

Searching for real “Mam”:  
Political Issues on Civil and Indigenous Rights  
among the Mam-Maya People in Guatemala  
Mitsuho IKEDA

1. Native Language Competency is Key Factor for Winning Debate inside of  
Community

As Dr. Yoshinobu Ota, the organizer of the panel, wrote four inquiries of our task in his abstract. For considering recent indigenous presence in anywhere of the world, I will take one of his inquiries as, “How is anthropological knowledge renewed, transformed, and rearticulated in the face of ‘indigenous presence’?” it is very important suggestion for me. I am inspired by his inquiry, but I would like to change slightly this question following as; how does the anthropologist, me too, confront with newly emerging “indigenous presence” in local context during one’s fieldwork? Though we do our fieldwork in treating indigenous people as “object” of investigation, it is clear that the indigenous people always present themselves as tangible “subject.” We, subjects, meet with Indigenous people, other subjects. We can talk, do dialogue, dispute, and negotiate. So the anthropological issue of “indigenous presence” provokes me to describe how they recreate their images as tangible subject and how diverse can their ways of life exist.

The stories that I narrate you today were collected from the fieldwork experiences among Mam language speaking Mayan indigenous people in San Marcos department, Guatemala. I call this pseudonym town’s name, “Txolnimtze”(literally meaning, “among many trees”). I will show some example of local political issues among people. Even though all most all the people are bilingual, Mam and Spanish, they are not conscious of these bilingual abilities, “*bilingualismo*” in Spanish, because of misunderstood propaganda by central government language politics. It says, to be bilingual is two languages usage of both Spanish and English, not both Spanish and

Indigenous language.” But in the local context it can be said historically, the bilingualism is national language politics to educated Indigenous people who can speak Spanish for assimilation to one nation. The government has been reluctant to accept the agreement of the Peace Accord in end of 1996. In the accord, there is important principal for reconstructing nation after end of the civil war, this idea can be said that people should make effort that they realize to be Multi-ethnic, Plural-linguistic, and Multi-cultural societies in a same nation. For realizing plural-linguistic country, government has founded the Guatemalan Mayan Language Academy (*Academia de Lenguas Maya de Guatemala, ALMG*) in 1990 for promotion of native indigenous languages including 22 Mayan<sup>1</sup>, Xinca, and Galifina. Mam is one of the 22 Mayan languages. The Mam speaking population is approximately over six hundred thousand in both Guatemala and Mexico.

In the Txolnimitze' town, many local teachers of elementary schools are native bilingual who can teach in Mam, but they should teach in Spanish in their classrooms under the direction of the ministry of education, MINEDUC, except Mam language class for only one or two hours per week. Even though there exists this kind of adversity, people maintain their own language. Native language competency is key factor for surviving themselves inside of indigenous community, because mother tongue provokes their primordial attachment, which “is meant one that stems from the ‘givens’-- or, more precisely, as culture is inevitably involved in such matters, the assumed ‘givens’-- of social existence” (Geertz 1973:259).

Sophisticated language usage is not good for to be respected culturally but also necessary for defining one’s social positionality in the town. We can analyze various aspects of language usages not only from cultural but also from political points of view as following polarizing topics.

---

<sup>1</sup> The 23 official assigned Mayan language are followed in alphabetical order; *Achí, Akateko, Awakateko, Chalchiteka, Chortí, Chuj, Itzá, Ixil, Jakalteko, Kaqkchikel, Kiché, Mam, Mopan, Poqomam, Poqomchí, Q'anjobal, Q'eqchi', Sakapulteko, Sipakapense, Tektiteko, Tzutujil, Uspanteko.*

(a) Monolingual *versus* Bilingual

In Txolnimitze' town, there are a few families of ladino. Ladino means semantically mestizo people, “mixed blood of native Indians and Spanish conquerors,” and etymologically Latin people, “*latīnus*” in Latin. Ladinos are traditionally monolingual. They have a typical identity of “not to be Indian people.” Historically there has been a racial stereotype that ladino might be acculturated people from Indians, so all the ladino were the Indian who had come to town and abandon their own culture. Apart from this fact, a few ladino people can speak Mam for maintaining relationship with Indian through their commercial activities. So much being bilingual in the town has polysemic meanings, so to say, “to be people of the town (*Xjal te Txolnimitze*) ,” “to be Mam,” “to be Maya,” and “to be Indian<sup>2</sup> .”

(b) Catholic Action Catechists *versus* Maya Priests

The Catholic Action (*Acción Católica*, AC) is originated from fundamental innovative reform movement inside Catholic Church from 1960s after the period of fall of Guatemalan revolution, 1945-1954. Political connotation of AC means protecting devotees from communist political activities and calling attention to authentic Roman religious life from folk Catholicism typical in Indian towns. In Txolnimitze' town, there was a strong ladino Father, who had established the first normal school for young people and also organized AC catechist groups for devotee townsmen. The catholic Father put native translators from Mam to Spanish during mass, expelled traditional Mayan priests (“*chimanes*”) from the church, and prohibited performing traditional Mayan ritual inside the town. Father’s ambitious was to make the town from Mam monolingual, and later bilingual, and finally to monolingual Spanish. Native catechists used to speak in Spanish written in the Bible even in monolingual villages in the town. In church site Father installed FM radio station spoken in bilingual for listening well

---

<sup>2</sup> People that I have been studying call themselves categorically in various form; “*indio*” today having insulting, “*indígena*” means as indigenous people, it seems politically more correct, “*naturales*” with ambiguous feeling and depending on its context, “*Mam*,” “*Maya*,” and “*Mam-Maya*” newly emerging ethnonym or given ethnic group. In Mam language, human being is “*xjal*,” *gente* in Spanish, we ourselves call as “*qe-xjal*” *nuestra gente* in Spanish in one side, ladino or mestizo is “*moos*” (male) or “*xnula*” (female) on the other.

for native devotees. But language usage of Mam in church is not more sophisticated than in traditional Mayan ritual contexts, because the former is pragmatically translated from Spanish and the latter's usages always come from native original their way of lives. Borrowing Basil Bernstein's language use concepts, the former can only have restricted code, the latter can have both restricted code and elaborated code (Bernstein 2003[1971]). Mayan priests are good at traditional usage and have rich vocabularies in both secular and paramount world. In general secular catechist's usage of Mam tends to simplify on one side, the esoteric Mayan priest's usage tends to complicate on the other.

(c) High Academic Achievement Professionals *versus* General Townsfolk

As Kymlicka (2001:218) wrote, "democratic politics is politics in the vernacular." I remember that I had first attended at the town meeting of open dialogue among a dozen of mayor candidates in 2007. All the candidates spoken in Mam, but their competency were variable as well as Spanish. Because of deficiency of political neologism in Mam, we could hear many Spanish borrowed technical terms of modern politics in their Mam speeches. Nevertheless speech competency in their native tongue was very important. There were some young political candidates graduated university bachelors, "*licenciado*" and civil engineer graduated at university or collage, "*ingeniero*." Professionalism ideology had just reached in this town. Meritocracy thought had been also familiarized with almost of townsfolk. The art of speech in public spaces became one of important competency for mayor candidates. This new type of leadership is now triumphing over traditional nepotism and/or clientelism even people has familiarized with conventional favoritism and/or patron-client relations.

Now I will discuss conflictive political situation relating with their speech acts – performative aspect of language use – through describing some political portraits of people of Txolnimitze'

2. A New Type of Mayan Movement Leader: Carlos

In this section I will examine the epistemological presupposition of anthropological theories on political culture. The view of dichotomy of cultural phenomena *versus* politics is common outside of the realm of cultural anthropology. But many anthropologists may agree with that cultural phenomena are always incorporated with value concept of politics, even in both are entangled. Political theorists arrange this type of issue with the combination and dialectics between civil rights of minorities and state nation-building (Kymlicka 2001). But here this topic is not the argument for us. We should say that the real problem could be how we describe ethnographically cultural matter that would be incorporated with political one. Or every cultural issue cannot be neglected with its political context. The story, which I will mention in this paper, says that a Mayan traditionalist has been converted to a kind of local political activist. To realize us this context is very clear, and we should introduce his personal carrier and the local political condition in town. I will start to explain his political experience.

His name is Carlos, a fictitious name. I have known him for more five years in a town of San Marcos department, western Guatemala. He is elementary school teacher of village hamlet of the town. He has been studying cultural anthropology in distance learning of national university course. When he has noticed me as foreign anthropologist studying in his town, he has begun to ask me what importance of anthropology for the local people is. He is one of young Mayan priests and was learning with old local predecessor that was evaluated as “evil clandestine activity” by orthodox Roman Catholicism catechists of the town. Seven years ago, in 2007, when we were known each other he hid his own identity as a Mayan priest apprenticeship, and he only has defended traditional their own cultural value relating with both Mayan social movement and traditional religious revitalize movement. Two years after Carlos confessed me that he were studying to become a Mayan priest; he used to invite me assisting Mayan ceremony out of town.

He finally became to be candidate of municipal mayor election at September 2011. After that someone criticized him that he would become to be mayor not to be alternative type of community leader. But he did not feel his contradictory sense of the coexistence both traditional Mayan priest and political commitment as candidate of municipal mayor election. According his opinion there exist between relationships among revitalizing civil rights to have traditional cosmological and/or religious creeds, presenting political radicalism to protect of Mayan cultural property right, and participating with secular political activities as the COCODE committee members. The COCODE is acronym of *Concejo Comunitarios de Desarrollo* is civil council that had been created legislatively in 1985 but had begun functionally after the legislation of Decree-Law 11-2002, the Decentralization General Law, *Ley General de Decentralización* in 2002. Carlos said that he had understood the great relationship between revitalizing traditional Mayan cosmology by becoming a Mayan priest apprentice under guidance of his mentor and recovering one's identity as Mayan people who were collectively suffered from the thirty-six years Guatemalan state violence against indigenous people. By his own working-hypothesis, he had been changing his personal relationship with local people and speaking out his opinion in public.

The serious of his drastic change can be interpreted that he could utilize with mobilization of political resource by manipulating the COCODE activism in municipality. But in other aspect we can see that the COCODE members including him would create new type of political participation and their own political identity by representing their own "indigeneity"<sup>3</sup>. At least the Mayan movement has become more extension than before. Today the reaction of the oppressed people against the state has

---

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, does not define "indigeneity." But it's working group (UN-WGIP, 1983) had defined provisionally as follows; "Indigenous populations are composed of the existing descendants of the peoples who inhabited the present territory of a country wholly or partially at the time when persons of a different culture or ethnic origin arrived there from other parts of the world, overcame them, by conquest, settlement or other means, reduced them to a non-dominant or colonial condition; ...(*omission*)...." In 1983, they added following important phrase; "any individual who identified himself or herself as indigenous and was accepted by the group or the community as one of its members was to be regarded as an indigenous person (E/CN.4/Sub.2/1986/7/Add.4.para.381)" (Sandberg McGuinne, Online)

become more radical. The Mayan movement can be interpreted as politicization of the re-appropriation of their own culture. For example in the Peace Agreement of 1996 the pluralism of national identities, national languages and national culture both are necessary for opening way to the pluri-national country. The Mayan activists are not tolerant to ladino-centric nationalist or jingoist. Instead they want national recognition of indigenous rights and reconciliation among Guatemalan nations through becoming Guatemala for pluri-language, multi-culture, and multi-ethnic society.

### 3. Communal Fountainhead Property Land Case

I pick up a case description of a conflict between the municipal and the opposite civil council, el COCODE, Concejo Comunitarios de Desarrollo, debating on the rights of communal fountainhead property.

#### (I) The First Stage:

There are three water sources in the center of the town. Two are near at AT, and one is near at FT (AT and FT are both anonymous place name). According their petition of appeal, one neighbor invaded into communal space of fifty meters square of FT and “constructed trench with 1.5 meters width, 3 meters depth, and 15 meters length around the limit of the communal water deposit tank. He also was cutting of water head trees,” in August 2008. Then one member of the COCODE was discovered the fact and proposed for Council stopping the development. Carlos was one of the members of the COCODE council. After the discussion, the Council decided to accuse one townsman as appropriator of the communal water resource before the municipal. Even though the mayor Elias of the town organized the task forces for accommodation at November 28, 2008, the townsman insisted his property, denied the appeal of the COCODE, and finally did counter-appeal to municipal against the Council members as violation of human rights. The Council requested municipal to search the official communal land property record of certain case that should be archived in the town hall. But the document could not be discovered. The Council members preached down both

responsibility and governability of the mayor Elias. After that by ignoring the mayor, the council decided to appeal the denunciation of “invaded” townsmen according the Criminal Procedure Code as appropriation of deposit and current water resources to departmental judgment court. The court decided to arrest townsman and jail him. After that the members of the COCODE reviewed that the mayor Elias and town councilors could not cooperate with the COCODE even though council members rushed to run to at least six authorities both departmental and national institutions. This is the condition of the first stage

(ii) The Second Stage:

One year after of the communal water conflict, in September 2009, there was the communal land disposal plan of “*dos cuerdas*,” as same as about 128 ha, to sell for the Canadian missionary philanthropic organization, which has over thirty years experience in the town. The director of this group, we call him Beto (pseudonym), had negotiated with mayor Elias of this town for a long while planning to build the dental clinic and relating other philanthropic activities. Beto’s father is the first founder of the evangelical protestant church in this town, which affiliates with same missionary group for more than thirty years ago. After getting this information of the project, the COCODE members reacted with a bit of xenophobic reaction by raising the propaganda that says “Not to sell our communal land for foreigners” by mayor Elias’ arbitrary decision. And they finally succeeded to foil the plan. Why did they succeed? - We should back to the history and know the political milieu broad political context in western highland Guatemala.

There were two times of the referendum consulting about mining development in 2006 and 2008 in municipal level. As same as the results of all municipals of western highland, the local people completely have denied mining development. Even their perfect consensus, there still had remained a kind of rumor in village around town, e.g. “Someone wants to sell a parcel of land near mountain when ‘strangers’ come with pick-up truck and say villagers accounting ‘to make investigations of the land’.” At the



time of 2011, the mayor Elias benefited this heated political condition for making great campaign including sympathized Mexican catholic priest against mining development by foreign mine company, “*No a la Minería*” campaigns. People were influenced very much to protest against “foreign mining company” as xenophobic symbol by this slogan.

In this time the COCODE members used the rhetoric of the mayor Elias that he once had used to mobilize the people against mining development. They criticized that the mayor Elias might have the connection with “outside agent,” that could connote as same as foreign mining company. This would be intentional manipulation against Elias by the COCODE. The mayor Elias who wanted to dispose communal land to the missionary pretended with agreement of the COMUDE, *Consejo Municipal de Desarrollo*. The COMUDE is higher-level organization of the COCODE. Representative of the COCODE constitutes the COMUDE membership. Elias called the members of the COMUDE to municipal hall. The COMUDE is higher decision making organization than the COCODE that is determined by the specific Political Direction, Decreto 11-2002, Article 11a. According testimony of the COCODE members, the mayor himself made the agreement paper, the *Acta*, on the disposal of the communal land to the Protestant Paramedical Project of the town without sufficient discussion between pros and cons groups, and made the COMUDE members signatures in the end of 2009. After that the COCODE members later discovered the papers with not only the agreement of the disposal *Acta* but also others contracts written in more important thing between the municipal and the COMUDE. The word they used to call “*Acta*” means not only the official agreement in modern bureaucratic meaning but also traditional authoritative paper whose importance came from pre-Hispanic era. This is the end of the second stage.

(iii) The Third Stage:

After that the COCODE member discovered more important description in the *Acta* between the municipal mayor and the COMUDE. The important description in the

*Acta* says that municipal government could lend the municipal office space to the municipal branch of the BANRURAL bank gratis for fifteen years from January 2010. The BANRURAL was found from the privatized the BANDESA bank, one of ex-national banks, in 1998, by the legislation of the Privatization of National Agencies Law in 1997. In the end of 2009 the new hall was under construction after that the ex-municipal hall build in 1960 had been distracted. The COCODE member's raised again new political campaign for townsmen against the mayor Elias and the municipal councilmen, both would appropriate "public" municipal space lent for the BANRURAL branch. It was symbolized as "outsider of municipality," in their xenophobic mood. Sometimes the members misrepresent intentionally or unintentionally the bank as "foreign exploiter" as mining company. The COCODE members took political campaign accusing the municipal mayor Elias and councilmen against traditional communal sanction to appeal with moral economical sentiments. The members began to demonstrate the protest manifestation in front of the municipal hall and to request talking with mayor, but the mayor denied to meet with them. The demonstrators have enlarged their company members to manifest for void of the "unfair" *Acta* by the mayor and the COMUDE. Sometimes they had chances to trip to the department capital and to denounce both the mayor and the COMUDE for deviant political process.

(iv) The Fourth Stage:

After fierce protest movements in the town, the COCODE had succeeded to become signatory of the Agreement of Municipality ("*Acuerdo de Municipalidad*") with the mayor Elias. This name reminds them the Agreement of Peace, formally the Agreement of firm and durable Peace, "*el Acuerdo de paz firme y duradera*," signed in end of 1996, between Guatemalan government and Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URGN). Borrowing the word of *Acuerdo* makes them, especially the members of the COCODE, political legitimation. Carlos, the sub-leader of the COCODE, criticized the Canadian dental clinic project leader Beto and the his friends "professionals" including the regional supervisor of the Ministry of Public Education

and other NGO leaders in the town, who were evaluated as irresponsible bystanders by Carlos. He viewed this protest movement as coming back of their social justice saying, “*Pueblo ganan, Alcalde estaba humillado,*” that means, “People win and the Mayor have been humiliated.” The supporters of the COCODE displayed the fireworks at the day they had succeeded. They were proud of two articles contained in the *Acuerdo* that they participated, One article says that the municipality will not lent all the space of the first floor of the municipal building to bank, and another article says that nobody can buy the two *cuerdas* of the municipal communal land around water fountain.

(v) The Fifth Stage:

On the contrary the mayor and the other leaders of the COCODEs who are belonged in the COMUDE council tried to revenge upon the exceptional COCODE in which Carlos had important role as a protagonist. In May 2010 the mayor Elias invited all members of the COCODEs to his big banquet dinner in the patio of his big house. After that they had town meeting with the COMUDE members in the municipal multi-purpose salon. At the beginning of this meeting Carlos and his followers were suddenly criticized as their grandstand play by violating the communal harmonies. Carlos and his group were losing. At climax of this people’s informal trial against Carlos’ group, nevertheless, one member of his COCODE snatched a microphone and defended eloquently with Carlos against the majority of COMUDEs. He repeated similar discourse of previous Carlos’ statement; “The municipal authority should never sell even a parcel of the communal land to ‘foreigners.’ That is our land, which we have inherited from our ancestors. Why does only the BANRURAL bank branch occupy all the first floor of municipal hall without rent payment? It’s irrational.” This speech could make drastically change the situation of Carlos’ group predominant. Finally the mayor Elias organized the voting for all the participants. The agenda that the mayor Elias’ proposal for offering the BANRURAL office without rent, was finally denied at the COMUDE’s town meeting.

Several months later Carlos recollected that the happening made them with more

“enemies” than before because someone might lose opportunity of benefits in case of installation of BANRURAL branch in the town. The mayor Elias had temporally loss of his reputation nevertheless it was not lethal. When I attended the succession ceremony for changing municipal offices, *Sucesión del Cargo Comunitaria*, at first day of January 2011, there were more than two thousand participants from the entire municipality gathering at the municipal salon. Elias had walked proudly into the municipal salon. Even the town meeting happening can be interpreted as storm in the cup; we should watch carefully that no one denies the newly emerging concept of governing imaging for paying attention toward who is decision-maker of public sphere in the communal town.

#### 4. The Conflicts between the COCODE and the Municipal government

As mentioned above, I demonstrated how local people think what is political autonomy under the decentralization condition in national level by taking example of minor local conflictive debate between town’s mayor fraction and the rebellious local council fraction. My thesis is possible to summarize to four points mentioned below.

(1) Among Guatemalan nation including indigenous community the idea and legislation of decentralization policy have escalated ay the time from end of 1996 when the Peace Accord between the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG) and the Guatemalan Government had been sighed.

(2) Generally speaking both transparency of voting system and central government’s decentralization policy have been evaluated as a kind of old liberal policies not of neoliberal’s one. But we can find out this type of policy in the John Williamson’s (2003) Washington Consensus package that has been criticized by old liberal students.

(3) After my experience in which newly emerging political wing appeared, one of local councils assigned by community, the COCODE fraction, confronted politically against the conservative-traditionalist mayor Elias. My experience can be interpreted as conflict of pursuing hegemony under the political condition after introducing

decentralization political system or “democracy from below” to municipality. On one hand the traditionalist have nepotism and clientism tendencies. On the other hand, the COCODE fraction, Carlos’ group has been succeeded being supported by local people through presenting their own discourse saying emotionally, “Do not dispose easily our ‘communal property’ to private and/or outsider agencies.”

(4) For me, to an alien Japanese author, the activities of Carlos’ fraction that has created new type of inquiry, “what is democracy in a certain local context?” Also this inquiry makes us to rethinking the purpose of democracy in our Japanese social context after 311 nuclear power plants explosion in Fukushima prefecture, east Japan.

Here we need to hear the discourse of Elias and his colleagues, more conservatist than Carlos. I have described conflictive confrontation between the town mayor fraction and COCODE fraction. For governing town Elias and his colleagues used the conservative political nepotism-clientism method. The COCODE fraction had become to be more radical through contesting against mayor Elias’ treatments. There are not only opposite two currents between conservative and radical but also paramilitary right wing political current not to hesitate more violent method. I will present later a violent incidence case of burning of the Catholic priest pick-up truck that had occurred the day before municipal election in 2011. Before explaining the violent incident, we need to more explanation from for looking at Carlos from the mayor’s point of view.

According my interview with Elias, ex-mayor of town, “they” (means the rebels, the COCODE fraction including Carlos) instigated a people to protest against municipal government in front of town hall in September 2010. Elias explained that the rebel’s hidden intention had been finally disclosed during pre-campaign for local mayor election hold in September 2011. Because Carlos, the sub-leader of the COCODE group stood as a candidate of mayor from the VIVA (*Visión con Valores*) party coalition with the *Encuentro por Guatemala* party. The number of votes obtained about two thousands took fourth position of total votes and has “only” five hundreds less than the third candidate of his rival, former-mayor, Elias, of the UNE (*Unidad*

*Nacional de la Esperanza*) party. The former-mayor group, I said them as “conservatists,” recollected that Carlos had not protested against town council with good motivation as reformist but only wanted to assume the political power by dominating all municipal interests.

These there comments were collected in the end of January 2012 at the time after relinquishment of political power to new municipal mayor. All are *ad hoc* interpretation of the traditionalists. I understood that the former-mayor had evaluated himself as good governor even he had recognized there existed less transparency political process without making consensus with the COCODE groups. Elias mentioned that the rebels always had opposed the town council by agitating local people in September 2010. Elias could not understand the reason why they always had taken against the municipality. He also could not anticipate that Carlos would become the town mayor candidate at that time.

Carlos, the actual leader of the rebels, is a village schoolteacher of the same municipality, a weekend butcher shop owner of the municipal market, and a Mayan traditional priest, *Sacerdote Maya*, of the open secret in this town. He also was the leader of young teachers traditional dance group. Once they had got the title of championship as one of the best dance groups in western highland Guatemala. He is multi-player of Guatemalan traditional instruments, e.g. marimba, “*chirimia*” (fipple flute or oboe), tabor, and so on. As a whole Carlos can be understood as traditionalist-culturalist acquired by post hoc his education.

Carlos has decided to become mayor candidate at least February or March 2011. I asked him if he had wanted to become of the candidate in future, then he denied this possibility because he did not have patron of political party and his supporters. Everybody knows that it needs huge money for buying voter. So Carlos explained the patron means supplying money for campaign. One witness said me that Carlos had been continuing for his campaign during five month until last day before of vote. After

the election Carlos recollected that it was too late to be success in his election campaign.

## 5. Election and Incidents

### 5. 1 Carlos Became Candidate of Town Mayor

From the ex-mayor, Elias' point of view, Carlos who was member of subversive protest group, sub-leader of the COCODE always contested against the municipality. His attitude might rise pre-election campaigning for the election at September 2011. The real "enemy" of the mayor, the "sub-commander" of the COCODE, was Carlos. He had become town mayor candidate recognized left-wing VIVA party that I mentioned before. For winning to be re-elected for next four years 2012-2014, Elias also participated the campaign as same political party of center-left UNE, the National Unity of Hope, "*Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza.*"

Generally speaking the empirical constructed political power structure in the town cannot be predicted easily because there exists secular power relationship including traditional political nepotism and clientism that are still remained. So we are interested why they were very tough to pursuit the political correctness and the spirit of democracy. For example in this town the extreme right-wing Patriot Party (*Partido Patriota*, PP) supporter of this town feel resentment against UNE supporters, because the former were doubtful as to manipulate minimizing votes for them by the latter. The present (May 2014) town mayor recognized by the extreme right-wing Patriot Party (PP) does not be hostile against the UNE ex-mayor. The old also extreme right-wing FRG, Guatemalan Republic Front (*Frente Republicano Guatemalteco*), party candidate who has long experience in municipality as influential members of municipal assembly has been defeated taking runner-up.

There is not correspond relationship between clientism of supporting parties at the

point of vote and nepotistic provide inducement after the vote. It does not seem that national diet members behave according parties' ideology and policies, but there is more important their pragmatic human relations than parties' ideology. In other words sometime happened that inconstant coalition even between ideological enemies. Both people and diet members tend to depend on political charisma leader that seems to have potential induce nepotism for his supporter. There is no problem wandering between parties and changing political commitments. Among them the important thing is the "trust," I heard always as with "pragmatic" before this word.

In summary the discipline of the political behavior on Realpolitik in the indigenous society of the Sierra Madre Mountains of western Guatemala is to provide inducements more than ideological differences and dispute about them without the time period for election campaigning. This is my epistemological framework to understand their political behavior without my understanding for Carlos. All townsmen relation with political campaign could easily explain me that Carlos is in the same vein. Because I had thought that Carlos would be exception, I used to mistake of my interpretation by using my double standards; he should be good because of Mayan cultural traditionalist depending Mayan cosmology, meanwhile other candidates were not so good because of political conservatist using distorted manipulation, e.g. promises of nepotism or clientism. Meanwhile the townsmen finally understand of the Carlos' eloquence that makes to accomplish to become mayor candidate as ultimate goal. But I still respect on Carlos who behaved as traditionalist culturalist and also as new type of political leader different from other young elitist political leader, especially Elias. This can be still enigma for me, a cultural anthropologist from outside of their world, to understand "suitable" or "more proper" for interpretation of political cultures. We need more "to commit oneself to a semiotic concept of culture and an interpretive approach to the study of it is to commit oneself to a view of ethnographic assertion as... 'essentially contestable'" (Geertz 1973:29).

## 5.2 Burning Father's pick-up TOYOTA



We remind an incendiary incident of pick-up car in front of Don Fernandez' house in September 2011. His first son, Catholic Father, Padre Castillo [pseudonym], was the owner of the car. But Castillo is not a protagonist in this case, his father Fernandez 63 years old was the central figure.

Don was a secular activist of catholic church of this town. He was a driver of Father Castillo; today he is bishop in capital city of Guatemala. Father Castillo was most influential catholic priest of the history of missionary work (1969-2003) in this town. Don Fernandez is not born in this town, but in San Pedro Sacatepéquez, the very important Indian commercial city of the San Marcos department. He cannot speak Mam, so the townsmen consider him as outsider of the town.

During his secular missionary activities for his young days, he loved this town and settled down the town. Because his first son, Castillo, was wise, his father Fernandez decided him to enter to the catholic seminary. Finally Castillo graduated at seminary and leaved for his parish post in other Indian town of San Marcos department. Because Fernandez has been tight relationship with church, he once had been a candidate of town mayor recognized by Christian Democratic party, DC and failed taking the third position in the mayor election occurred over the twenty years ago. In this time former mayor of the UNE party has appointed don Fernandez as election management committee member. Then town people thought he might be strong supporter of the UNE party. When the mayor began his campaign for re-election and he gave speech before town people, he said that don Fernandez had been great supporter of the mayor of the UNE official candidate. One year after I interviewed with don, he said vaguely that the supporters of the former mayor would not always the supporters of the party, which recognizes as official candidate of mayor election without mentioning the UNE name.

The incendiary incident happened on September 10, 2011 when it was the day before

of the national and local government election. Father Castillo had come back his hometown with brand-new TOYOTA Hilux pick-up truck. After incident other catholic father mentioned, “the folk said, there was rumor that brand-new car of the father would be suspicious donation from foreign mining company.” Anyway Father Castillo parked his pick-up truck parallel with his younger brother in front of his father, Fernandez’ house. They had dinner and slept in bed at around 11pm.

The incident happened at midnight. Fernandez received a call of cellular phone, but hanged up before getting call. He called back to his friend who said immediately, “You brother! Get out your house, your car is burning!!!” He jumped out his house, and saw the inside seat of brand-new Hilux was burning. Someone might break the window, light something with kerosene, and throw into the window of the car. He rushed his two sons to put out fire by using cloth and splashing water. Don Fernandez explained me later, there were spectators including supporters of Patriot party. They never helped to extinguish and only were observing what had happened. His phone-calling church friend, that is the reason why he calls “brother,” said him that the car would be ash unless told him by phone. After that don and his family could not sleep and even lie up all night. The dawn came into the morning of September 11, 2011, the voting day. Don counted this entire story.

### 5.3 Carlos' Point of View on Incendiary Case

After asking this incident narrative for other townsmen, I find out that Fernandez omitted one thing. I do not know if he omitted intentionally or not. The story, which Fernandez had omitted, was that he were very angry about violent incendiary and stormed into the house of Carlos, the mayor candidate of the VIVA, in midnight. According Carlos and his colleague, at that night his two election campaign strategists were arrested by national police for suspicion of incendiary of pic-up truck. Carlos talked with them about predicting the result of this election until past of 10:30PM in the house of their common friend.

Then Carlos came back to his house and slept at midnight. He and his family were suddenly woken by various violent noises including roar, ringing, and beating at door by don Fernandez. They were seriously scared. Carlos approached the door of his garage, then observed the street through the wicket, and finally found the figure of don raging in the street. Don said, “You, a gang of your party lighted the car of my son, Carlos had done light!” in front of his house. Carlos still had not understood what don said. Then he opened the garage door and said to don, “Please calm down for God's sake.” Carlos explained don Fernandez; he had no idea of what had happened, why they would have hostile motivation against don. Finally don came back to his house. But at the same time, his campaign strategists who were both elementary school teachers, rode on motorbike, and were stopped and arrested by national police for incendiary suspicion in municipal jail. After explaining their innocence to don, Carlos was called to visit police authority. He also was suspect. But he elucidated the police authorities that they should be free from jail because there exist exemption code from the accusation as criminal case suspect during the municipal election period. Only he had the certification card with his photograph that mentioned he was a mayor candidate. He was saved from sentence. The burned pick-up truck was transferred to park lot inside church ground after police inspection. Police and local prosecutor never had found the real criminal of this incident.

## 6. Under the Suspicious Shadow during Four Years

### 6.1 Lynch Attempt Incident on Don Fernandez

At the dawn of September 2011, the voting day, Don Fernandez could not sleep by the incident of last night. But he should visit to local voting site because he had been appointed as election management committeeman by the challenging to re-elect UNE party mayor, Elias. Office volunteers, election management committeemen, and surveillance committee members constructed the voting management and surveillance

system. The third category member is called as “fiscal” same as Spanish. The fiscal should be appointed from each political parties members to watch fair election. One fiscal of the Patriot party (PP) found out the figure of don Fernandez, and pressed him hard threatening to say, “He came to here with fraudulent ballot papers marked as favor for Elias!” The throng including numerous voters was gathering up to don by fiscal’s outcry for accusation. Rapidly he feels him that he was grabbed violently by the hands of the fiscal. The Civil National Police (PNC) members hurried to release him from the throng with anger against suspicious fraudulent. The Police members explained them that there was not apparent evidence and they should release him. The policemen were succeeded to liberate don, to put him into the patrol pick-up truck for his safety, and to escort until municipal center. After arriving the town the policemen advised don not to leave your house for your safety. Don was scared and remembered vividly the incendiarism of last only twenty hours before. Needless to say he never got out of his house. Additionally the policemen visited the church where the burned pick-up truck of his son and inspected again truck by blaming of possible containing fraudulent voting papers. Without obvious evidence don Fernandez was suspecting the man who inform to police inspecting his son’s truck again should be a Patriot Party member.

We can easily imagine fear that don experienced isolating between mob especially “political enemies,” because there was some possibility of doing lynch incident against don. According journalist papers and my collecting information, the lynch incident against “local enemy,” (*enemigo de comunidad*), e.g. robber or rapist, can be occurred as followed. There exists presupposition of bad anticipation of the Civil National Police, PNC, because sometime the people explain the PNC cannot punish “evil person.” One fiscal explained that not all the people know the legal prosecution process of the suspect, and tend to outrage directly against flagrant. If the suspect with great scandal is put in jail before investigation and its following trial, sometime a group of people with cold weapon, e.g. machete, heavy stick et cetera, gather in front of PNC office claiming to “handing over” suspect out of jail. In this case “handing

over” does not mean liberation but execution for lynch. Sometime the mob threatens to harm policemen if they do not agree with “handing over” the suspect. Then the suspect released will be arrested and accused in front of the mob. If someone begins push and kicked against suspect, the followers escalate to harm more violently until victim dies or burned by inflammable oil. The last lynch incident had occurred in this town for more than ten years.

## 6.2 Political Parties and The Supporters

We cannot evaluate the question of voting if bad fame of the UNE party’s candidate and supporters influenced the outcome of vote. Elias has gained the third rank of vote. Not enough within few month the townsmen enjoyed gossip as, “he escaped secretly from this town,” “he is working in *Xela* (Quetzaltenango, the second largest city of Guatemala),” “he does not exist in this town.” But he lived quietly in this town that I confirmed it by very complicated communication procedures. We do not understand the reason why quiet Elias is now. But after the attempted or contingent violent incident, Elias and the UNE party had entirely lost their reputation.

The result of vote was very clear, it was crushing victory of the Patriot Party with about four thousand vote of leading after the FRG party with tow thousand and half votes. Even the victorious Patriot Party, we doubt why the PP supporters had hated don Fernandez and/or the UNE party. On September 2007, about one year before the conflict of communal water resource land, the first moment of violent confrontation within the town had occurred. The FRG former mayor had appointed don Fernandez as election management committeeman at the voting brunch in hamlet of the town. He was responsible for voting management and transport votes to the central committee of the election in the town. But the numerous filled-out voting papers were discovered from his voting site after finishing announcement of vote counts. In last time election the victor was Elias, the UNE candidate. The gaining second position was Lázaro, the PP candidate and also the future winner of 2011 election. Lázaro and his supporters

could not agree with this rigged suspicion. They had finally appealed at department election court for re-counting the total vote. In the chaos of central voting office of the town, the committee members had discussed on treatment of these faulty ballots of which don Fernandez was responsibility for supervision in the voting site. The central committee had decided to treat these votes void. But after the final decision by the committee, a schoolteacher of the hamlet, supporter of Patriot party, a member of election of committee, had denounced for his intentional concealment by don Fernandez because all the votes were filled-out for the Patriot. After that the Patriot supporters have recognized that don is a malicious “enemy.”

The Patriot accuser against don Fernandez, is a friend of Carlos. His name is called Juan [pseudonym]. He is a schoolteacher and good dancer of the member of teachers’ traditional dance voluntary association of the town. When Carlos was elected the leader of teacher’s association, Juan should resign the representative of the dance voluntary association. Instead of Carlos, Juan becomes to be responsible of dance group. When don Fernandez was accused as irresponsible vote watcher at the central election committee, don tended to shift his responsibility onto the other schoolteacher, a colleague of both Carlos and Juan. They recognized her responsibility as good fellow teacher. By curious coincidence, she was a teacher of the village where the attempted lynch incident against don occurred for years later. She was promoted as director of the secondary school. The teachers believed her more than don, and then nobody had trust with don Fernandez.

In the same vain when mayor Elias of the UNE appointed don as same election management committee in September 2011 four years after the first scandal of suspicious rigged election, the fame of don has fallen to the ground. He had gotten the bad fame as persona non grata by the townsmen at that time. The real problem is their incomplete investigation and less transparency for public discussion. Today they frequently use the word, “impunity,” because this terminology is very popular among mass media and politics of national level.

## 7. The Connotation of binding between Politics and Culture

Carlos and his colleagues were resisting against some kind of traditional political style in which people want to a little benefits from nepotistic and to depend clientism ambient. Once I was interested in Carlos' way of life as my idealistic hero. So I called his representative figure as "Mam Rebel" borrowed Ricardo Falla's book (1978) entitled "Quiche Rebel" (*Quiché Rebelde*) which is ethnography describing the innovative revisionists, the Catholic Action ("*Acción Católica*," AC) of catholic missionary among Kiche'<sup>4</sup> community of San Antonio Ilotenango, Totonicapán from 1948 to 1970. The Quiche Rebel had combated with any kind of traditionalist and culturalist activities. On the contrary of Falla's ethnography, our Mam rebels are more sympathized with traditional Maya ritual against conservative catholic missionary because this town historically was a heartland of the Catholic Action in San Marcos department. The political situation of this town is more complicated than of K'iche case.

By growing national and foreign investment, the local people are familiarized with political nepotism and clientism at least for twenty years after ending armed conflict for 36 years. In this historical context the both traditionalist and culturalist like the Carlos' group member behave more radical than conservative because the former have not much political and economic resource. Carlos has mastered traditional Mayan priest knowledge and practice, so he can speak eloquently by using old and sophisticated vocabulary. Their new speaks can influence the folk who are tired with political corruption by local nepotism and clientism.

For knowing these stories, our colleague, especially among Japanese in general, we might stir up ill feeling of outsiders against a Guatemalan indigenous society that I have described. Political in secureness of voting system and their behavior, violent

---

<sup>4</sup> Spanish ethonym of Quiché should be described as Kiche' in Mayan orthography.

action between political parties supporters, deficits of democratic procedure by contesting for political complaint, et cetera; all the process might be opaque, so people tend to resort to depend on nepotism or violence. It seems that there is no exit with transparency, “*huis clos*.” This situation could escalate into the stereotype what indigenous people would tend to have violent direct political solution than pacific method. This type of problem is called as “political insecurity” from conventional point of view in international human security scheme.

In this scheme, there are two contrasted political regime model, “civic polity” that we can observe in developed countries and “corrupt polity” that can be assigned in developing countries. For escaping this essential dichotomy, I used to ask people of the town what the democracy is, and/or which political condition the good democracy has. In the morning toward noon, one countryman invited me a soft drink, “*refresco*,” and answered as “Guatemalan democracy is not [authentic] democracy” in something paradoxical form. It seems me haphazard like as other country’s affairs. I do not remember detailed but I continued to talk about concepts corruption, dishonesty, and unlawfulness. Then I asked more one question for him what authentic democracy is. He did not say answer but he did add, “It’s impossible [to be correct].”

I heard other various versions of two episodes and their interpretations that I have mentioned above. There is interesting explanation that mentioned about the incendiary incident of the Father’s pick-up truck. One man explains as follows, “It should be natural to be given God’s punishment that the Father’s car has been bought by the alms of the poor people,” that means to problematize on their own properties to proper owners. It can be understood that the specific causality attributes to political resentment about electoral corruption, but the people highlight more important moral problem by God’ will.

After a while towns’ people believed seriously this explanation that would be certified by the incredible incident post hoc. Back to five years, the Patriot Party had



experienced hardship by taking the number of votes obtained by the runner-up. The Patriot supporters believe that the UNE candidate and backer, especially Elias and don Fernandez, had manipulated numbers of vote. They believe the reason why they lost the municipal mayor election.

The incident of fire of the municipal market at the final day of December 2011 came to appear the Patriot Party supporters as a bolt from the blue. In midnight it is very popular that townsmen celebrate to display firework in the sky. The victor of the municipal mayor election is recognized by PP. He and his family deal in various fireworks. In the climax of the midnight noises, one firework had jumped into their own shop that deals in huge amount of firework. Their commodities including fireworks had caught fire immediately and their shop was entirely destroyed by fire. The new mayor recognized by PP would take office within the two weeks. This disaster naturally reminded townsmen the fire disaster on the Father Castillo's pick-up truck that had happened three month before. There are many supporters of the PP among new mayor' brother and their families. In this occasion townsmen might suppose that one of these families of PP would be perpetrator of incendiarism of the catholic Father's car. People say that this dirty play had finished a draw.

## 8. Conclusion

I showed the internal conflicts between indigenous people especially in the period from August 2008 to September 2011. I focused on actual people as political actors that I am interested in. Carlos wanted to become "one of people in justice" through his activities in the town's COCODE. But the townsmen, chiefly other mayor candidates and their supporters, scolded him that he would want to take in power like a former mayor of the town, Elias. The one of young intellectuals, Elias, had been very ambitious that the regional economy would be reformed by neoliberal economic politics. But he backed his governing method from democratic bottom-up policy to more traditional clientelism. The retired church driver Don Fernandez has always tried to behave "good

fellow” in this town but he always has fallen in playing the villain because of his imprudent character.

To become real “Mam” inside the town is completely different from the presentation of self with outer agency both inside and outside the town. In my paper, I present Carlos as a new type of political leader of this town. I do not evaluate his political ability and anticipate that he will be good “Mam” politician. But I do explanation why I feel he has potential to be new type of political leader in future in three modes of ideal types; *Homo modernus*, *Homo chronus*, and *Homo politicus* by my interpretation.

As *Homo modernus*, Carlos has at least three faces of modern “Mam”; a teacher of elementary school in village, a leader of traditional dance group of local teachers, and “*Aj Q’i j’*” (literally translated, as Counting Day shaman/priest). He was born as son of local merchant and graduated at normal school founded by the Father of *Acción Católica*. He counted his personal experience for younger days, “it’s sad to disappear our traditional Mayan knowledge. Father disliked it and wanted to abolish it, it too sad. We should respect our ancestral knowledge and practice that we love harmony with nature and between human beings” In his narrative we can easily find out his modernist re-interpretation of traditional Maya philosophy. As dance group leader, he did not hesitate to recreate “invented” traditional form of dancing under his project participating departmental competition by support of the ministry of education, because “the authentic traditional” dance styles were disappear for long time. As Maya priest, firstly I had learned with old local shaman then he had sought his mentor outside the town. At the same time he studied the art of traditional “custom” (*costumbre* in Spanish) by books. All the mode of his behavior seems very rational even when he sought to become traditional priest.

*Homo chronus*, “chronological human being,” seems pedantic usage but I would like to use it because their chronological consciousness is very important factor to distinguish themselves with other human group members. Generally speaking the Maya

shamans/priests depend on traditional almanac for planning rituals, sacrifices, and agricultural activities (e.g. sowing seeds). The traditional almanacs are published not only by private companies but also by government agencies, e.g. ministry of education. Carlos says that, the mayor almanac are written according the K'iche calendar system, so they need modify from K'iche system to the Mam system because their terminology of *tzolk'in* (combination with vigesimal numbers and thirteen cyclical numbers) and *haab'* (365-day calendar system) is different from K'iche one. Even though it is said that the Maya people share in same cosmology, there are differential discourses in detail between them. The time counting folk methodology and their remembering techniques are very important concept to recollect painful history of political violence of early 1980s and before (Ikeda 2006).

And as *Homo politicus*, Carlos was protagonist of a series of political conflicts of this town from August 2008 to September 2011. The significance of his discourses could provoke townsmen into a series of their reflective inquiries to be citizen, e.g. what is citizenship, why citizen have right to protest against authority, what is public profit, who is citizen, and so on. When Carlos reminded public memory of Father Castillo, he always highlighted father as symbol of oppression of traditional weak people. He criticized the ideology which the Acción Católica had been introduced should function of destructing the traditional value of “our grandparents and ancestors” (de nuestros abuelos y antepasados). He observed that the traditional virtue was abandoned when AC movement insisted people to modernize their mentalities, not contradictory to be good Roman Catholic but to be “custom maintainer” (*costumbrista*). For Carlos restoration and performance of traditional rituals in this town means coming back traditional virtue. We never observed him as narrow-minded fundamentalist but you can watch over culturally rational behavior on him. In other words he was struggling for alternative value to be real “Mam,” the citizen in the prolonged post-colonial era of Guatemala.

Characters appeared in pseudonym

Beto, the director of Canada based missionary NGO.

Castillo, catholic father, son of Fernandez

Carlos, a school teacher, butcher, a Mayan priest, ex-leader of teacher's dance group.

the VIVA(Visión con Valores) coalition with the Encuentro por Guatemala party candidate of municipal mayor election, 2011.

Elias, the municipal mayor from 2008-2012. UNE(Unidad Nacional de la Esperanza) party candidate of municipal mayor election, 2011.

Fernandez, secular activist of catholic church.

Juan, a friend of Carlos. the Partido Patriota(PP) supporter.

Lázaro, the municipal mayor from 2012-present. the Patriot Party (Partido Patriota, PP) candidate of municipal mayor election, 2011.

### Glossary

Academia de Lenguas Maya de Guatemala, ALMG. The governmental institution, the Guatemalan Mayan Language Academy, founded from 2001.

Acción Católica, the Catholic Action, fundamental innovative reform movement inside Catholic Church from 1960s.

Aj Q'i'j, shaman, priest. Literally translated, as Counting Day shaman/priest

BANRURAL Banco de Desarrollo Rural, S.A.

bilingualismo, bilingualism

chimanes, traditional Mayan priests

COCODE, acronym of Concejo Comunitarios de Desarrollo. Community Council for Development.

COMUDE, acronym of Concejo Municipal de Desarrollo. Municipal Council for (regional) Development.

costumbre, In Spanish, is literally translated as "custom," but means collective activities of Mayan traditional rituals and philosophy.

haab', a kind of counting Mayan calendar. 365-day calendar system

ingeniero, civil engineer graduated at university or collage

licenciado, bachelor of collage or universtiy

MINEDUC, Ministerio de Educación, Ministry of Education.

PNC, Civil National Police

tzolk'in, a kind of counting Mayan calendar. Combination with vigesimal numbers and thirteen cyclical numbers.

Txolnimitze', Pseudonymous name of the town where I realized the survey.

URNG, Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity

Xjal te Txolnimitze', people of the town

### Bibliography

- Bernstein, Basil, 2003[1971]. Theoretical studies towards a sociology of language. (Class, Codes and Control vol.1) , New York: Schocken Books.

- Falla, Ricardo. 1995. Quiché rebelde : estudio de un movimiento de conversión religiosa, rebelde a las creencias tradicionales, en San Antonio Ilotenango, Quiché. Guatemala: Editorial Universitaria de Guatemala.

- Geertz, Clifford.,1973, Thick description: Toward an interpretive theory of culture, in "The Interpretation of Culture", New York: Basic Books.,pp.3-30

- Ikeda, Mistuho. 2006. Reflexiones sobre la violencia política y la antropología:la actualidad guatemalteca. En "Mundo maya: Contribuciones de los antropólogos japoneses," Centro de Estudios Mayas, UNAM, Kazuyasu Ochiai (coord.), pp.179-210, Mérida: Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

Kymlicka, Will. 2001. Politics in the vernacular : nationalism, multiculturalism and citizenship. New York :Oxford University Press.

- Williamson, John. 2003. From Reform Agenda: A short history of the Washington Consensus and suggestions for what to do next. Finance & Development 40(3):10-13.

- Sandberg McGuinne, Online

Official Definitions of Indigeneity

<http://johansandbergmcguinne.wordpress.com/official-definitions-of-indigeneity/> (last viewed in May 10, 2014)