or organizations engage in counter-mapping by describing tx'otx'. The

town of San Sebastián, Huehuetenango held a public meeting in October 2017 to

commemorate their *Consulta Comunitaria de Buena Fe* (Community Consultation where

they voted against mining in the region). This outdoor meeting was hot, and very few

people sat in the chairs that were made available on the community's central basketball

court. There was an audience though. Most of those in attendance sat in the shade of the

town's central park, just behind the desk of Mam council and organization leaders who

faced the somewhat empty basketball court in front of them below. In the backdrop,

everyone could view the green mountains across the valley from the town. With booming

speakers connected to a microphone, the speakers' messages permeated the park. Most of this meeting consisted of an "open-mic" opportunity for Mam individuals to remind everyone in their community about their participation in the town's Consulta Comunitaria. Partly shaped by this context, they called attention to surrounding trees, animals, and the mountains, drawing upon a more holisitic conceptualization of Mam territory as tx'otx'.

An elderly man held the microphone in his left hand and slowly gestured to the green mountains across their municipal borders (see Image 14). He told the crowd:

> These mountains are part of our territory. When I was a child my father and
> grandfather used to tell me that [the mountains] have the name "Jaguar," because
> of the animals that used to walk in these mountains. Now there aren't [animals]
> like there used to be in these mountains. It's because of the harm that's been done.
> And that is why we should continue defending our territory, so that the animals
> return as before.

Certainly the context of this commemoration (about defending territory from transnational mining companies) may have shaped why he drew attention to the surrounding environment and the need to defend tx'otx'. This example demonstrates that it is not only Mam council and organization leaders who engage in counter-mapping by drawing attention to a more holistic understanding of territory as tx'otx'. This man was counter-mapping territory in a forward-looking fashion, by envisioning how efforts to unite in defense of tx'otx' may result in making tx'otx' whole (e.g., with a return of animals to the mountains) in the future.

Image 14. Defining territory as tx'otx': mountains across from San Sebastián.

Even outside of socio-political meetings where the context may shape how Mam individuals define territory, several participants called attention to the environmental landscape when defining Mam territory. For example, Marcos and Eva are a couple from Pavencúl, Mexico who sell goods in the marketplace and they are not members of any socio-political organizations. They defined territory by telling me about the greenness of the land and the volcano Tacaná, which can be seen from their house. Marcos explained, "Tx'otx' is *tierra verde* [green land]." He furthered this description by speaking of the highlands as Mam territory, and he specifically mentioned the border towns of Pavencúl and Chequín, the volcano Tacaná, and the municipio Comitancillo (where he has done business before in Guatemala). Likewise, other participants used interchangeably the words *altiplano* (highlands), *zona alta* (tall or high zone), and *Sierra* (referencing the Sierra Madre mountain range that spans the Guatemala-Mexico border) when describing Mam territory. They called attention to the mountain regions, drawing upon a more

holistic understanding of territory as tx'otx'. When I pressed Marcos about whether the border then divides the pueblo Mam he replied by down-playing the significance of the state border for tx'otx'. He replied, "No…Not much. I think that for this, for the Mam zone, I think that there is no border…There is no border, so this is all one region."

Likewise, Anibal, a Mam farmer and newly employed tourism policed officer in his late-20s from Comitancillo, pointed out to me the Sierra Madre mountains that could be seen on the horizon from his corn field. Anibal explained, "Our territory, as Mam; you can see the Sierra all the way out there." Anibal did not use the word tx'otx' and he doesn't know much of the Mam language. Yet he defined Mam territory by calling attention to the mountain range in the distance.

Occasionally, some participants who called attention to their surrounding environment when describing territory also essentialized Mam identification. For example, Arturo is a nineteen year old student from Pavencúl, Mexico who spoke of Mam territory and being Mam as having a tie to the rural parts of the Sierra Madre mountain range. Arturo explained that even though he wasn't raised to speak the Mam language, not unlike the majority of his peers in Pavencúl, he considers himself Mam and indigenous: "Yes, I consider that I am indigenous because we live in the Sierra. Sometimes we travel to hang out in cities like Tapachula, Mexico and other cities, but I still consider myself indigenous." For Arturo, part of being indigenous means living in the Sierra rather than the city.

Essentializing identification is done by indigenous and non-indigenous individuals alike. Some of the narratives of Mam participants suggest that ladinos/as see them as indigenous because they live in the rural mountains. Arturo explained, "There are

some people who, well [because] we are from here, from the Sierra…and when we go to cities, well the people look at us, as if we are from a different class, they think that we're not of their class, that we can't be around people like them. They might say, the most typical, the most typical, the word that they could use so that we don't come close to them [is]: '*indio*' [indian]. Because that is what they think. And '*indio*' is a word that they use to make you less. And for the person making you less, they [feel] big before you." One of several important aspects to Arturo's description of interpersonal racism in the context of this particular section, is that some who are non-indigenous may essentialize Mam identification in terms of spatiality: supposing that one is "authentically" Mam if they are from the rural mountains.

As I've argued in this section, Mam councils, organizations, and individuals in their everyday lives engage in counter-mapping by calling attention to the surrounding environment, drawing upon a more holisitic conceptualization of territory as tx'otx'. One of the challenges that the Mam face is not only confronting how their territory may be defined through the essentialist criteria of speaking the Mam language, but also navigating how to define their territory as a relationship with tx'otx' that does not encourage some to equate indigenousness with being from the rural mountains. Next I will turn to how the Mam engage in counter-mapping through the discourse of defending their territory.

Counter-Mapping: Defending Tx'otx'

As the pueblo Mam participates in defending tx'otx' they also engage in the process of counter-mapping. Because the pueblo Mam does not turn to *the map* when deciding how

to defend Mam territory, their actions aimed at defending tx'otx' cut across state political-administrative borders.

As Mam councils have participated in the organization of Consultas Comunitarias to vote against mining and other actions to defend tx'otx', their participation demonstrates a visualization of territory that cuts across state political-administrative borders. Pe'x described to me his own participation defending Mam territory and that of others from the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx':

> In our territory there is the mining, the hydroelectric [dams], TRECSA [a Colombian company that has extended an electrical grid to mining and agricultural companies], everything is here…But we continue to struggle. No to mining! Get the transnational companies out! Mother earth is not for sale! With our territory, there are no negotiations. The water is sacred and it gives us life, so we must protect it. There are the Consultas [Comunitarias]. The actions that we have taken are diverse.

Pe'x's statement reminds me of the several instances when I accompanied him and other Mam council leaders in community marches that commemorated such Consultas Comunitarias.

Community organizations have also participated in defending tx'otx' by raising Mam individuals' consciousness about the community decisions that have already been made against the imposition of mining and hydroelectric companies across tx'otx'. For instance, one community organization participated in the defense of territory by raising such awareness through "No a la minería!" slogans that they painted along the highway (see Image 15). Just between Tapachula, Mexico to Pavencúl, Mexico there are more

than twenty-five such slogans with some variation of the statement "No a la minería!" Several of these slogans were painted by youth on boulders and rocky mountainsides, which constitute aspects of tx'otx' that these organizations are seeking "to defend" from external harms. Rolando, a community leader from Pavencúl, Mexico, explained that he and other leaders participated in this effort to defend tx'otx', by contacting community authorities between Pavencúl and the town of El Progreso in Tapachula, Mexico. Rolando described how this was organized:

> With delegates, judges, auxiliary judges, so it was talked about it a meeting. We always have meetings, every month. And every month we talk about [the topic] of *no a la minería*. So then one day it was discussed and then [we decided] we were going to put signs that said "No a la minería!" along the side of the road. They said from here [in Pavencúl, Mexico] all the way to the ejido El Progreso. That way, any government official that comes here or any foreigner that comes with the intention of exploiting our lands, tx'otx', by seeing that, maybe with that they could be detained or now maybe they won't be allowed to enter. That is what we talked about in the meeting. And that's how we went about making the signs.

Rolando's description of defending tx'otx' shows how participating in the defense of territory constitutes an aspect of counter-mapping. By participating with other Mam community authorities and organizations in painting these signs across tx'otx', Rolando visualizes Mam territory as spanning state political-administrative borders.

Image 15. "NO A LA MINA." Roadside painting between Tapachula and Pavencúl.

Mam individuals who are not part of Mam councils or organizations also engage in counter-mapping when discussing the need to defend tx'otx'. One afternoon in 2011 I hiked with Jse' down a mountainside in Tacaná, Guatemala to visit an elderly woman he occasionally visits. Jse' is a school teacher from Comitancillo who now teaches in a border town of Tacaná. While hiking down a narrow dirt path in a deep valley, with the mountains engulfing us, he began to speak with me about my research and issues relating to indigenous rights and environmental degradation across tx'otx'. Jse' explained that the most common form of discrimination he and other Mam individuals have experienced in the region is the deforestation and mining, "such as the mines in Ixtahuacán, which are close." He continued, "That is what is exploiting us, exploiting our territory."

Image 16. Seeing and hearing changes in the landscape of tx'otx'.

Jse', who was hiking in front of me, then paused and turned around to direct my attention toward the mountains in the distance (see Image 16). Across the valley from us I saw a few fields of crops between patches of pine trees. Stretching out his arm, Jse' directed my attention away from the green areas of the mountainside to focus on the mudslides. He said, "Look. In 2006 those mountains were covered with trees, but now… [Jse' then shrugged his shoulders and shook his head as if both disappointed and confused]." I asked, "And what happened?" He told me to listen. After a brief moment of silence, my ears adjusted and I could hear an echo from the base of the valley in the distance. To me, the echo sounded like a couple of lawnmowers. Jse' then interrupted the echo, telling me that "They are cutting down the trees in the valley." He wasn't sure who was doing this, but he said that it was occurring "*en contra del pueblo Mam*" [against the

pueblo Mam]. He explained, "Even though we can't see them from here, they are cutting down those trees."

For Jse', defending tx'otx' is not just about preserving beautiful *paisajes* [landscapes], but defending tx'otx' is also a defense against discrimination because, as he explained, "It is only where the indigenous people live, where our pueblo is, that this is happening." In this explanation, Jse' engaged in counter-mapping by defining tx'otx' and the need to defend tx'otx' as "where our pueblo is." He pointed to valleys and mountains in both directions, even as they extend across the Guatemala-Mexico border.

Similar to Jse''s account, other Mam participants from Guatemala and Mexico who are not part of a Mam council or organization are also engaged in counter-mapping by speaking about how the pueblo Mam is defending tx'otx'. In these examples of counter-mapping, Mam individuals explain that the harm to tx'otx' is manifest in changes to landscape. Earthquakes that result in landslides are one example of this change in landscape that reflects harm to tx'otx'.

It is important to note that the Mam participants I spoke with did not make a distinction between "man-made" or "natural" earthquakes (i.e., I heard no distinction between earthquakes caused by mining blasts or ruptures in geological faults, for example). For example, on July 7th, 2014 a 6.9-7.1 magnitude earthquake with an epicenter on Chiapas' coast near the Guatemala-Mexico border violently rocked the border region's coast and highlands. This deadly earthquake affected the indigenous and nonindigenous alike in both countries. On this particular day I witnessed myself the dramatic change in landscape across tx'otx', just as described by my research participants.

Image 17. Rockslides viewed as a manifestation of how mining harms tx'otx'.

Before the morning earthquake trembled, I boarded a mini-van in Tapachula with school teachers heading to start their work week in the highland border ejido of Pavencúl, Mexico. Since this was a very early morning bus ride I tried to get some sleep on the bumpy route (paved and unpaved in different sections along this route) up the mountains and toward the volcano Tacaná. I woke up during the earthquake just after 6am, as the school teachers pointed out the windows of the van at the swaying trees near the road. We continued up the mountains, not realizing the extent of this earthquake. I'm certain the typical bumpiness of the drive impede our realization of this earthquake's magnitude. But eventually our trip was halted by a massive rockslide before us on the mountain's narrow road. Unable to pass and without transportation for the long distance still ahead, our driver turned the van around. Minutes later, our return to Tapachula was also halted. Additional rockslides following the earthquake had now blocked the route back to

Tapachula (see Image 17). Climbing over these massive rocks on foot, we eventually found a route and driver that could safely return us to Tapachula. One of those walking and climbing with me was Jwa'n, a teacher from the coast of Chiapas who has made noteworthy efforts to learn the Mam language while in Pavencúl and who defines himself as Mam in certain contexts.[37] On this route Jwa'n expressed to me part jokingly, "Perhaps that is why there is so much talk about *no a la minería* [no to mining], we don't want our mountains to fall."

Counter-Mapping: Discursively Mobilizing Tx'otx'

While both defining Mam territory as tx'otx' and defending tx'otx' speak to ways that Mam councils, organizations, and individuals in their everyday lives engage in the process of counter-mapping without "[going] to *the map*," the pueblo Mam also engages in counter-mapping by mobilizing the meaning of tx'otx' and mobilizing experiences about defending tx'otx'. In other words, counter-mapping not only occurs by defining Mam territory as tx'otx' and by defending tx'otx', but also by sharing such definitions and experiences that relate to tx'otx'.

During the cross-border meeting between the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' and C.R.I.M.M.S., Che'l and others from CR.I.M.M.S. agreed with Pe'x's comments

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[37] It was rare to hear Jwa'n identify as Mam. However, on some occasions when eating lunch in the home of Sandra, a Mam woman in Pavencúl who is paid to prepare meals for the schools teachers, he would ask her about how to say certain things in the Mam language. In these contexts, he would also ask her "our culture," acknowledging his cultural belonging to the pueblo Mam. Yet in other contexts (usually in the presence of other school teachers also eating at Sandra's home who do not self-identify as indigenous), Jwa'n asked Sandra questions about "*her* language" and "*her* culture," distancing himself from the pueblo Mam. Jwa'n would also join in with these other school teachers as they occasionally contrasted aspects of Mam culture in Pavencúl (such as bathing in the *chuj*) from "our culture" in Tapachula. Sandra never called Jwa'n out on this slight distinction and she never expressed to me that she was aware of his subtle shifts in identification.

regarding the importance of participating in the defense of territory, and how culture and the environment are entwined. Che'l explained to those present at the meeting:

> We [recently] went up to do a cultural event. But inside [of that event] we are also inserting the phrase "No to the hydroelectric [companies]; no to mining exploration!" Because there is a small group of people there [in favor], it's not a lot, but all of the people are against how some have even sold land to Canadians to be exploited…So, look, my *compañeros* [speaking to those who are Mam from Guatemala]…the activities that we have done [as Mam councils in Guatemala and Mexico] practically, practically in every way, they are similar. Look, I want to share with you, companions, to give you strength. Strength, companions. We want to unite ourselves with you and have you united with us in the defense of territory. Let's reach out and grab and hold hands.

Che'l's comment highlighted how defending territory should be a cross-border endeavor with the Mam councils in Guatemala. He transitioned from a focus on articulating cultural endeavors to environmental endeavors (such as speaking out against mining and hydroelectric companies during community events). Although Che'l did not use the word tx'otx', he later called attention to the need to protect the environment for their descendants and he asserted that he will continue to speak about "defending our mountains and rivers." By doing so, Che'l drew upon a more holistic conceptualization of territory as tx'otx'. He visualized Mam territory without "[going] to *the map*;" without reinforcing the state political-administrative borders that socially, culturally, and politically divide the pueblo Mam.

Another way that the Mam organizations discursively mobilize the meaning of tx'otx' and experiences defending tx'otx', is by speaking to communities about the potential consequences of harm to their crops, mountains, rivers, etc. Rolando, a community official of Pavencúl, Mexico, described the importance of communicating to others the negative consequences associated with harm to their community's surrounding environment. In Rolando's explanation, he engaged in the process of counter-mapping by speaking of the social and environmental harms that the Mam confront across the highlands, which span state political-administrative borders. Rolando recollected how "There used to be many trees. Now there aren't as many big trees…That's how it's been year after year. Now you don't see big trees. There are few [trees], and they are small trees." Rolando linked this change in landscape to the arrival of mining companies: "It is not like our times now when we hear of the exploitation of mining and everything. You didn't hear that before. You didn't hear of that." He then emphasized the importance of sharing these observations with those in Pavencúl and beyond:

> The most clear threats the government makes [against us], because it is the government that has already sold [our territory] and already given concessions or permission, [are the] licenses to those companies to exploit mines. So we say threats, that's what we tell everyone we are [fighting]…It bothers us very much, it bothers us a lot. So we are also organized. All of the pueblo [Mam], all of the people, not only here in Pavencúl, everyone. So that this way we can all be organized. That way, everyone can be a *sabedor* [knower] of what could happen. Because we don't want those companies to enter and exploit our lands. Because, *según nuestras tierras* [according to our lands], at the hour we exploit them, they

say, 'Now there will not be any production.' They say that the crops we cultivate

we will not see in production. Instead of production, we will see contamination

from the acids, and I don't know what else, but the many other liquids that they

use when they're mining there. So [mining] will contaminate our water and also

our air…And by contaminating the water and the air, well that is where the

consequences of sickness come about. And we will see more suffering.

Here Rolando engaged in the process of counter-mapping by speaking about the ways

that he and other community leaders have defined their territory as the trees, air, and

water. Additionally, by speaking about the importance of defending territory from the

environmental harms of mining he is counter-mapping. He mentioned that all of the Mam

should be organized in such efforts, specifically noting that this organization extends

beyond Pavencúl.

Once again, tx'otx' provides a conceptual vehicle for deconstructing state

political-administrative borders without reifying the state in the process. In sum, drawing

upon a more holistic conceptualization of territory as tx'otx', defending tx'otx', and

sharing with others what tx'otx' means and experiences defending it, represent

overlapping aspects of how the Mam engage in counter-mapping without "[going] to *the*

map."

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation I have highlighted how the spatial and the symbolic are co-

constituting. But so far I have primarily focused on the spatial in terms of how states

structure spaces and places through its political-administrative borders. Chapters three

and four paid particular attention to how state borders constitute the spatial, which may shape and be shaped by the symbolic borders of collectivity. In this chapter, I furthered this argument by showing how analyses of the spatial, in relation to the symbolic, should include more than just considerations of state political-administrative borders. An analysis of the spatial should also take into account alternative ways of seeing and imagining places and spaces that do not fit on "traditional" maps. By thinking of the spatial in terms of Mam territory, defined as tx'otx', I have shown how some perceptions of the spatial conflict with others. Indeed, the invisibility of the pueblo Mam and Mam territory on most Mexican and Guatemalan maps is problematic for the Mam as they seek recognition as an indigenous nation. But an additional, and fundamental, issue is that the Guatemalan and Mexican states define territory (through maps) quite differently than how the pueblo Mam defines territory. In this regard, the question of *what is territory* is just as relevant as *where is territory*.

To address *what* and *where* territory is for the Mam, I analyzed two approaches undertaken by the Mam: first, the construction and mobilization of Mam counter-maps; and second, the process of counter-mapping beyond *the map*. I demonstrated that counter-maps challenge the nation state framework by defining places and spaces in ways that do not conform to state maps. By drawing indigenous territorial borders that transcend state political-administrative borders on such maps, counter-maps provide a critique of the social, cultural, and political divisiveness of state borders for indigenous peoples. But these counter-maps, to a certain degree, also reify the state because they take *the map* as a necessary starting point. Indigenous peoples engaged in counter-mapping without "[going] to *the map*," on the other hand, deconstruct state maps that socially,

culturally, and politically divide the indigenous and thus may be more likely to avoid reproducing state hegemony.

However, counter-mapping without "[going] to *the map*" is not with its own limitations. A crucial limitation of counter-mapping, as it is outlined here, is that the state does not recognize tx'otx'. Counter-mapping challenges the status quo by speaking of space and place in different terms than the state, but by doing so the state may continue to ignore altogether the collective rights demands of the Mam. Therefore, the pueblo Mam is strategically defining their territory both by counter-mapping without *the map* (i.e., challenging the reification of the state and its borders) and by making counter-maps that draw upon state maps. It remains to be seen whether the state will respond to any internal or external pressure to adjust its view of territory and its perspective on who has the legitimate authority to make decisions within that territory.

As of now, the only way that the state is budging in its view of territory at all seems to be through Mam state workers who have constructed counter-maps that "go to *the map*" as a starting point. These very few examples suggest that there is space, however minimal, to breach the state and develop alternative ways of seeing and knowing the world (Park and Richards 2007). Once again, though, there are very few examples of this. And even these few examples, to a certain degree, continue to sustain the nation state framework that divides the pueblo Mam.

Much of this chapter calls into question what a map really is. Maps often take on the broad characterization of being some sort of graphic representation of the spatial, or a cartographic representation (Harley and Woodward 1987:xvi). However, as Eades (2015) notes, some criticize this definition as being too broad (see also Wood 2010).

Nevertheless, here I have suggested taking an even broader approach. When we consider how counter-mapping, even more broadly, includes representations of the spatial that may not be *graphic* representations (such as discourses and stories), we can better understand how actors continually structure space while challenging dominant cartographic representations that may be socially, culturally, and/or politically divisive for collectivities.

CHAPTER 6

INTERWEAVING THE FABRIC OF A CROSS-BORDER NATION

"The theme of identity is to say, well, this is a Mam territorial space."

-Pe'x (Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx')

Throughout this dissertation I have addressed how the Mam are actively imagining nationhood across state political-administrative borders. Such efforts denaturalize the borders that socially, culturally, and politically divide the pueblo Mam. Additionally, the nation state framework conflates the boundaries of the (singular) nation with the boundaries of the state, impeding the recognition of indigenous peoples as nations with collective rights to territory and autonomy across such borders (Postero 2007). As indigenous peoples continue to struggle for recognition as nations within states and across state borders—even calling on states to recognize their plurinational character—they problematize the nation state framework. Importantly, such efforts "make nations and states two very different entities" (Wilson and Donnan 1998:2).

My research highlights an underexplored aspect of nation-building: not only do states construct nations, conceptualized as "imagined communities" (Anderson 1991), but indigenous peoples also engage in nation-building processes through the construction of "*contested* imagined communities" (Warren 2013:236, italics mine; see also Sahlins 1989). As Warren (2013:236) suggests, cross-border movements that aim to bring an indigenous people from two different countries together, uniting them under a singular

political project, is "a process that requires a significant amount of imagination." Throughout this dissertation I have analyzed how the Mam are denaturalizing state borders through the active imagination of this contested imagined community—a cross-border nation.

In this chapter I conclude by arguing that there is an interwoven character to the three processes discussed in the previous chapters: collective identification, cross-border experiences, and counter-mapping. I argue that these processes are inextricably connected—they feed into each other—a process I will refer to as *imagining cross-border belonging*. I conceptualize imagining cross-border belonging as an active reconstruction of space (both physical and symbolic) across state borders. I argue that imagining cross-border belonging constitutes a symbolic struggle with material, and even spatial, consequences linked to the collective rights of cross-border nations.

IMAGINING CROSS-BORDER BELONGING

This dissertation has addressed how leaders of Mam councils, Mam organizations, and also individuals in their everyday lives who self-identify as Mam engage in denaturalizing state borders in their efforts to construct a cross-border nation. After bridging relevant sociological literature on collective identification and interdisciplinary literature on indigenous peoples and borders I provided a historical contextualization of this particular case across the Guatemala-Mexico border. Then in chapters three, four, and five I analyzed how the Mam have denaturalized state borders through three processes: collective identification, cross-border experiences, and counter-mapping.

In chapter three I focused on how the Mam identify as a collectivity. I analyzed how spatial borders and social interactions shape how the Mam define the symbolic boundaries of collective identification. However, collective identification boundaries are flexible and context-driven. The state has been effective in limiting a cross-border understanding of Mam nationhood. Yet shifting contexts have created openings for the Mam to imagine themselves as a people with ancestral territory across state political-administrative borders.

In chapter four I described how Mam councils have engaged in collective cross-border experiences where they've interacted with the Mam on the other side of the border. I described not only some of the impediments to the realization of such cross-border experiences (particularly at the borderline itself), but also some of the ways that Mam councils have circumvented these obstacles. Such collective cross-border experiences among Mam councils mirror the interpersonal social interactions among Mam individuals discussed in chapter three. Although these are usually ephemeral experiences, they may have lasting consequences for how the Mam define themselves as a people across state borders. Mam councils on both sides of the border have also begun to share such experiences with the intent of promoting Mam nationhood across state borders.

And in chapter five I analyzed how the Mam are counter-mapping their ancestral territory, or constructing maps of their territory that challenge those produced by the Guatemalan and Mexican governments. Maps produced by each government (and also embraced and advanced by well-intentioned scholars and activists, indigenous and non-indigenous alike) may legitimize and privilege certain ways of seeing and knowing the

world, while eliding subaltern epistemic and ontological perspectives. In chapter five I described how some counter-maps still reinforce *the map*, privileging the state's perspective of territory, the nation state framework, and the political division of the pueblo Mam. However, I described how counter-mapping also highlights sacred Mam places and landscapes and efforts to defend the environment, which draws on a holistic conceptualization of territory as *tx'otx'* that extends counter-mapping beyond the map.

In the following I describe *imagining cross-border belonging* by discussing examples of how collective identification, cross-border experiences, and counter-mapping are interwoven together among the pueblo Mam. By imagining cross-border belonging, Mam leaders, activists, and individuals in their everyday lives are constructing a contested imagined community, even a cross-border nation (see Warren 2013).

Collective Identification and Cross-Border Experiences

The boundaries of Mam collective identification are shaped by state political-administrative borders, by the nation state framework, and also by cross-border experiences (at both the individual and collective level). In chapters three and four, I demonstrated that Mam leaders and individuals often draw upon cross-border experiences when identifying as a collectivity across state borders. Attention to the ways that cross-border experiences shape collective identification offers an important contribution to theoretical conceptualizations of nationhood and its construction. Indeed, this case suggests that cross-border experiences (even ephemeral social interactions) might create opportunities for some indigenous peoples to construct nationhood from below.

By addressing how collective identification and cross-border experiences are interwoven together we can gain a more nuanced understanding of how some unique national imaginings are constructed. In Benedict Anderson's (1991) influential work on nations and nationalism, he conceptualizes *nations* as "imagined political communities." Anderson contends that such communities are imagined "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (1991:224). For Anderson, national imaginings are constructed "in the minds of each." In essence, Anderson argues that for even relatively small nations, face-to-face interactions (or even hearing about other members of the collective) are not central to imagining this shared sense of community.

However, the Mam are actively imagining nationhood *through* cross-border face-to-face interactions (and through shared stories about such interactions). Indeed, "meet[ing] them" and "hear[ing] of them" on the other side of the border made Mam cross-border nationhood tangible for many participants. As described in chapters three and four, these cross-border experiences take place at both the interpersonal and collective level, as both unplanned and planned occurrences. To a certain degree I agree with Anderson—in that such face-to-face interactions are not requisite for imagining a political community—but my research also posits that such face-to-face interactions (and shared stories about these cross-border experiences) bolster Mam collective identification as a cross-border nation. My research suggests that for some indigenous peoples, these face-to-face social interactions may strengthen imaginings of nationhood across state borders.

Anderson's (1991) approach demonstrates how nation-building may work from the top-down (e.g., from governments who promote a sense of nationalism through the nation state framework to everyday citizens). Here I am not suggesting that such assertions about nation-building are incorrect. However, I am suggesting that we could learn more about nation-building by paying particular attention to way that nation-building occurs on the ground through everyday social interactions. In addition to analyzing how nations are constructed from the top-down, we could expand our understanding of nation-building by further analyzing how nations are constructed from the bottom-up, grounded on the building blocks of face-to-face social interactions.

Collective identification, as I argued in chapter three, is context-driven. And it is within the context of interpersonal cross-border experiences that Mam individuals may define their collective identification boundaries across state borders. As Mam individuals engage in interpersonal cross-border experiences—even ephemeral social interactions— such experiences may have lasting consequences for how they imagine themselves as part of a cross-border nation. For instance, during an interview following Alejandra's first cross-border experience (as I discussed in chapter four), she described how she now envisions herself as part of the pueblo Mam, which extends across the Guatemala-Mexico border:

And I, when I speak with someone, I will tell them, 'I speak Mam. I enjoy [the] Mam [language].' Yes, I feel part of the pueblo Mam. I was born in another type of life. It's different. It's very different. The circumstances are different. But it depends on me, it depends on the individual, if they are going to forget about their roots or not. And I, at least, when I speak I will talk about the pueblo Mam, about

how they are over there [in Guatemala] and here [in Mexico], about what their customs are like, and what it's like to be a part of Mam territory…so I feel part of the pueblo Mam.

Alejandra's explanation not only captures her enthusiasm to share this cross-border experience with others, but it also captures a sense of responsibility (perhaps even an urgent responsibility) to promote a collective identification narrative asserting that the Mam are an indigenous pueblo with territory extending across the Guatemala-Mexico border. This example further suggests that collective identification as a cross-border nation is not merely some mental activity facilitated by cross-border experiences. In other words, Mam individuals are not simply flicking on and off different collective identification boundary narratives like a mental light switch. Unlike the mental activity conveyed by Anderson (1991) when conceptualizing nations as imagined political communities, Alejandra suggests that *imagining* is not simply in "the mind of each." For her, cross-border experiences may facilitate *feelings* about collective identification. According to Alejandra, this cross-border experience has provided her with a sense of belonging, a feeling, which binds her to an indigenous pueblo and its territory. Interwoven together, cross-border experiences and collective identification narratives may strengthen this imagining of cross-border belonging.

Mam councils also seek to share stories about their cross-border experiences with the intent of promoting a sense of cross-border belonging. As described in chapter four, while cross-border experiences certainly influence how some Mam imagine themselves as a cross-border indigenous people, many Mam individuals do not have the opportunity to personally meet Mam from the other side of the border. On top of one of the temple

structures at Zaculeu, after the meeting in Guatemala with the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx'

and C.R.I.M.M.S., Pe'x explained to me:

> Now we have the responsibility of sharing it [the messages from the meeting]
> with other communities because not everyone could be here today…And with
> that, they can be informed…that the [Mam] pueblo is united, both here in
> Guatemala and with Chiapas. So that they know they form part of the Mam
> nation.

By sharing these cross-border experiences with other Mam individuals, the Mam councils

promote a collective identification boundary narrative that actively denaturalizes the

Guatemala-Mexico border. After this cross-border meeting Mam council leaders from

both sides of the border tasked council representatives to share the primary message of

this meeting with various communities: that the Mam will continue to strengthen its ties

as a nation across the Guatemala-Mexico border. By interweaving cross-border

experiences and collective identification, Mam councils denaturalize state borders while

promoting a sense of cross-border belonging. Indeed, such leaders acknowledge that by

sharing their cross-border experiences with various communities they are constructing

Mam nationhood.

Cross-border experiences inspire the Mam in their efforts to seek collective rights

associated with recognition and redistribution. Not only do cross-border experiences

strengthen Mam collective identification across state borders (part of this ongoing

symbolic struggle to reimagine space), but they may also help the Mam develop tools and

strategies to reclaim their ancestral territory (part of this ongoing spatial struggle).

Although we could draw distinctions between aspects of this symbolic and spatial

struggle (which would be a disentanglement of recognition and redistribution claims (see Fraser 1997)), I suggest that we view this symbolic and spatial struggle as inherently coupled together. This ongoing struggle involves recognition and redistribution as two sides of the same coin (Richards and Gardner 2013; Richards 2004). The ongoing symbolic struggle to be recognized as a cross-border nation through the reimagining of space is profoundly connected with the ongoing spatial struggle to reclaim ancestral territory, even across state borders, for social, cultural, environmental, and political purposes. Thus, cross-border experiences may enliven collective identification as a cross-border nation and they may also serve as a catalyst for developing tools and strategies to revindicate their territory across state borders.

For example, as outlined in chapter four, when leaders from The Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' and C.R.I.M.M.S. convened in Guatemala, they explored how they could be better united in addressing social, cultural, and political issues. One pressing concern was that Mam leaders from both sides encounter problems with border officials each time they attempt to meet as a cross-border council. This includes the harassment by border officials that C.R.I.M.M.S. leaders encountered the day prior to this cross-border experience. An idea that resulted from the meeting was to create a credential for Mam council leaders to convene on either side of the border. Such a credential would make it easier for Mam individuals and organizations to cross the border to visit sacred sites for ceremonies (such as Zaculeu in Guatemala and Izapa in Mexico) and to organize social, cultural, and political events on either side of the border. The idea to create a credential (a tangible object with potential spatial consequences) emerged while interpreting the border as a site of contestation and discussing the symbolic struggle of the Mam as a

cross-border nation. This example demonstrates that potential spatial consequences may stem from the symbolic struggles of collective identification.

As I've outlined here, cross-border experiences and collective identification are interwoven processes that sustain a sense of cross-border belonging. The context-driven character of collective identification opens up possibilities for Mam councils and individuals in their everyday lives to construct a Mam cross-border nation. One of the ways this occurs is by sharing stories about cross-border experiences that may further strengthen collective identification across state borders.

Cross-Border Experiences and Counter-Mapping

Cross-border experiences may also strengthen counter-mapping efforts. The counter-maps of Mam territory designed by the Academia de Lenguas Mayas de Guatemala (discussed in chapter five) were created following meetings with Mam individuals in the Mexican border towns of Unión Juárez and Cacahoatán. Nile, one of the leaders of ALMG, described these as meetings with their Mam brothers and sisters. Certainly cross-border experiences may influence the ways that counter-maps are designed (showing that Mam territory transcends state political-administrative borders), even when such counter-maps draw upon state maps and perhaps inadvertently legitimize the state's spatial perspective of territory.

In addition to counter-maps that draw upon state maps, counter-mapping beyond *the map* is also shaped by cross-border experiences. A couple of weeks after Lox's first meeting with the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' (from Huehuetenango, Guatemala), I was at a cultural event sponsored by C.R.I.M.M.S. in a community near her hometown of

Pavencúl. Lox invited a few of her college friends from Tapachula (who do not identify as Mam) to this event. As we sat outside waiting for the event to begin, Lox shared with her friends the recent experience meeting a Mam council, like C.R.I.M.M.S., from Guatemala. Without reflecting on the meaning of the acronym, she even referred to the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' as "C.R.I.M.M.S. Guatemala." Within the context of sharing this cross-border experience with her college friends she also tried to persuade them to organize a hiking trip to the volcano Tacaná in the coming months. Pointing in the direction of the mountains (where Tacaná sits on the other side) she explained, "It's one of the beauties that we have in our territory. There are many beauties in our territory. It would be fun [for you] to know the volcano. We share [Tacaná] with our brothers and sisters from Guatemala." In the context of sharing her cross-border experience and trying to persuade her friends to plan a trip to Tacaná, Lox engaged in counter-mapping by describing Tacaná and its surrounding mountains as part of a shared Mam territory. For Lox, Mam territory includes the volcano Tacaná, and the surrounding mountains, trees, plants, rivers, and animals. In the Mam language, tx'otx' signifies how all of these environmental aspects are interconnected. This example suggests that cross-border experiences may shape counter-mapping beyond *the map*, drawing upon a more holistic understanding of territory as tx'otx'.

Likewise, the Mam draw upon landscapes and sacred sites when describing their cross-border experiences. In other words, counter-mapping and cross-border experiences are interwoven in a mutually reinforcing fashion. Both are processes that feed into each other in shaping Mam territorial space across the Guatemala-Mexico border.

For example, the Pavencúl marketplace discussed in chapter three is certainly a space for weekly interpersonal cross-border experiences. As vendors and shoppers from nearby Guatemalan border towns come to Pavencúl, Mexico each Wednesday morning to buy and sell products they engage in social interactions with Mam individuals from the other side of the border. Within the context of these cross-border experiences, some Mam make reference to the volcano Tacaná (and the borderline that divides it) when sharing where they are coming from and how they are part of the same people. These references, often made while pointing to the surrounding volcanic landscape, signal a sense of shared cultural (and occasionally political) belonging across the border and a more holistic understanding of territory as tx'otx'.

On one of these warm market day mornings I conversed with four Pavencúl residents outside one of a small snack store. While enjoying a breeze in the shade of the store's metal sheet awning, we spoke about my research and the weekly marketplace. One of the men gestured to the volcano and explained to me:

> A lot of people come from the other side of the border. A lot of people. But there [pointing to the volcano] is part of our community too. They come here [to Mexico] and we go there [to Guatemala]. Tacaná unites us. The volcano, understand? …Some of us go to the market, sometimes we don't buy things, but [the market] brings us closer.

As seen in this example, the market is envisioned as a space for cross-border experiences. Furthermore, this individual views Tacaná as a unifying part of the landscape, describing the Mam who attend the marketplace from both sides of the border as part of a cross-border community tied to the volcano.

Such explanations also highlight how collective identification as a singular indigenous pueblo is interwoven into the processes of cross-border experiences and counter-mapping. For instance, another man added to this conversation:

> Yes, it's because the [border] line hasn't always been here. It's from the governments. But we are the indigenous from before the line. That's why they all from there [he points to the volcano Tacaná, referencing those from the Guatemalan side of the border] and us from here are the same. We're Mam from both [sides].

In effect, Pavencúl's weekly market is a space for cross-border experiences where some Mam may draw upon their connection to the nearby volcano Tacaná as a unifying landscape within Mam territory that enhances their collective identification as a cross-border nation. Through such experiences the Mam may draw upon mountains, volcanoes, streams, sacred sites, etc., conveying a more holistic understanding of their territory as tx'otx', which binds the Mam together across state borders.

Mam councils also demonstrate that cross-border experiences are interwoven with counter-mapping. When Mam councils share stories about their cross-border meetings with various communities, they describe the integral character of their cultural and political actions as a nation while deconstructing the political-administrative divisions across their ancestral territory. Héctor, a leader from the Mam Council in San Marcos (El Consejo Mam te Txe Chman), explained to me that the Council of the Mam Nation recognizes the need to discuss the vision of Mam collectivity transcending the Guatemala-Mexico border with various communities in order for it to gain wider acceptance among the Mam. His description of how Mam councils share their cross-

border experiences and other social, cultural, and political topics also taps into a desire to deconstruct the divisive state borders across Mam territory:

> We speak of unity, of autonomy, we speak of self-determination of the pueblo Mam, of the nation. That's to say the Mam Nation has its own system of justice, its own political system, its own economic system, its own spiritual-religious system, [and] we have our own cultural system even though they have divided us into caserios, municipios, departments, and countries.

Héctor explained that the Mam Nation is advancing various social, cultural, and political aspects of nationhood. Yet he acknowledged that the pueblo Mam and their territory continue to be divided by state borders. For Héctor, sharing stories about cross-border experiences is significant because such stories may encourage the Mam to envision their ancestral territory without those historically constructed socio-political divisions. Thus, cross-border experiences may stimulate counter-mapping efforts.

Furthermore, as I noted in the previous section, Héctor's explanation highlights how sharing cross-border experiences may promote Mam collective identification as a cross-border nation. Stories about cross-border experiences provide an opportunity to "speak of unity," as Héctor put it, even though the Mam have been divided by state borders. As interwoven processes, cross-border experiences, collective identification, and counter-mapping sustain efforts to promote a sense of cross-border belonging.

As discussed here, cross-border experiences not only strengthen Mam collective identification as a pueblo across state borders, but cross-border experiences may also strengthen the counter-mapping of Mam territory. Indeed, Mam councils and individuals in their everyday lives draw upon their cross-border experiences as they describe Mam

territory across the Guatemala-Mexico border in ways that challenge state maps promoted by each government.

Counter-Mapping and Collective Identification

In this section I will describe how collective identification and counter-mapping are interwoven processes in the construction of a cross-border national project. This is especially apparent as Mam individuals discuss themselves as part of a pueblo in relation to landscapes in their ancestral territory. Defining the boundaries of Mam collectivity through various landscapes and sacred sites of Mam territory accentuates a more holistic conceptualization of territory as tx'otx'. Such a perspective of territory also embeds the pueblo Mam within this spatial construction.

Following Alejandra's first cross-border meeting with C.R.I.M.M.S. and the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx' (described in chapter four), Alejandra explained to me that she sees herself as part of a Mam nation that resides on both sides of the border. Identifying as a part of a cross-border collectivity has also influenced her to think about certain counter-mapping strategies. Alejandra explained that growing up she never really thought about being part of an indigenous pueblo that extends into Guatemala, and she blamed some of this on the education system in Mexico. She told me she never saw any maps in her classrooms depicting Mam territory and she said she was unaware of any such maps even existing. Nevertheless, looking forward she explained that such maps could be quite beneficial in the Mam schools that C.R.I.M.M.S. is constructing in Mexico's sierra mountains:

We're going to make a map, as we could call it. One day of the week, or I'm not

sure how often, how many of the classes that we have there [in Pavencúl,

Mexico]. But [at least] one day, teach them [the children] Mam geography. What

was and *is* Mam territory. And not put, not draw the map of Mexico or

Guatemala, and put the [border] line, and here, etcetera… [But] draw the Mam

outline. Where is all of Mam territory? Without taking into account the

geographical division that Chiapas and Guatemala now have. But draw one single

map of all of that and explain to them that Mam territory includes this, this, and

this, and not define it [in the state's terms]. Mam territory includes part of

Guatemala… But describe in general what Mam territory is. This would be a very

good [activity] too.

Since this is simply a proposal, it is easy to speculate that such an activity about Mam

counter-maps could parallel going to *the map*. In other words, these counter-maps could

simply map Mam territory onto the state maps that are already promoted by each

government and displayed in some schools. Such an activity would take for granted the

cartographic perception of the state from an aerial gaze at different scales, privileging a

certain way of seeing and knowing the world that elides subaltern epistemic and

ontological perspectives.

However, Alejandra's description moves cautiously beyond those types of

counter-maps. Alejandra suggested that this counter-mapping activity should move

beyond *the map*. She explained that the premise should be to "not draw the map of

Mexico or Guatemala" or the border lines. But, rather, the students should discuss what

Mam territory means to them, which may certainly draw upon a more holistic conceptualization of territory as tx'otx'.

Alejandra's proposed activity demonstrates how counter-mapping is interwoven with collective identification. Her proposed activity could become an ongoing collaboration among students and teachers who are defining themselves in relation to their territory. Alejandra suggested that while the teachers would instruct the students about Mam territory and geography in this activity, the children would also play a significant role in defining what Mam territory means to them. As noted in chapter five, the question of *what is territory* is just as relevant as *where is territory*. The Mam may interpret what territory means to them by envisioning themselves as part of that territory, as part of the collectivity that is integral to its spatial construction. Counter-mapping efforts are certainly shaped by how Mam individuals imagine themselves as part of a collectivity across the Guatemala-Mexico border.

Interwoven Processes: Imagining Cross-Border Belonging

In conclusion, imagining cross-border belonging interweaves collective identification, cross-border experiences, and counter-mapping. As Mam councils, organizations, and individuals in their everyday lives are imagining cross-border belonging, they actively reconstruct physical and symbolic space. Imagining cross-border belonging is both a political and a cultural project, profoundly fused, which denaturalizes the state borders that impede the realization of indigenous collective rights.

Indeed, being indigenous is just as political as it is cultural (see Richards 2013). Javier, a Mam college student who is also a NGO leader in Comitancillo, described:

The point is that everything is integral. Whether in a conscious or unconscious way, everything is integral…Right? So it's the same for the work we do as [a Mam NGO]. In this, we work in part in agriculture. But the agriculture part [of our organization] carries with it an extra spirit, it should carry with it an extra spirit…This is to us the political part. The political is the integral [character]. Along with the political aspect [of things] is the economic part, the spiritual part. So it's sort of like, for example, the maíz for the Mayans: it carries with it a spiritual part… In reality everything is tied up together.

Javier reflected on how it was one of his responsibilities to help others in his community understand how their engagement with Mam cultural traditions (such as speaking Mam and bathing in the *chuj*, for example) are part of a political project. For Javier, the cultural and political aspects of being Mam are integral and inextricable. He further explained that with the cultural aspects of being Mam, he feels responsible "to wake up a political consciousness in the people." Javier notes that the Guatemalan government, particularly through the education system, has focused solely on the cultural aspects of being Mam while "the political formation of indigenous peoples has been omitted and negated." On the other side of the border, Jwa'n, Francisco, and other school teachers expressed similar sentiments but argued that the teachers in Mexico don't have any government support to even highlight the cultural aspects of being Mam, much less the political. Javier was upset that the Guatemalan government continually frustrates the political formation of the Mam as a pueblo with territory across the highlands. Yet he remains optimistic that by articulating how cultural efforts are also political efforts, more Mam individuals will come to view their everyday actions as part of an ongoing struggle for collective rights as

a nation. Imagining cross-border belonging fuses together these cultural and political aspects of nation-building.

As both a cultural and political project, imagining cross-border belonging is an active reconstruction of space that denaturalizes state borders. When I asked Pe'x about the goals of the Consejo Mam Saq Tx'otx', he described various socio-political activities (e.g., the protests against some of the transnational mining companies) that could be strengthened with more unification among the pueblo Mam. This unification is challenged by the state borders that socially, culturally, and politically divide the pueblo Mam. The solution, he argued, lies in promoting a sense of collective identification that transcends state borders:

> But the most pressing [thing to be done] would have to be [with] the theme of identity. The theme of identity is to say, well, this is a Mam territorial space… This is the message we shared in Pavencúl. That the border was baptized by the Spaniards. And for that reason we must sweep [the border] away.

Interestingly, Pe'x spoke of "identity" in the same breath of "Mam territorial space." He then also mentioned the cross-border experience in Pavencúl where the Mam councils critiqued the imposition of the Guatemala-Mexico border.

I have suggested that we may better understand how nationhood is constructed across state borders by viewing collective identification, cross-border experiences, and counter-mapping as interwoven processes. I have also argued that imagining cross-border belonging is both a cultural and a political project, entailing shared cultural aspects of identification and shared ancestral territory across state borders. Through such efforts the Mam may denaturalize (or "sweep away") state borders and reconstruct space as Mam

territory. Imagining cross-border belonging is an ongoing exercise the Mam are engaged in as they seek to construct an imagined community, even a cross-border nation, however contested.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation I have addressed how an indigenous people divided by state borders is actively constructing nationhood across those borders. State borders can be impediments to political demands as well as targets for sociopolitical action (Naples and Bickham Mendez 2015). This is certainly true for cross-border indigenous nations; forms of collective identification that are lost as a result of ongoing colonial intervention (expressed in part through the imposition of political-administrative borders) may be rearticulated through active political efforts. Identification is not just about recuperating ideas or identities, but is an ongoing project that can contribute to the construction of alternative futures. In the case examined here, the Mam may seek political and cultural rights as a cross-border nation, even though not all Mam view themselves in these terms right now. The symbolic struggle over collective identification, sharing cross-border experiences, and counter-mapping Mam territory are significant because they have material consequences linked to Mam rights in both countries and across the border.

While this dissertation has focused on the pueblo Mam, these findings are relevant to other peoples that span state borders too. Long-standing historical, social, and political boundaries may continue to shape how such peoples identify. Yet, cross-border peoples can contest and denaturalize hegemonic boundaries by engaging in activities such as sharing cross-border experiences and interactions, forming socio-political ties

among indigenous authorities, and developing counter-mapping projects. These symbolic efforts have the potential to lead to political rights that transcend these contemporary divisions, such as the facilitation of cross-border political meetings among indigenous leaders, consultation with them on development projects in their territories, and enablement of indigenous individuals to visit sacred sites across state borders.

Borders are not the only places that shape the collective identification of indigenous peoples. Ancestral territories are significant places for indigenous peoples that may also shape how they identify, even as cross-border nations. For example, Peter Blue Cloud (in Nabokov 1999:434) of the Mohawk Nation notes that indigenous territories are significant places that may transcend state borders:

> The St. Lawrence River Valley Area around Montreal, Quebec, is but a fraction of what is still rightfully the territories of the Mohawk Nation. Larger still are the territories of the Iroquois Six Nations Confederacy of which the Mohawk Nation is a part. These territories are mostly in what is now called the United States of America, but were ours long before the coming of the Europeans.

Blue Cloud's assertion highlights the importance of considering how places (such as state borders and ancestral territories) may collide in ways that contour national imaginings. As I've argued in this dissertation, ancestral territories and state borders are places that may shape the construction of collective identification boundaries.

But ancestral territories and state borders are not the only places that play a meaningful role in identity construction. While other types of boundaries such as the Berlin wall, walls in the Palestinian territories, and peace walls in Ireland, also merit investigation in terms of how borders affect identification, research should also continue

to consider how other places shape boundary work. For example, research on living next to a toxic site or within a gentrifying neighborhood would also likely demonstrate how place matters significantly in identity construction and the shape of activism. Sociologists can further develop research in these areas by addressing how shifting social and political contexts affect how these places both shape and may be shaped by collective identification efforts.

I suggest that this research is sociologically important for at least three reasons. First, spatial concerns are afforded too little attention in sociological work on processes related to collective identification. Throughout this dissertation, I demonstrated the importance of taking the spatial into account by focusing on how the Mam engage in imagining cross-border belonging. I have shown that state borders literally map over the historical relationship of indigenous people to particular spaces, places, and landscapes and influence how the indigenous identify themselves collectively. But in addition, I have shown that shifting social and political contexts shape symbolic struggles over collective identification, and individuals and collectivities may engage in counter-hegemonic social and symbolic processes to contest state borders and reclaim territories and access to places with special significance. Symbolic struggles over collective identification may have material, and potentially even spatial, consequences. Thus, I have argued that spatial and symbolic boundaries are co-constituting. State borders shape collective identification, and symbolic boundary work may entail the imagination—or reestablishment—of other territorial boundaries that conflict with those established by states. Research on collective identification can be strengthened by understanding its spatial rootedness and relation to

concrete places as well as its symbolic processes. Indeed, boundaries are more than a metaphor.

Second, this research offers a critique of methodological nationalism by problematizing the reification of the nation state framework. Methodological nationalism in the social sciences naturalizes the conflation of the nation and state by equating society (as a singular unit) with the nation state (Wimmer and Schiller 2003). The research presented here, on the other hand, shows how some national imaginings conflict with state constructions of a singular imagined community mapped onto the territorial limits of the state. This research stands as a critique of methodological nationalism by challenging the equation of society with the nation state.

Third, this research highlights a unique form of nation-building that should be further analyzed. Nations and nationalism are conceptualized in a variety of ways in the social sciences, reflecting distinct nation-building projects (Wimmer and Schiller 2002). While some research addresses how nations and nationalism are constructed outside of the territorial limits of the state (e.g., research on long distance nationalism), little research addresses nation-building *across* state borders. For instance, long distance nationalism addresses how people living in distinct geographic places may be linked together in a relationship with a territory and/or government—linked as a trans-border citizenry that is not geographically bounded (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001, Glick Schiller 2001). However, this form of nation-building and nationalism is distinct from what is analyzed here. Similar to long-distance nationalism, but certainly different, this dissertation draws attention to a form of nation-building across state borders. This nation-building links indigenous peoples to ancestral territories that diverge from the territorial

limits of states. Sociologists may better understand these unique nation-building processes by further analyzing how other indigenous peoples are constructing cross-border nations, such as the Mapuche across the Chile-Argentina border (see Warren 2013) and the Tohono O'odham across the Mexico-United States border.

This unique nation-building project also differs from how nations are typically conceptualized in the social sciences. Unlike conceptualizations of nations as imagined communities that do not require face-to-face interactions (Anderson 1991), this research demonstrates that face-to-face social interactions or stories of such interactions (via cross-border experiences) may play a significant role in some nation-building projects, such as those seeking to promote nationhood across state borders. This form of nation-building warrants further investigation. In particular, future research should analyze how state officials interpret cross-border nation-building projects and how they will respond to such projects.

As a contested imagined community, this case reveals how the Mam are constructing nationhood across state borders. Mam councils, activists, organizations, and individuals in their everyday lives continue to denaturalize such borders by weaving in and out of collective identification boundary narratives, sharing cross-border experiences, and counter-mapping their ancestral territory. Interwoven together, these processes contest the reification of the nation state framework that elides the collective rights of indigenous peoples. Unflinchingly, the Mam are actively constructing nationhood by imagining cross-border belonging.

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